

NEWS SNAPS

Onion trader killed in ferry

UNB, Pabna

Body of an onion trader was recovered from Enyetpuri ferry on Kazirhat-Arichaghat route here on Monday.

Family sources said onion trader Babul Hossain of village Badaigram in Sujanagar upazila went to Dhaka on Sunday to buy a truck and his body was found in the ferry while he was returning home on the following day.

Misceants kill widow

UNB, Kushtia

A widow was killed by miscreants at village Alampur in Sadar upazila on Wednesday night.

The victim was Sandha Rani Biswas, 45, wife of late Shailendra Nath Biswas. Police said the miscreants attacked the house of Sandha Rani at about 9pm and chopped her indiscriminately, leaving her dead on the spot. The motive behind the killing could not be known. A case was filed with local police station.

Body recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Durgapur Police recovered the body of an unidentified young woman from the shoal of the Someswari River in Munjibazaar area of Durgapur.

Police told this correspondent that the entire body was burnt. An unnatural death (UD) case was lodged with Durgapur thana.

Abnormal price-hike of betel leaf in districts

BSS, Joypurhat/Narail

Abnormal price-hike of betel leaf has caused great sufferings to consumers in northern and southern districts.

Price of betel-leaf has shot up by 10 to 12 times in recent weeks everywhere in the areas.

Common people like it as a traditional commodity for centuries together. But now they suffer a lot due to this new phenomenon.

According to market sources, about 80 per cent adult people in eight districts of greater Rangpur and Dinajpur and 30 per cent people in eight other northern districts consume the popular item daily.

It has a great demand in this region. But its present production in Naogaon, Rajshahi, Natore, Joypurhat and some other areas

does not meet the demand of the region. A major portion of its demand is met by bringing leaf from Khulna and other southern districts.

One hundred pieces of betel-leaf were sold at only Tk 8 to Tk 10 in December last, while its present price is Tk 90 to Tk 100 at different places.

According to traders, betel-leaf plants were damaged during shivering cold waves in last December and January this year. Same thing happened in other areas. These plants cannot tolerate temperatures below 10 degrees Celsius, they said to this correspondent. Supply of the popular commodity reduced drastically in local markets. Smugglers cannot bring the same from India due to strong vigil by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) jawans along the borders, traders told this correspondent. So,

its price increased abnormally, they added.

Officials in Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) expressed similar views.

A few women betel leaf consumers of Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Dinajpur, Joypurhat and Bogra told BSS recently that they never experienced such price-hike during their life-time.

According to market sources, in 10 districts of Khulna division about 60 to 70 per cent adult people consume the item daily.

Betel leaf containing 80 pieces were sold at Tk 10 to Tk 12 two months ago while now the leaves are being sold at Tk 50 to Tk 65 in Narail, Jessore, Jhenidah, Magura and in some other areas.

Eight arrested during UP polls in Bagerhat

UNB, Bagerhat

Eight people, including two chairman candidates, were arrested during Union Parishad (UP) elections here on Thursday.

The arrested included chairman candidates Muksed Ali and Alhaj Abdur Rob, his brother Humayun Kabir and Haroon of Baripara union.

Police later released all the arrested persons except Humayun Kabir.

Another chairman candidate of Mathia union, Radaraman Shikder, could not cast his vote due to repeated threats by his rival candidate.

Witnesses said supporters of his rival candidate attacked his men on Wednesday night, leaving 15 people injured.

Shikder alleged that they attacked his house and abducted two of his supporters -- Ranjan Mollik, 67, Haribilash Mitra, 40.

Prothom Alo newsman sent to jail

UNB, Kishoreganj

A court here on Tuesday sent a newsman to jail rejecting his bail petition.

Dilip, Prothom Alo correspondent at Nikli in Kishoreganj, was arrested in an election violence related case on Monday.

He went to the spot at Karapasha in Nikli upazila along with police and took photographs of incidents there.

Police said Dilip was with them, but he was arrested as his name was mentioned in the FIR.

Newly elected chairman of the union Karar Borhanuddin said Dilip was the victim of animosity of the local member of parliament (MP) of the ruling party.

Deputy leader of the Opposition in Jatiyo Sangsad Advocate Abdul Hamid condemned the arrest and demanded Dilip's immediate release.

Molasses output falls as indiscriminate felling of date trees goes on

BSS, Madaripur

The production of molasses from date juice has decreased in Madaripur district due to indiscriminate felling of date trees for the last few years.

According to an unofficial survey, there were more than two lakh date trees in Madaripur in 1992 and molasses production was recorded at 2,000 maunds at an average rate of 10 seers per tree.

The earning from the sale of molasses was about Tk 2 crore in last season, but it is apprehended that the production will come down alarmingly in the current season due to large scale felling of date trees.

Taking advantage of financial condition and ignorance of rural people, a section of owners of brick fields are purchasing date trees at a cheaper rate to use them as fire-wood in their kilns.

Madaripur Sadar, Mostafapur, Kalkini, Palon, Angari, Goshairhat, Utravil and Naria were noted for marketing of date juice molasses. People from different areas used to

rush in these areas to purchase tasty molasses.

Demand of molasses was increasing and it was a profitable item. The date juice molasses were also sent to many bazaars all over.

Molasses of Khoazpur, Dasherzangol, Char Muguria and Madra are in great demand for its specialty and colour.

The 'Patali' brand molasses also attracts mainly for its taste and fragrance.

The molasses not only meet the local demand as substitute to sugar, but also provides job opportunities to a large number of poor day-labourers.

According to an unconfirmed source, about one lakh professional date tree cutters in greater Faridpur earned a good amount of money by collecting date tree juice in the winter season.

Indiscriminate felling of trees has deepened the crisis.

Many professional date tree cutters and molasses producers are now unemployed due to shortage of trees and juice.

Herb plantation drive turning into a social movement

BSS, Joypurhat

Different government and non-governmental organisations have taken up a massive programme for plantation of medicinal and herbal saplings almost everywhere in the northern region.

The drive has become popular from the middle of last year when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia inaugurated the plantation fortnight with a call to plant medicinal trees. The drive has turned into a social movement.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), District Civil Surgeon Offices (DSO), government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have taken up extensive programme of plantation of medicinal and herbal saplings in office premises, homesteads, hospital campuses and other open places.

More than 35 NGOs are playing important role in raising saplings of rare variety of medicinal and herbal plants and distributing these among people. Civil Surgeons in the region are also contributing a lot to the programme of plantation of herbal saplings.

DAE officials are doing major works by conducting awareness building programmes among the mass to popularise plantation of such saplings.

Ministers, parliament members (MPs) and public representatives are asking common people to participate in the programme. All concerned are trying to make people understand that plantation of medicinal and herbal plants in greater number will not only help our ecological balance but also will help common people to have their medicines of many diseases from these plants.

About one lakh saplings of herbal plants have so far been panted in the region since July last, officials said.

Civil Surgeon of Joypurhat Dr. Anwar Ali has practically made the campus of Joypurhat Modernised Hospital a garden of medicinal and herbal plants.

Dozens of varieties of such saplings have been planted by him

on the campus which attracts common visitors.

Dr Ali explained to this correspondent about numerous aspects of his garden.

Officials and executives of Thikana Sangstha, a local NGO, are executing a big programme to plant herbal saplings inside its office premises in the township of Kurigram.

The NGO planted over 5,000 such saplings each year and sold those at a cheap price among government, NGOs and members of public.

Their programme proved to be successful as people are showing much interest in plantation of medicinal and herbal plants in office premises, educational institutions and other public places.

According to physicians and experts, the initiative should be moved forward further.

CAG meets audit officers, staffers in Pabna

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of Bangladesh, Asif Ali on Friday met 30 officers and staffers of five audit parties engaged in auditing at one silo, three local supply depots (LSDs) and three central supply depots (CSDs) under the Ministry of Food, says a press release.

The silo and supply depots are located in Bogra, Dinajpur, Jaipurhat, Pabna and Sirajganj in Pabna.

He reviewed the audit findings and outlined some guidelines to improve the quality of audit. He also visited a CSD at Muladuli, Pabna where he reviewed the audit findings there.

The meeting was attended by Waliul Haq Khandker, director general (DG) of Works Audit Directorate and M Mesbahuddin Khan, DG, Local and Revenue Audit Directorate, while Manindra Chandra Dutt, Director of Performance, Audit Directorate coordinated the meeting.