

Interim councils take over in three hill dists

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, *Rangamati*

Chairmen and members of three interim hill district councils in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), selected by the caretaker government, took over yesterday in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts.

In Rangamati, Jagat Jyoti Chakma took over as chairman of Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC) from Manik Lal Dewan. Four members of RHDC also took charge.

They are Union Parishad Chairman Bihari Ranjan Chakma, Rangamati Charukola Academy principal Rotikanta Tangchangya, Augsusain Chowdhury and Moniruzzaman Mohsin. Officials and local journalists were present at the simple function.

Aungsusain Chowdhury and Moniruzzaman Mohsin are Awami League leaders. The two

other members have no political affiliation, the sources said.

Thanjama Lusai took over as new chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council, replacing Mayma Ching. The four members of the council are TS Bom, advocate Aminur Rashid, Chingsa Pru and Usainu Marma.

In Khagrachhari, incumbent chairman Moinindra Lal Tripura retained his post. The four new members of the district council are Animesh Dewan, Ruibi Karbari, Abubakkar Siddique and Sanumaomg Marma.

The system of appointing interim council was first started during Awami League rule, which was continued by the immediate past four-party alliance government which came to power in 2001.

After creation of HDCs, elections were held to the councils for first time on June 25, 1989. Since

then no election was held.

In an immediate reaction, Rangamati civil society leader Sukumar Dewan told The Daily Star, "I hope neutrality will be maintained by the new council as its chairman has no political background".

Civil society leader Sadhuran Tripura in Bandarban said the newly appointed chairman and members of Bandarban Hill District Council are neutral persons. He thanked the caretaker government for this and hoped they would be able to solve many problems which could not be addressed earlier by political governments.

The HDC Act provides that a full-fledged district council will be elected in each of the three hill districts to ensure participation of all indigenous and Bangalee communities in development activities.

BSF kills cattle smuggler, abducts three

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) yesterday gunned down an Indian cattle smuggler near Sathkira border and abducted three Bangladeshi stone lifters from Laurergarh border in Sunamganj.

Our Sathkira Correspondent reports: Alamgir Hossain, 26, son of Lalu Mia of Paikardanga village in Basirhat Police Station, India, was killed on the spot when BSF opened fire at Indian cattle smugglers at Panitor under 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

The smugglers were crossing the border with cattle, according to reports received in Sathkira.

After the incident, BSF and BDR traded gunfire on Padmashakhra border in Sadar upazila. BSF reinforced strength and increased patrol while BDR was put on alert to avert any untoward incident, BDR said.

On contact, Major Kamrul Hasan, Operations Officer of 41 Rifles Battalion confirmed death of the Indian by BSF. He also said BSF personnel fired three gunshots at BDR members.

UNB reports: BSF men along with their dog squad entered the Bangladesh territory in Sunamganj by speedboats at about 8am and forcibly took three labourers to India, locals said.

They also took away four stone-laden boats. About 200 labourers were collecting stone at the quarry when the BSF men attacked them, they said.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

A picturesque scene on the Padma with white clouds hovering in the blue shy and geese swimming on gentle waters. The photo was taken from Rajshahi.

Jute worker in Khulna now begs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Arjan Ali (50), a worker of closed state-owned Peoples Jute Mill came to Khulna Press Cat 11-30 am yesterday to beg alms from journalists.

"I have no money to buy food to feed members of my family. They will die from starvation if you do not help me", he said with tears rolling down his eyes.

Arjan Ali who is among hundreds of workers terminated by BJMC authorities said that many other workers have taken to begging like him.

Hailing from Jhalakati district, Arjan Ali said he had no means to shift his family from mill colony.

He was however happy with journalists in Khulna for writing about their plight from loss of jobs.

He said he has little hope of getting his arrear salaries and benefits from the mill.

3 front ranking Bagerhat BNP leaders sued for extortion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Three top Bagerhat BNP leaders have been named as accused in an FIR of extortion case filed by a front ranking leader of the party's woman's front.

The FIR was lodged with Bagerhat Sadar police Station Saturday afternoon by Toufique Kalam, president of Bagerhat district Jatjatyatabadi Mahila Dal.

The accused are senior vice-president of Bagerhat district BNP Ali Reza Babu, organising secretary Sheikh Nazrul Islam, president of Bagerhat district Sramik Dal Liaquat Ali Sardar.

Another person has also been accused in the case. He is clerk Saeed Hasan of Bagerhat Deputy Commissioner's office.

Complainant Trufika Kalam stated in her FIR that she was forced to pay Tk one lakh as toll by the accused on December 3, 2003.

She further stated in the FIR that the accused damaged her shop on that day and gave her death threat for not paying more Tk two lakh demanded by them earlier.

Ali Reza Babu and Sheikh Nazrul Islam are in Bagerhat Jail in connection with another case.

Expatriate's wife killed, farmer injured in bomb attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kushthia*

An expatriate's housewife was killed allegedly after rape in Kushthia and a farmer was injured when fleeing 'abductors' threw bombs at him in Meherpur Friday night, police said. Shamima Akter Baby, 27, wife of Baki Billah was raped and killed by unidentified criminals at Char Choldag village in Daulatpur upazila.

Police said, criminals abducted Baby by breaking open the door of her house. They took her to a nearby field where they slaughtered her after rape.

During the incident, a domestic help named Johnny, 30, was present at the house, police said. Police arrested him for interrogation. Baki Billah was living in Dubai for the last five years, they said.

In Meherpur Sadar, Farid Hossain 25, son of Aroz Ali of Beltala was injured seriously when criminals hurled bombs at him at about 11.30:pm. Criminals attacked him as they failed to abduct him at gunpoint. Farmer Farid was returning home from the adjacent Salikha village. Hearing his cries, people rushed to the spot and took him to Meherpur General Hospital for treatment.

Mindless sand lifting threatens Hardinge Bridge Guide Dump

Protests by locals, environmentalists go unheeded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

Indiscriminate sand lifting from mighty Padma at Paksey in Ishwardi upazilla is threatening the guide embankment of Hardinge Bridge and the railway station.

A group of people linked with bigwigs in the immediate past ruling party is engaged in the illegal work for the last four years, sources said.

The ongoing sand lifting will soon threaten the Lalon Shah Bridge, they claimed. The sand lifting continues despite protests by local people and environmentalists.

Railway officials in Paksey said they urged the authorities to take steps to stop the illegal sand lifting, but to no effect.

"We urged Ishwardi Upazilla Nirbahi Officer, police superintendents of Pabna and Kushtia several times to stop sand lifting from (Padma) river beds at strategic points near railway installations and bridges but it all went unheeded", Regional Manager Md. Amjad Hossain of Bangladesh Railway told this correspondent over phone on Saturday.

Written complaints were also submitted to Ishwardi Upazilla Nirbahi Office, he added.

Talking to this correspondent, some local people alleged that a syndicate led by an influential local BNP leader is engaged in sand lifting from the river bed in Jhawdia, Diar Ruppur,



PHOTO: STAR

Illegal sand lifting going on from the shoreline of the Padma in Paksey.

Bamongram and Shara areas, only two to five kilometers from the Pabna and adjoining districts.

The river bank has collapsed at several points in the area due to indiscriminate sand lifting, they claimed.

Every day, traders engaged by the syndicate are lifting over 4,000 feet sand from river beds by tractors, trucks and the boats.

Over 200 mechanised boats also carry sand to different areas of the Pabna and adjoining districts.

Dredgers are also used to lift sand, they said.

They said cracks have appeared on the railway guide dump at some points and it will be vulnerable during flood.

Md. Nazir Uddin, a contractor lifting said they took permission

from the mineral resources ministry in 2003.

When contacted, Paksey UNO Abu Bakr Siddique said he received an application from railway officials and sent it to higher authorities for action.

MEDICINE 'SCAM' IN MAGURA

DG health unhappy, warns of action

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Magura*

Director General (DG) of Health Directorate (HD) Dr Md Shahjahan Biswas paid a surprise visit to Magura civil surgeon's office, district reserve store (DRS) and the Sadar Hospital Saturday afternoon.

The visit followed a report on alleged medicine scam at the DRS medicine store published in The Daily Star earlier.

The DG held several meetings with health officials including the civil surgeon and expressed displeasure over the medicine scam, alleged lax health administration in the district and pitiable condition of the Sadar Hospital, sources said.

Dr. Shahjahan at a meeting with health officials expressed his surprise why the CS did not form a body to probe the medicine scam. He warned that action would be taken for such lapses.

The alleged medicine scam took place on the night of May 25 when police intercepted an ambulance and arrested its driver Zafar for carrying date-expired medi-

cines supplied from Magura district reserve store. Storekeeper Lutfar Rahman of the DRS was arrested on Thursday following a statement of the driver.

Dr Shahjahan, after visiting the emergency ward, OT (Operation Theatre) and other sections in Magura Sadar Hospital, held the meeting where he expressed utter dissatisfaction over irregularities, a doctor who attended the meeting told this correspondent requesting anonymity.

The DG criticised the CS for the recent medicine scam and poor condition of two OTs at the Sadar Hospital. He ordered the CS to repair air cooler and lighting systems at the OTs.

He expressed his surprise how posts of surgery consultant, eye consultant and pathology consultant could lie vacant for months and asked the CS to send a letter immediately to authorities for appointment of doctors.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, CS Dr. Fariduddin said he would form a 3-member body to probe the medicine scam.

KAILASHTILA WELL 6

Gas production to start shortly

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, *Sylhet*

Production will begin in the newly drilled sixth well in Kailashtila gas field in a day or two.

It will add 20 mmcf of gas to the National Grid, sources in Sylhet Gas Field Limited (SGFL) told this correspondent yesterday.

Flow test of gas of the well at Golapganj upazila began Saturday afternoon in presence of Petrobangla Chairman Dr Sheikh Abdur Rashid. Bapex Managing Director Jamal Uddin, managing Director of SGFL Jahangir Kabir and Project-in- Charge Khaza Ahmed.

Again, at 6 am yesterday, the flow test was started for 12 hours. The test may continue two-three days more with gaps, the sources said. "We are satisfied with the preliminary test findings", the official said.

"Such technical tests are done to ascertain the well condition as well as to flare out the waste to make the well totally fit for gas production", he added.

Gas field officials on Saturday warned locals not to be worried or panicky as there is possibility of

rise of the flame at the well mouth during test.

They assured the villagers that adequate cautionary measures have been taken. Drilling of the well no. 6 in Kailashtila Gas Field of state-run Sylhet Gas Fields Limited (SGFL) began on March 1 this year. It was completed on June 1. Petrobangla's drilling company Bapex successfully completed the job.

Bapex also drilled well no. 5 last year. The well no. 5 is already producing gas since September 13 last year.

Drilling of the wells involved an expenditure of about Tk Tk 70 crore.

With the newly drilled well, SGFL has six gas wells in its Kailashtila Gas field in Golapganj upazila.

Now, about 95 MMCFD gas is being supplied to the national grid from the five wells and another 20 MMCFD gas will be added from well no. 6.

Besides, condensate like petrol, diesel and NGL are also being extracted as by products.

ZIA FERTILISER TO UNDERGO REPAIR AGAIN

BMRE plan overturned for unknown reasons

SHEIKH SHAHIDUL ISLAM, *B'baria*

Deviating from an earlier plan for BMRE (Balancing Modernisation Rehabilitation and Expansion) of Ashuganj Zia Fertiliser Company Limited (ZFCL), its authorities are going ahead with plan for repairing it, which will be of little use for keeping the 26 year-old machines operational.

The authorities are processing a 'development project proposal' (DPP) involving Tk 190 crore to repair the urea factory, the Managing Director of ZFCL said.

Sources said a BMRE decision was made earlier involving Tk 400 crore, of which Tk 190 crore was supposed to be given by the government and the rest from other sources as loan.

Industries Advisor Geetiara Safiya Chowdhury at a press briefing at ZFCL during her visit on May 8 said that there was no alternative to BMRE to keep the old factory running.

After her visit, German company Ude GMBH German, which installed the factory, was called to give a 'preliminary advice' about BMRE.

A team from the company came in May, investigated different sec-

tions and suggested BMRE to keep it running.

The German company also asked ZFCL authorities to supply them relevant documents and papers soon to work out details.

But the ZFCL authorities are yet to supply documents and papers to the company.

The factory was repaired in 2001 at a cost of Tk 35 crore, in 2003 at a cost of Tk 120 crore and in 2006 at a cost of Tk 60 crore.

A source remarked that the factory could not be run for weeks at a stretch after repairing it several times at a cost of Tk 215 crore. So what is the guarantee that repair again with Tk 190 crore will keep it operational, he posed the question while talking to this correspondent on Saturday.

The factory falls silent off and on due to mechanical problems in different sections. It was kept shut for 82 days from July 10 last year till July 10 this year, incurring a production loss of 1,2,500 tonnes.

ZFCL was inaugurated in 1982 with a daily production of 1600 tonnes of urea fertiliser. It is now producing 1250 to 1350 tonnes a day, incurring heavy losses. It is also failing to achieve the annual production target given by

Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC).

An engineer seeking anonymity told this correspondent that repair again with Tk 190 crore will be of no use for the factory. BMRE is the only way to keep the old factory running for some years more, he said.

When contacted, ZFCL Managing Director Md. Osman Goni however observed that BMRE will take time. "We are supplying documents and relevant papers to the respective company gradually".

He said they are now busy with DPP which was approved by the government earlier.

"If the factory runs smoothly after DPP, why should we go for BMRE?", he said.

A factory cannot be termed old or dilapidated as because its faulty parts are changed regularly, the MD said.

Production cost of urea at ZFCL has also increased because of huge production loss due to frequent technical problems, the sources said.

Production cost of a tonne of urea at the factory is now Tk 6000 but the government sells it at Tk 4800.

Election goes, pre-poll pledge goes with it

A bridge at Khodra remains a dream

ABU AHMED, *Sathkira*

An election pledge to construct a bridge on Kabadak river at Khordo made by political leaders on several occasions is yet to be fulfilled.

As polls pledges were flouted, local people staged agitation and submitted memorandum to authorities, but to no result.

BNP lawmaker Habibul Islam Habib elected from Tala-Kalaroa constituency pledged to construct a bridge there in his polls campaign in 2001. He was but he did not fulfill the pledge.

A bridge on the river at Khordo is a long cherished desire of over five lakh people of Kalaroa upazila in Sathkira district and Keshabpur, Manirampur, Sharsha and Jhikargachha upazilas in Jessore district.

The bridge will also reduce the

distance between Jessore and Sathkira by 16 kilometres and make road communication easier with Khulna.

The Khordo Setu (bridge) Implementation Committee staged demonstrations on several occasions at Kalaroa and submitted a memorandum to the then lawmaker Habib on November 12 in 2004 to press the demand.

Over 5000 people brought out a procession, formed human chain and held a rally at Kalaroa upazila headquarters on April 3 last year protesting 'inaction' of the then lawmaker Habibul Islam in this regard, convener of the committee Raju Ahmed said.

Talking to local journalists at Sathkira Reporters Club recently, Raju urged the caretaker government to fulfill the long felt demand of over five lakh people of the area by taking up a project to construct

the Khordo bridge.

Hundreds of students are the worst sufferers as they have to cross the river on boats to go to different educational institutions in the area.

Following repeated demands, the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) took up a project to construct a bailey bridge at Khordo at a cost of Tk 10 lakh soon after BNP came to power in 1991, Raju said. But it also was cancelled.

Former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Khan Tipu Sultan elected from Manirampur constituency in 1996 got a project sanctioned at the fag end of the then AL government. He laid the foundation stone in March, 2001.

But it was cancelled again after the BNP-led four-party alliance came to power in 2001.



PHOTO: STAR

End of sufferings not in sight... People have to cross the Kobadar river every day with great trouble due to lack of a bridge at Khordo. Construction of a bridge there is a demand of over five lakh people of Kalaroa upazila in Sathkira for long.