

Nor'wester kills 4 in Bagerhat, Khulna city

UNB, Khulna

Four people were killed and three others injured as nor'wester lashed Bagerhat district and Khulna city yesterday and Thursday night.

In Bagerhat, storm left a trail of destruction in Sadar, Rampal, Morelganj, Mongla and Sharankhola upazilas, killing three people and damaging houses and standing crops.

The dead were identified as Sayed Ali Hawlader, 35, and her daughter Sahida Begum, 12, of Khezurbari village in Morelganj upazila and Zinat Ali, a guard of a shrimp gher enclosure in Rampal.

Hundreds of houses and educational institutions, and standing crops on a vast tract of land were damaged in the storm that continued for an hour.

In Khulna city, one person was killed as nor'wester swept the city yesterday noon.

The dead was identified as Martin, 42, a carpenter.

Police and witnesses said the carpenter fell from the rooftop of a house where he was setting CI sheets during the storm.

He was rushed to a nearby clinic where he succumbed to his injuries after an hour.

Traffic movement on Khulna-Jessore highway was disrupted as trees fell on the road.

PM returns June 3

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will return home on June 3, a message received here from New York said yesterday.

Following a successful operation on her knee, the Prime Minister is now recovering fast under the supervision of physicians in New York, the message sent by her Press Secretary said.

The Prime Minister is going through important files sent to her from Dhaka and giving decisions on them. She had important discussions with cabinet members, secretaries and high officials over phone yesterday. She listened to them and gave necessary directives. MPs and political leaders from here also talked to the Prime Minister yesterday.

MD of Bashumoti Housing arrested in abduction case

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested the managing director of a real estate company from the city's Badda area yesterday in connection with an abduction case.

Nasiruddin Nasu, MD of Bashumoti Housing, was arrested from his office at about 5 pm and later sent to Keraniganj thana where a case was filed against him last month.

Police said Pabitra Sarker filed the case against Nasu and Sirajuddin on March 16 on charge of abducting his father-in-law Laxmikanta Sarker from Dhaka-Mawa road.

Laxmikanta Sarker is yet to be rescued.

Tremor jolts Ctg thrice in 30 minutes

UNB, Ctg

Mild earthquakes jolted greater Chittagong late Thursday night thrice within a span of half an hour.

Seismological Centre sources here said the first tremor, measuring 4.19 on the Richter Scale, lasted about 18 seconds at 1:43:48. The

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
May 25		6-39 pm
May 26	5-12 am	

Prayer Timings		
May 25		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-45
Zoha	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-42	6-47
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina offers fruit juice to a young monk at the Central Shaheed Minar where Buddhist monks staged a hunger strike in protest against the murder of monk Gyanjyoti in Chittagong.

'Govt responsible for monk murder'

B, Dhaka

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina held the government responsible for the killing of Buddhist monk Gyanjyoti and asked for arresting the killers to reassure people about security of life.

"The government, which is patronising the killers, cannot shirk its responsibility for the killing of a Buddhist priest," she said alleging that incidents of killing are increasing only for government patronage of the assassins.

Expressing solidarity with the Buddha Bhikkhus (monks) on hunger strike at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday afternoon in protest against the killing in Chittagong, the opposition leader said it was very unfortunate that a Buddhist priest is also killed in this country.

"This is a black chapter in the history of this country, which earned glory as a secular, liberal democratic state during the rule of Awami League," she said demanding immediate arrest and punishment of the culprits.

She deplored that even after a month of the killing of Gyanjyoti, none was arrested. "Everybody knows who are behind the killing," she said criticising what she said reluctance of the government about this case.

The former prime minister said allowing the killers to escape punishment encourages unabated killings, causing the deterioration of law and order. She observed that the incidents of desperate killing were taking place every day, but none was arrested.

Alleging that people are being subjected to horrible sufferings during the rule of BNP-Jamaat alliance, Hasina said, "The ruling party is releasing the killers and criminals while harassing innocent people."

She observed that people have been taken hostage by terrorists, and

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Hasina visits Naushin's family, blasts govt for lawlessness

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the people and conscious citizens would have to decide what they would do with the government as it "failed miserably" in giving public security controlling unabated criminal acts.

"I would like to leave it to the judgement of the people and conscious citizens for taking the decision," she told reporters after visiting the bereaved family of the minor girl Naushin killed by gunmen's bullet at Badda on May 9.

Hasina, who returned home Thursday after a month's sojourn in UK and USA, observed that the whole country was caught up in a pit of chaos and lawlessness where criminals were being harboured by the government and thus democracy and the rule of law was not working.

"In which country are we living where even a baby is not safe in her

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Flying to KSA by Saudia now almost mandatory?

RAFIQ HASAN

The Saudi Arabian Airlines -- Saudia -- has allegedly been doing monopoly business in carrying passengers to Saudi Arabia, depriving other airlines, according to sources.

Because of its monopoly business, it charges 30 to 50 per cent higher fare than other carriers. In the process, the country loses foreign exchange equivalent to around Tk 150 crore annually.

The airline charges US\$455 per ticket on the Dhaka-Jeddah route and \$420 on the Dhaka-Riyadh/Dammam routes. But other airlines charge between \$320 and \$280 on these routes, sources said.

As such, a person has to travel on the Saudia at an extra cost of \$155 to

\$155. Annually, more than 1.50 lakh Bangladeshis excluding Hajj pilgrims go to Saudi Arabia mostly for job.

According to sources, the Saudi embassy in Dhaka has allegedly made it mandatory for all recruiting agents to send at least 60 per cent of manpower on Saudia. Otherwise, the embassy does not issue visa, it has been alleged.

Moreover, travel on Saudia is mandatory for individuals or any group of less than five. So, Saudia gets around 80 per cent of the business since the small groups make up 70 per cent of the people going to Saudi Arabia.

The Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) recently urged State

Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam to take an initiative for withdrawal of the condition on travelling to Saudi Arabia.

In a recent letter to the state minister, BAIRA President MAH Salim said, "There should be a formal approach by our foreign ministry to Saudi foreign ministry asking them to withdraw prior ticketing as a condition for visa issuance."

The BAIRA president alleged that Saudia also tried to impose similar conditions on India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, but it failed because of strong government initiatives.

He claimed that the Saudi gov

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PHOTO: IQBAL SIDDIQUEE

A fissure has opened on the Sylhet-Salutikar-Compangyanj Road that vehicles ply every day at risk of accidents. More cracks will appear in the monsoon to come on the bypass road that goes just outside the secured area of the airport.

ASM NURUNNABI

Life in Dhaka City has never been so chaotic as it is today. City-dwellers in general are faced with various problems plaguing the city life -- traffic jams, air pollution, hijacking, terrorism, murders, loadshedding, hartals -- the list could go on endlessly. But growing up in Dhaka City is no less difficult either. Children and youngsters who need to expend their energy in a very healthy manner through games and other outdoor activities find themselves increasingly restricted within an ever shrinking circle as most playgrounds and other open spaces have disappeared to make way for apartments, shopping complexes and various business establishments.

The dearth of playgrounds has serious repercussions on the physical and mental health of our future generations. Being deprived of this essential element of healthy upbringing, the younger generation is more and more taking to immoral activities. The necessity for playgrounds and open spaces has therefore assumed a dimension that no society can afford to neglect for the sake of its posterity.

Bush, Putin ink disarmament treaty

AP, Moscow

US President George W Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a landmark treaty yesterday that requires the United States and Russia to make the largest reductions ever in their nuclear arsenals.

Bush said the signing "ended a long chapter of confrontation and opened up an entirely new relationship between our countries." Putin said, "This is a serious move ahead to ensure international security."

The accord would limit the United States and Russia within 10 years to between 1,700 and 2,200 deployed strategic nuclear warheads, down from about 6,000 apiece now -- a two-thirds cut in their respective nuclear arsenals.

"Friends really don't need weapons pointed at each other, we both understand that," Bush said. "But it's a realistic assessment of where we've been. Who knows what will happen 10 years from now. Who knows what future presidents will say and how they react."

DETAILS ON PAGE 5

Five drown as trawlers capsize in Tushkhali river in Barguna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Five people drowned as two trawlers capsized in Tushkhali river in Barguna district on Thursday night, witnesses said.

All the bodies, identified as Abdur Rab, 55, Motaleb, 35, Saghir, 20, Wazir, 30, and Idris, 35, were recovered from the river yesterday afternoon.

Witnesses said passenger trawlers FB Bhai Bhai and FB Shah Riadh with about 50 passengers abroad were caught in storm near Nalirhatbaria at about 10 pm and sank in the river.

Of the 50 passengers, 45 swam ashore while the rest five drowned.

In the same river, another trawler with 100 bags of cement sank at Badi Khali in Bamna upazila the same night.

Hunt for Bina's killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police could not arrest BNP leader Mosharrar Hossain Ripon, the main suspect in the killing of DCC ward commissioner Binoy Krishna Sarker Bina, till last night.

Police carried out raids on different areas in the city yesterday and went to the residences of Ripon's relatives in a bid to track him down.

The police's suspicion of Ripon's involvement in the murder deepened after he fled Dhaka. Ripon went into hiding after some unidentified gunmen shot dead Bina Wednesday night.

"Ripon's going into hiding after the killing proves his involvement in the incident," said a DB official, who is in the investigation team.

Officer-in-Charge of Kotwali Police Station Mahubur Rahman said they found out a clue to the killing but it could not confirm Ripon's involvement.

Asked about the whereabouts of Ripon, the officer said that he could

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DOWN TO EARTH

Dhaka's disappearing playgrounds, canals

Most of the small parks in the city are now derelict and unfit for public use for games and other recreation purposes. These parks are either under unauthorised occupation by owners of shops set up inside the park or have become the haunts of anti-social elements belonging to drugs and prostitution rings.

Apart from the small parks, the big open spaces and playgrounds have also suffered tremendous loss. Take the Paltan Maidan for instance. Youngsters from Captain Bazar, Siddik Bazar, Alu Bazar, Paltan, Fakirapul, Arambagh, Tikatuli and Gopibagh once used to play various games in this huge

field. Now that Paltan Maidan has shrunk into a narrow strip of land as a big part of the field has been used up for building the Hockey Stadium. The stadium has now become a commercial centre as numerous shops have been set up around the stadium. Also, this shopping centre has eaten up a large chunk of the Maidan for accommodating a parking space.

Ironically, youngsters nowadays have the rare opportunity to play during the time when a hartal is called and that too in streets, lanes and by-lanes.

A similar story of loss and deprivation has to do with our lakes, canals and rivers in and around the

capital. Reports say that a network of 22 canals that used to constitute the natural drainage for the floodwaters has disappeared or shrunk over the last four decades. The disappearance of the canal network has not only aggravated the city's drainage problem. Apart from destroying the natural beauty of the city, the lack of canals has hampered the annual recharge of groundwater beneath the city, thus leading to the fall of the groundwater table every year at an alarming rate, recent surveys show.

For example, the Dholai Khul, which once used to be the artery of an important navigational route for

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PHOTO: STAR

Players and fans of the Mohammedan Sporting Club, winner of the Nitol-Tata National Football League title, rejoice over their victory at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Mohammedan defeated Abahani KC 6-5 in a tiebreaker.

BADC's double dilemma

Salary for April stalled, no funds to axe 'surplus' staff

REAZ AHMAD

About 9,200 officials and employees of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC), one of the largest public sector enterprises in the country, did not get salary for the month of April till yesterday, official sources said.

BADC's total monthly staff salary is Tk 8.25 crore. Roughly one fourth of this amount is spent for payment of salary to some 2,400 'surplus' staff who have no work', according to official sources.

A government assessment three years back had said that BADC should not have more than 6,800 staff with its then workload.

Over the years, implementation

of many projects was stalled and many projects were curtailed as their funds had to be diverted for payment of salary to the surplus staff.

The ever-shrinking annual development programme of BADC has now come down to Taka 122 crore only. It has an annual income of Taka nine crore only.

Out of this Taka 131 crore (122+9), BADC has to spend Taka 99 crore for staff salary, keeping only Taka 32 crore for implementation of projects.

The sources said at least Taka 24 crore can be saved annually if the surplus staff can be axed.

They said that the staff did not get their salary for the month of April

as funds for some projects for the second (October-December) and the third (January-March) quarters of the current fiscal (2001-2002) have not yet been released.

In the face of growing agitation by the staff for salary, BADC authorities wrote to agriculture and finance ministries a week back requesting for immediate release of the funds.

Sources in agriculture ministry said at least Taka 160 crore will be required to axe the surplus staff through a 'golden handshake' programme but the finance ministry is unwilling to arrange this huge amount for BADC now.

Most of the surplus staff will go on retirement in about five years

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Water supply down, bills up in Ctg

WASA can't provide meters but fixes charges 'at will'

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Chittagong

Chittagong WASA is realising excessive bills from subscribers in different areas without providing meters while the water supply is too inadequate to the needs, subscribers alleged.

The WASA has given about 2000 water connections without meters in the last three years, sources in the organisation said.

In the absence of meter, 'average bill' is realised, which is much more than the actual consumption of water, many subscribers claimed.

Taka 912.15 is realised (at the rate of Tk.20.27 per thousand gallons) per month against each connection to a residential compound having three families and Taka 3526.80 against each non-residential connection.

The flat rate has been fixed assuming consumption of 500 gallons of water at each residential connection and 5000 gallons at each commercial connection per day, WASA sources said.

Both types of subscribers say they would not have to pay such 'excessive bills' if they were provided with meters.

The fixed 'average bill' is unrealistic and illogical while the water supply is too inadequate, they claimed while talking to this correspondent. The bill would have been almost half had there been meters, they claimed. Often water is supplied for only 3 to 4 hours a day, many of them alleged.

WASA officials said meters could not be procured due to some 'complica

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JCD, Shibir clash over cricket match in Ctg: 5 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Five people including a constable were injured as JCD and Shibir activists clashed over a cricket match at Port Colony in the city yesterday afternoon.

The feuding groups chased each other, traded gunshots and exploded cocktails during the clash, creating panic in and around the colony.

Police Nayek Abdul Quddus and four others were injured in cocktail explosions. The injured policeman was admitted to Dampara Police Hospital.

Later, police nabbed ten people from the spot.

Chittagong Port Sramik Dal leader Nurulla Bahar said some local miscreants belonging to the Awami League clashed with Shibir activists over a cricket match. The miscreants are now involved in different criminal activities in Port Colony area in the name of JCD, he added.