

SNAPS

12 fishermen feared drowned in sea

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Twelve of the missing 24 fishermen were feared drowned in the Bay of Bengal on Sunday night.

Twelve others were rescued by other fishermen.

In the meantime, 12 of the 14 missing crew of the trawler, FB Alauddin were rescued by other fishing boats and returned safely to Kuakata shore on Sunday night.

Returned fishermen informed that they had seen a capsized fishing boat with fishing equipment in the Gargamoti area of the Bay.

Five crew of the engine boat owned by Sirajul Majhi were among the missing. Relatives are searching the bodies in the Sundarbans, Pakkhirchar, Lalidia and Patharghata coastal areas.

Kuakata Union Parishad chairman Abdul Berek Molla told on Monday that he had sent trawlers to find out untraced crew and fishermen.

AL leader held on murder charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A local Awami League (AL) leader was arrested by police on Monday for alleged involvement in Altaf murder.

The arrested is Ashok Lahori of Khalishkhal village in Tala upazila. He is also the general secretary of Khalishkhal union AL.

Satkhira district AL leaders including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Monsur Ahmed, Nazrul Islam, Firoz Ahmed and Sheikh Shahiduddin in a press statement on Tuesday protested the arrest and demanded his immediate release.

Woes of 2 rape victims

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

A rape victim fled her village home while another one was shifted to Dhaka for better treatment from Mymensingh recently.

In the first incident, a schoolgirl was compelled to flee her village home after being threatened by 'rapists' to do so. The incident happened at Chandipasha village of Nadail upazila in Mymensingh.

A criminal named Shafiqul Islam, 30, of the same village entered the bedroom of the ill-fated girl at midnight on June 5 and raped her there. Two days later, influential people at the village organised an arbitration meeting and fined Shafiqul 20,000 taka in his absence.

After the rape incident, the victim tried to commit suicide several times.

A case was filed with Nandail police station.

In another incident, a seven-year-old rape victim was also shifted to Dhaka in a critical condition from Ishwarganj in Mymensingh.

The poor girl, a madrasa student was returning home from her teacher's house on June 6 evening. Then Halud Mia, son of Abul Hashem, Shahajahan son of Shamsuddin at the same village waylaid her and took her to a nearby lonely jungle and raped her, according to police.

She was sent to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital in a critical condition from where she was removed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital on June 13.

A case was filed with Ishwarganj thana, but police failed to arrest the accused.

A vital ferry route ignored for long

15-km Bhola-Laxmipur ferry service will benefit 21 southern districts, reduce road distance to Ctg by 250 kms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A 15-kilometre ferry service from Bhola to Laxmipur can reduce the road distance to Chittagong by about 250 kilometres, cut the travel time by half and boost economic activities in 21 southern districts.

The ferry service, a demand of people of the region for long, has not been introduced despite commitments by successive governments.

Officials of BIWTA and Roads and Highways department here say they can introduce the service from Ilisha in Bhola to Majuchowdhur Hut in Laxmipur if higher authorities decide.

This will also reduce the distance from Khulna to Chittagong by about 330 kilometres, sources say.

Now, to go to Chittagong from Barisal, one has to go to Bhola by road and then avail a risky river journey from Ilisha (in Bhola) to Laxmipur by BIWTA sea-truck and then have a road journey to Chittagong. The tedious journey takes over 12 hours.

The river journey in sea truck and small launches from Ilisha to Laxmipur through the Meghna estuary is very risky, except during winter when the river remains relatively calm.

Now, people from Barisal and Khulna usually go to Chittagong by road via Dhaka, covering about 600

kilometers. They also travel via Chandpur, using two river routes.

BITWA however provides a direct Barisal-Chittagong steamer service but it takes over 30 hours and is mostly irregular, passengers say.

To reduce the Barisal-Chittagong road distance, the present government renovated the roads from Barisal to Ilisha and introduced ferry services from Barisal to Charkawa on the Kirtonkhola river and from Bheduria to Bhola on the Meghna river.

The roadway communication from Barisal to Ilisha became popular after introduction of the ferry services.

But the risky journey from Ilisha to Laxmipur refrain many, particularly traders, to use the route. Only one IWTA sea truck now plies the route, which often sails overloaded. Merchandise can not be transported through sea truck.

A high official of the R & H department seeking anonymity told this correspondent that they could introduce Ro-Ro ferry service in the Ilisha-Laxmipur route if the higher authorities decide.

Some ferries, used in the Aricha-Nagarbari route earlier, can be used in the Ilisha-Laxmipur route following construction of the Jamuna Bridge, he said. "We have also

trying to introduce a ferry service in the route. But nothing has been done so far.

Ebaidul Huq Chan, president of Barisal Chamber and Commerce and Industries, said introduction of ferry service in Bhola-Laxmipur route will give a big boost to economic activities in the southern district as it will reduce the cost and travel time to Chittagong from southern districts and Knulna by half.

During Awami League rule, former minister Tofael Ahmed who hails from Bhola had told this correspondent that his government had a plan to introduce ferry service in the Ilisha-Laxmipur route. Few months back, BNP leader and State Minister for Religious Affairs told this correspondent that his government was



A partial view of the crowd of passengers, snapped at Ilisha ghat on Monday, waiting for a sea truck to go to Laxmipur.

PHOTO: STAR

Change crop pattern, expand microcredit to avoid monga

State ministers tell open discussion at Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Cultivation of short-duration crops including vegetables and increasing employment generation activities in non-agriculture sectors through micro credit are ways to avoid monga in northern districts.

This was suggested at a day-long open discussion on 'Causes of Monga and Remedies', organized by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC). It was held at its Rangpur training centre on Monday.

State Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister-in-Charge for Rangpur Alamgir Kabir and State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Faqurul Islam were special guests at the discussion.

The discussants included Director General of Agriculture

Extension Department (AED) Md Tarique Hasan, its Deputy Director Ainul Hoque and Rangpur BNP Secretary Mozaffar Hossen.

The monga (lack of work before crop harvest) situation prevails in the eight northern districts during the Bangla months of Aswin and Kartik as the percentage of landless people and marginal farmers are increasing with limited employment scope outside agriculture, said Ainul Hoque in his keynote paper.

He said 29 per cent of people in the region are landless and 28 per cent marginal farmers. Erosion of land by Teesta, Dharla, Brhammaputra, Korotoa, Ghagot, Katakhal, Atrai, Punarvhaba, and Tongon rivers is one of the causes for shrinking land holdings, particularly in shoals and riverside areas.

He suggested cultivation of BR-33 and BR-39 varieties of paddy and early varieties of vegetables.

State Minister Alamgir Kabir said AED and other government agriculture departments can play a vital role in motivating small farmers in cultivating short-duration crops including vegetables.

He also stressed the need for expansion of micro credit. The government has allocated Tk 345 crore for micro-credit in the proposed budget for fiscal 2004-2005 for poverty alleviation.

He said the government will take early steps like distribution of VGF cards and relief before monga this year.

State Minister Mirza Fakhruul Islam Alamgir urged agriculture officials to motivate farmers to change cropping to avoid monga.



State Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister-in-Charge for Rangpur Alamgir Kabir (third from right) speaking at the discussion on monga. State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Faqurul Islam is on his left.

PHOTO: STAR

TIB bodies in 3 more districts

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Three committees of concerned citizens (CCCs) were formed recently in three northern districts of Rangpur, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat aiming at building a social movement against corruption.

The Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) inspired the citizens in formation of the committees, says a press release.

The 13-member Rangpur committee is being headed by freedom fighter and journalist Sadrul Alam, while

the 11-member Lalmonirhat committee is being headed by teacher and social worker Moimul Islam. The 12-member Kurigram committee is being led by Zila Ainjibi Samity general secretary advocate Enamul Huq Chowdhury.

TIB officials Ekram Hossain, Mohammad Arif Hossain Khan, Rafiqul Islam and Mohammad Mohsin were present during formation of the committees.

Husband gets life for cruelty to wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A husband along with two men have been sentenced to life term for cruelty to his wife.

Nur Al Haque, Judge of Barisal Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal, yesterday handed down the punishment to Kamal Hossain alias Gaza Kamal, Afzal Hossain and Alom Bepari.

Kamal of Daber Kul village in Uzirpur upazila had married Rashida of the same village in 1993. They have two children.

Kamal Hossain had often tortured his been five for Tk 50,000 dowry. In February 2001, he threatened that he would sell her to traffickers if the dowry is not given. Rashida complained to local elders. They called an arbitration meeting on February 20, 2001.

On that day, when Rashida was going to the meeting venue, Kamal and his associates beat her. She was taken to Uzirpur Health Complex in a critical condition.

After recovery, she file a case with Uzirpur thana.

The court examined eight witnesses in the case.

Mymensingh road mishap kills girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

A schoolgirl was killed in a road accident at Ashura on the Tangail-Mymensingh highway in Modhupur upazila, Tangail on Monday.

Police and witnesses said a Tangail bound bus coming from Mymensingh knocked down Sharmin, 8, a student of Ashura Government Primary School killing her on the spot. The victim was crossing the road at that time.

Sylhet divn gets half of power needed

3-5 hours' load shedding a day: Transmission by Sylhet Betar faces disruption

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, SYLHET

Load shedding from three to five hours a day continues in the city and in rural areas in Sylhet division despite demonstrations by political parties and socio-cultural bodies for smooth power supply.

Three months on, there is no sign of improvement of the situation in near future, Power Development Board (PDB) sources say.

Small industries and students in urban areas and farmers in rural areas who depend on power for irrigation are the worst sufferers.

Transmission of programmes from Bangladesh Betar's Sylhet centre is also being disrupted due to lengthy load shedding.

The power supply disruption

triggered demonstrations also by farmers at different upazilas in the division.

A PDB high official while talking to The Daily Star yesterday said the demand for power in the four districts of Sylhet division is 170 to 180 Megawatt during peak hours from 5 pm to 11 pm.

"We are virtually getting 50 per cent of the peak hour demand since March", he said seeking anonymity.

"We have no alternative to keeping power supply suspended for hours in areas".

Besides, disruptions are also caused at times due to faults in supply lines because of heavy pressure, he admitted. He however claimed that complaints from consumers have decreased following the recent renovation of lines in Sylhet city.

"We have nothing to do till

supply from the national grid is raised, which is not expected soon", he said.

Taking advantage of frequent blackout, petty crimes like theft and mugging have increased in the city, a number of city dwellers alleged.

People in city suburbs like Khadimnagar, Tukerbazar Salutikor, Lalabazar, Srirampur, Kuchai, Hetimganj are the worst suffers, many in the areas said. They have to go without power for four to five hours a day, they said.

When contacted, the Chief Engineer of Sylhet PDB said power distribution is controlled by the central load dispatch centre. There is nothing to do locally.

The crisis is countrywide and will continue and till power generation increases, he said.

Jobless educated youth turns job creator

Kamal earns Tk 60,000 a month from poultry

HOSSIN SERAJ, Magura

Life is meaningful now to Kamal Haider, once an educated jobless youth.

He is now well-off with earning from poultry farm.

Kamal, son of a poor farmer passed BA in 2000. Finding no job to subsidize the income for their family of seven, he took training on poultry farming, provided by the government's Youth Development Department in Jessore.

Now, Kamal sells at least 750 eggs a day at the rate of Tk 300 per

hundred. Traders from Magura town come to his poultry farm to buy eggs.

"Now I sell eggs worth about Tk 67,000 a month, from which I easily save Tk 10,000", Kamal told this correspondent during a visit to his farm.

He has employed three persons in his farm and says he will create more jobs by expanding his farm. Many local youths are now taking training in his farm.

He also plans to add fishery to it.



Kamal Haider collecting eggs at his poultry farm.

PHOTO: STAR

Rape incident a source of income!

Influentials arrange arbitration, fine the rapist and take the lion share

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Is rape by others is a source of income for a section of influentials? Many people and victims' families say so in Gideri union under Gaibandha Sadar upazila.

Whenever a rape incident takes place, the local influentials prevail upon the victim's family and convince them to seek arbitration without going to police or court.

The result is an increase in such incidents. The victims' families, mostly poor, are socially compelled to accept what the influentials say.

Arbitration meetings fix a fine for the rapist. Part of it is given to the victim's family and the lion share is taken by arbitrators, it is alleged.

According to a survey conducted by local journalists, five rape incidents were reported from the area in the last week of May.

Many remained unreported.

Soon after any such incident takes place, a 'negotiator group' becomes active and arrange arbitration.

On May 23, an 18 year-old girl (her name not disclosed) was plucking jute leaf at Dhutichora village. One Sada Mia dragged her deep inside the field and raped her.

The rapist managed some local influentials. They fined Sadas Mia Tk 8,000 at an arbitration. The victim's family was given a part of it and the rest was taken away by the arbitrators, some villagers claimed while talking to this correspondent.

Angur Mia of Charpara village had raped a 20 year-old woman on May 25. He was cleared of charges after he paid Tk 10,000 to the arbitrators.

On the same day, Alifuddin was caught and beaten at Kamolar Bazar village for violating a 14 year-

old girl. He is now moving freely after paying a handsome amount to local influentials following an arbitration.

On May 27, a 16 year-old girl of the same village was going to her relative's house just after evening. On way, Rasidul, Shafiqul, Belal and Khushi dragged her to a nearby bamboo grove and gangraped her.

The victim complained to the Union Parishad member. The matter was settled with fine.

Some victim's families this correspondent talked to said it is difficult to stay in village ignoring the decision of influentials or Union Parishad members.

Gideri UP Chairman Anisur Rahman when contacted said rape incidents increased in the area in recent days. Arbitration is arranged because most of the victims are from poor families who can not afford to bear the cost of trial in a court. Moreover, in most cases, they want to avoid alleged police hassle, he claimed.

'Male, female children equal'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The district administration and the Shishu Academy jointly organised a discussion on 'Rights of Female Children and Existing Inequity' on Monday on the premises of Satkhira Government Girls High School.

Headmistress of the school Karimunnesa presided over the discussion, participated by Tahmina rahman, wife of the Deputy Commissioner, Noor Jahab Begum, wife of the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Yasmin Suktana, wife of the Police Superintendent; local daily Satkhira Citra's Editor Anisur Rahim, District Women Affairs Officer Shahin Sultana and District Child Affairs Officer Abdulalam.

They stressed the need for creating awareness among people that both male and female children are equal if they can be educated and grown as worthy citizens.