

SNAPS

Dacoity on 12 trawlers in a day in Patuakhali

A CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali
Dacoits looted about Tk three lakh from passengers on board 12 trawlers at Sonar Char in Galachipa in Patuakhali on Tuesday.

About 20 armed dacoits on board a speedboat swooped on the trawlers one after another during daytime, police and sources there said.

One person—Mojibur, 30, was injured as he tried to resist the dacoits. The dacoits sped towards Lalmonohar in Bhola after the incident, the sources said.

Rover moot ends

A CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali
A two-day Pre-Rover Moot concluded at the Government Women College here on Tuesday.

Deputy Commissioner Prasanta Bhusan Barua was the chief guest at the concluding session presided over by principal of the college Prof Nurul Islam.

Teachers of the college, students and officials also attended the function.

"Criminal" held with gun

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna
Joint Forces on Tuesday arrested alleged criminal Abdul Jabbar, 34, from Noor Nagar area under Sonadanga thana and recovered from his possession a sawn-off gun and one bullet.

Police said Jabbar is a "ringleader" of a gang of muggers and extortionists. A case has been recorded against him under the Arms Act.

Poet Jasimuddin's birthday today

BSS, Faridpur

The 101st birth anniversary of Pallikabi Jasimuddin will be observed here today in a befitting manner.

The Jasim Foundation, headed by deputy commissioner of Faridpur, has chalked out an elaborate program including a fortnight long "Palli Mela" (village fair) at Jasim Udyan located near the grave site of Jasimuddin on the bank of river Kumar. The poet's ancestral home is also near the place.

Besides, other socio-cultural organisations and Anzaruddin High School, founded by the poet after the name of his father, have chalked out elaborate programmes to mark the day.

Jasim Foundation has arranged special prayer at the gravesite, recitation from the Holy Quran and a Milad Mahfil.

Preparations for the fortnight long Pali Mela is complete. Besides two permanent structures, 156 stalls have been set up to hold cultural activities.

Handicrafts, cultural objects and other indigenous products depicting rural Bengal will be on sale.

A pucca ghat (bathing place at pond) styled "Sojan Badiar Ghat", built at Tk 17 lakh, will also be inaugurated tomorrow.

Disaster Management and Relief Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf will inaugurate the Pali Mela.

Hundi trading alleged Businessman sent to jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet.

Leading businessman Abu Hossain Chowdhury, who was arrested on Saturday for alleged hundi trading, was sent to jail hajat on Tuesday.

The court rejected his bail prayer as he was produced before a magistrate court in the city after a two-day remand.

Detective Branch police arrested Abu Hossain when he was coming to the city from Osmani International Airport in his car. Police also seized a pistol from his bag with a VIP tag and Tk 15 lakh, found in the car.

Police later said they were surprised how he managed VIP tag while flying to Sylhet in a Biman flight from Dhaka.

Civil Aviation official at Sylhet airport could not give any satisfactory answer in this regard. They said it was the responsibility of security men and Biman officials at in Zia International Airport in Dhaka.

A case under money laundering law has been filed against him with the Kotwali police.

Police said during interrogation Abu Hossain disclosed names of some hundi traders in Dhaka and Sylhet.

Reaping rewards of hard work in 22 Gaibandha villages

Men, women work on knitting machines; children go to school



PHOTO: STAR

A man is knitting sweater while a woman is preparing the yarn at a factory at Dhariakandi village in Kochashaher union in Gaibandha.

KM REZAUL HAQUE, Gaibandha

There is no illiterate and unemployed person in Kochashaher union.

All in the remote 22 villages in Gobindaganj upazila in Gaibandha district work on knitting machines or other tools in addition to producing crops, a scene not seen about 15 years ago. They are hardworking. There is no beggar.

They have not seen any monga (pre-harvest crisis of food and work) in the recent past, unlike in many areas of greater Rangpur

district. A knitting machine is now a household tool. There are at least 1000 big and small knitting factories in the union now. Hosiery production is their main work.

This correspondent visited the villages this week. Knitting machines were operating at almost every house. All including women were busy, either preparing and colouring yarn or operating looms. No school-age children were seen as they were at school.

Those who can not afford a knitting machine work in other's factories and earn around Tk 200

per day.

They mainly produce winter clothes like sweater, muffler, socks, cap, cardigan, blouse, hand gloves and babywear.

About 25,000 people are engaged in hosiery profession and they are now self-sufficient.

It is very heartening that this is having a tremendous demonstration effect. The businesses are spreading in nearby areas.

The factories produce winter clothes worth at least Tk 100 crore a year.

The cost of a manual knitting machine is around Tk 25,000 and

an imported power-operated machine is around Tk one lakh.

The products go up to wholesale markets in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

"The main input of winter clothes is nylon yarn imported from India, Korea and Singapore and we are to collect those from importers at high prices", Abdus Sobhan, a factory owner said.

Another owner said shortage of fund is one of the main problems for development of hosiery industry.

A large number of small factory owners can not continue produc-

tion other than in the winter season for fund shortage. Only solvent owners run their factories round the year and earn good profit, he said.

Meanwhile, hosiery cottage industry is spreading to others union. Over 50 knitting factories have been set up in neighbouring areas.

Anisur Rahman, a factory owner at Ratanpur village, said getting bank loan is very difficult due to "complex formalities". So small owners are compelled to borrow from local moneylenders at high interest which affected production.

Project to prevent merger of Jamuna and Bangali rivers

Discontent brews as election pledge not honoured

A CORRESPONDENT, Sariakandi (Bogra)

Discontent is growing among the people of Shariakandi and Dhunut upazilas in Bogra as consecutive meetings of the ECNEC in the last two months did not grant any funds for Jamuna-Bangali rivers merger prevention project.

Due to erosion, the mighty Jamuna and the Bangali rivers are coming closer at Titpara and Debdanga points in Shariakandi upazila in Bogra.

They are only 420 metres away at Debdanga and 425 metres at Titpara, the Water Development Board (WDB) Chief Engineer told this correspondent during a recent visit to the area. If protection measures are not taken immediately, they may merge any time, creating a disaster, he said.

The ECNEC (Executive Committee of National Economic Council) met on November 5 and 6 and on December 22 this year but

did not approve any funds for the project.

Khaleda Zia while addressing a big public meeting at Shariakandi Degree College ground during the election campaign in 2001 had said "permanent steps" would be taken to prevent merger of the rivers.

After assuming power, she passed orders to take steps. Some people this correspondent talked to said they had become overwhelmed with joy when the Prime Minister at a meeting at the Ministry of Water Resources on August 13 this year gave orders for taking steps for preventing the merger.

On October 16, the project was approved at a pre-ECNEC meeting of the Planning Commission and sent to the ECNEC meeting with recommendations for immediate implementation.

The Chief Engineer of WDB's North-Western Zone, Rajshahi, floated a pre-qualification tender

(Notice No. 01/2003-2004) on October 23.

At the November 5 ECNEC meeting, 13 big projects worth Tk 3027 crore were approved. But the rivers merger prevention project was not included in the agenda.

The December 6 ECNEC meeting approved projects involving Tk 475 crore to implement a project to develop Char (shoal) lands in three northern districts. But this project was not discussed.

The people of Shariakandi and Dhunut upazilas became frustrated when news came to them through a national daily that the ECNEC did not approve the project, they said.

It may be mentioned here that in 1998, two "hard points" were constructed at Shariakandi and Mathurapara at a cost of Tk 745.18 crore.

According to the Ministry of Water Resources, another six "hard points" were scheduled to be con-

structed at a cost of Tk 560.00 crore on the right bank of Jamuna to protect its merger with Bangali river. A pre-ECNEC meeting in 1995 approved construction of six "hard points".

International consultant Sir William Halcrow and Partners Ltd. (JK) had suggested construction of 27 "hard points" at the right bank of the Jamuna. Ten "hard points", should be built on emergency basis, it had suggested.

The mighty Jamuna has devoured about two lakh acres of land along with infrastructures, rendering scores of people landless and homeless.

Water resources experts say merger of the two rivers will be catastrophic for the entire region, which may affect the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge also. Approach road on the western side of the bridge may be disconnected from the mainland in flood season. The flood control embankment at

the downstream will be washed away by flood water.

About 25 lakh people of this vast area will be affected and crops on about two lakh hectares submerged. A total of 135km pucca roads, 120km kutcha roads, 1400 km village roads, 40 to 70 bridges and culverts, 0.5km rail roads and semi-industrial zones will be affected, they said.

Local people also claimed that BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tareque Rahman while visiting flood affected areas of Shariakandi in the last wet season also assured them that work on the merger prevention project would be started in next dry season.

Talking to this correspondent, Kazi Rafiqul Islam MP said commitment of the Prime Minister should be honoured and implemented without any fail for survival of the people of the two upazilas.

Contractors lock Bhola WDB office

Residences of Executive Engineer, 8 others attacked for "irregularities" in giving Tk 7 cr work

A CORRESPONDENT, Bhola

A section of Water Development Board (WDB) contractors hailing from Bhola, joined by musclemen, locked the WDB office and attacked nine residences of its officials and employees including that of the Chief Engineer on Sunday protesting alleged irregularities in giving work for Tk seven crore work of the Bhola town protection project.

The WDB office was under lock and key till yesterday and police was deployed there.

Police confirmed the incidents.

When contacted, some of the employees said, on Sunday morning, the contractors all of a sudden swooped on the office. The scared employees rushed out. The contractors then locked the office rooms from outside. They had no time to call police, they said.

The attackers however did not

damage any property or documents, they said.

They then swooped on the residences one after another, threw brick bats, damaging windowpanes.

Executive Engineer Reazuddin Ahmed and his family were not at Bhola during the incidents.

When contacted, some of the contractors alleged that the Executive Engineer gave all the work to 20 groups of contractors from Comilla, his home district. They also claimed that 1013 schedules were submitted till the last date on November 12.

The work includes construction and dumping of concrete blocks in vulnerable points and repair of embankments.

The work orders were given recently. After giving the work orders, the Executive Engineer and five other officials left Bhola, they alleged.

Demand for reopening Dhaka Match Works

Workers begin 9-day agitation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Workers of Dhaka Match Works (former Dada Match Works) formed a human chain at Picture Palace cinema square in the city on Tuesday as part of nine-day agitation programme demanding reopening of the mill.

The programme also includes rallies and processions on December 31, January 1 and 2, mass hunger strike on January 4 at

Shaheed Hadis Park, workers' rally in front of the mill on January 5, hunger strike on January 6, exchange of views with cross-sections of people on January 8 and submission of memorandum to Khulna City Corporation Mayor on January 9.

Leaders of the workers' union have threatened of dire consequence in case of failure to reopen the factory by January 7.

20 hurt in BDR-smuggler gunfight in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

At least 20 people including a woman were injured, five of them with bullets, in a gunfight between Bangladesh Rifle (BDR) personnel and alleged smugglers at bordering Jamalpur in the district Monday night.

BDR Sources said, being tipped off, a team from Jamalpur BOP

(border observation post) raided the area.

Sensing presence of BDR, the smugglers opened fire, triggering the gunfight.

The five hit with bullet are Rafiq, 35, his wife Selina Khatun 28, Hasanur, 22, Razzak, 31 and Fahim, 40.

Being chased, some of the alleged smugglers entered Indian Territory.

Admission tests in 9 govt schools in Ctg January 10-14

CU CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Admission tests in all the nine government schools here will be held from January 10 to 14 next year.

The tests will be held for admission into classes I, IV, V, VI and IX only in the government schools.

Meanwhile, the government school authorities have been receiving admission forms since December 24 which will continue till January 7.

Applicants can collect forms from offices of headmasters of the respective schools till January 5 on payment of Tk 60 for each form.

A five-member admission

committee headed by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Chittagong, Shaiful Islam has been formed to coordinate admission tests in government schools this year.

The schools are Collegiate School, Dr Khashtagor Government Girls' High School, Chittagong Muslim High School, Government Muslim High School, Nasirabad Government Boys' School, Nasirabad Government Girls' High School, Bakalia Government Laboratory High School, Government Mohsin High School and Government City Girls' High School.

Besides, Ispahani Public School, a leading non-government school in the port city distributed admission forms for admission into KG-1 section till December 24.

However, the date for admission test for 100 seats in KG-1 is yet to be fixed, said principal Hasina Zakaria.

Ispahani school will also admit students in Class VI. But the admission forms is yet to be distributed.

Order to axe 252

Aleem Jute Mills workers

march streets with clubs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Tension is mounting Aleem Jute Mills here following an order for retrenchment of 252 "permanent" workers of the mill.

The order passed by the BMC (Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation) head office in Dhaka was received by the mill authorities on Tuesday, said Abdul Hamid Sarder, president of the workers union.

After hearing the news, the workers on Tuesday brought out a stick procession protesting the retrenchment order.

When contacted, the mill authorities acknowledged receipt of the order.

4 outlaws held in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Four alleged outlaws belonging to Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) were arrested at Satpara village in Daulatpur upazila Tuesday night.

Tipped off, police raided the house of one Siraj Piadar and nabbed them while they were holding a secret meeting, police said.

The arrested are Kuser uddin, 40, Siraj Piadar, 34, Jhantu, 29 and Siddique Mollah 45.

Police said Kuser Uddin, a regional leader of the party, is an accused in eleven cases including four murder cases.

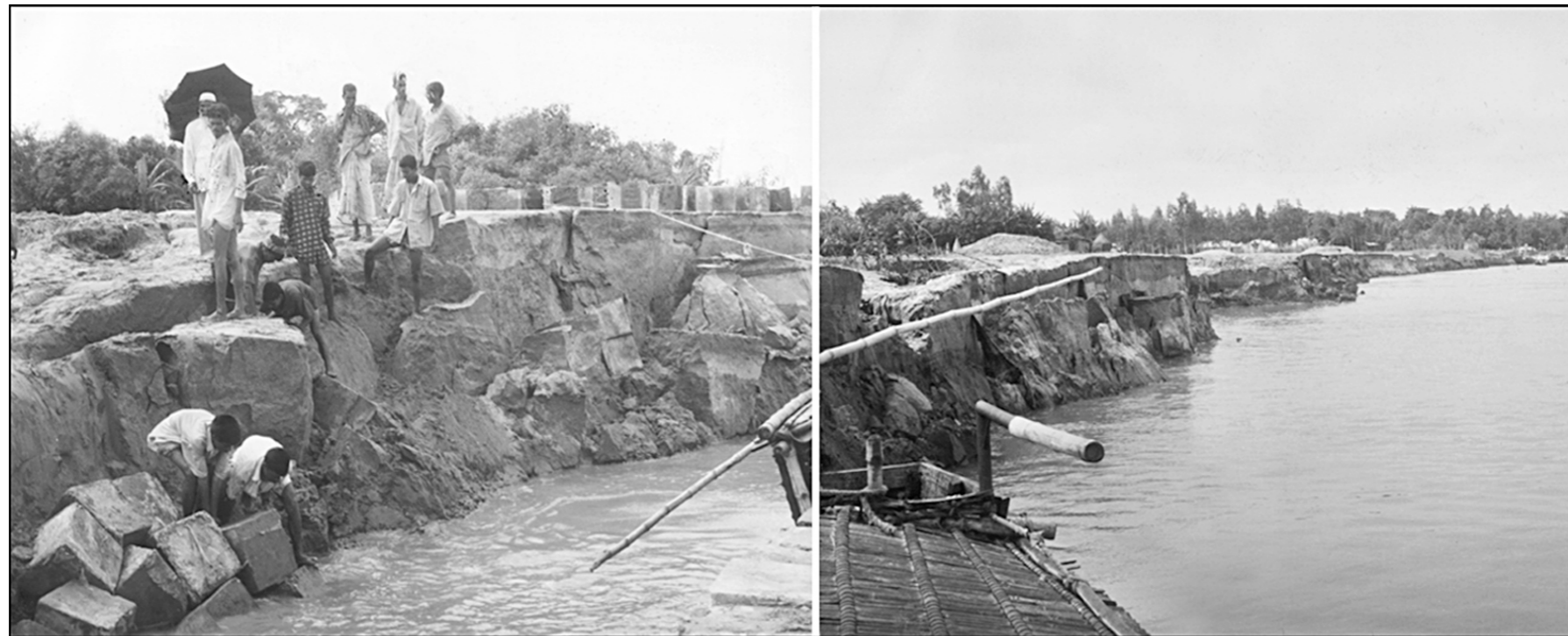


PHOTO: STAR

The Jamuna and the Bangali rivers coming closer due to unabated erosion at Kalitola Bazaar (left) and Titpara Dhap (right) in Sariakandi, Bogra.