

35 fishermen missing in Bay in 2 days

UNB, Bagerhat

Around 35 fishermen of eight trawlers went missing in the Bay of Bengal as their trawlers capsized in the rough sea on Saturday and Sunday.

Sources said the fishing trawlers with some 105 fishermen capsized at Dimer Char, Kachukhali, Kachubari, Gyanpara, Padmashul and Kaliar Khal areas at Bay after being caught by storms.

About 70 fishermen managed to swim ashore but 35 others remained missing, sources added.

The ill-fated fishermen hailed from Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Barguna and Bhola districts.

Lt Commander of Coast Guard of Mongla west zone Faisal M Mahmud said they are trying hard to rescue the missing fishermen.

As the sea is still turbulent, the rescue operation is being hampered.

Local meteorological department officials said yesterday the sea will remain turbulent for at least two days.

The have advised all fishermen to remain close to coasts till further notice.

Ex-BNP MP sued by party rival in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Former lawmaker and BNP central leader Jahiruddin Swapan was sued yesterday by a party rival for snatching, demanding toll, ransacking cars and looting office in Gournadi.

Swapan was elected from Gournadi-Agoiljhara constituency in 2001 election.

The case was filed with a magistrate court in Gournadi by Md. Arafat, younger brother of Mahmud Tuhin, president of Jatiyatabadi Tarun Dal and Tuhin Foundation.

Mahmud, a local BNP leader, was aspirant for four-party alliance ticket from Gournadi-Agoiljhara constituency in 2001 election.

Fourteen other BNP activists were also accused in the case filed under sections 140, 323, 379, 385, 387, 427, 447, 448, 506 of Bangladesh Penal Code.

The 14 are Gournadi municipality chairman and upazila BNP president Nurul Alam Howladar, upazila BNP secretary Saidul Alam Sentu, municipal Jubo Dal vice-president Shamim Khalifa, Gournadi Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) secretary and former



Jahiruddin Swapan

vice-president of Gournadi College Students Union Zakir Hossain Raza, ward commissioner Jamal Matubbor, upazila BNP activists AFM Rashid Dulal, AFM Farid, Kamal Talukdar, Zafar, Russel, Chhoton and Nayon Talukdar, Agoiljhara upazila BNP secretary Md. Bakhtiar and Agoiljhara upazila JCD president Md. Khokon.

Magistrate Munim Hassan ordered the officer-in-charge of Gournadi police station to record the case after investigation.

In the case, it was alleged that followers of Zahiruddin Swapan

demand a toll of Tk 10 lakh from members of Tuhin Foundation when their motorcade stopped at Gourmand bus stand on December 1 last year for tea.

After altercations BNP activists attacked and ransacked four minibuses and the local office of Tuhin Foundation. The attackers damaged and looted property worth Tk 3.75 lakh, injuring at least 13 people.

Local people rescued and escorted them to safety. Seven of the injured people were admitted to local hospital, Arafat alleged in the case.

In the case, it was also alleged that the accused persons also snatched Tk 2.96 lakh from AKM Nurul Islam, advisor of the foundation, on August 25 last year at Sharikal.

They also attacked an Iftar Mahfil of the foundation at Mahilara in Gournadi, ransacked the venue and looted goods worth Tk 1 lakh, Arafat alleged.

He also said in the complaint that at that time, police declined to record any case against the then lawmaker due to his political influence.

Farmers block highway in Shailkupa for fertiliser

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Farmers brought out a procession and blocked the Khulna-Kushtia highway at Shailkupa yesterday demanding fertiliser. Traffic on the highway was stopped for about two hours as angry farmers placed logs on it, sources said.

Farmers from Katchua, Nakol, Malmoli and Kulsura villages went to Bhatoi Bazar in the morning for fertiliser.

Disappointed, they came on the road and blocked it.

On information, a team of joint forces led by Maj Anis rushed to Bhatoi Bazar from Jhenidah.

Jhenidah Additional Deputy Commissioner Mezbahul Islam and Police Superintendent Abul Khaer also reached the spot.

They brought the situation under control by assuring farmers of adequate supply of fertiliser soon.

Contacted, Shailkupa Upazila Nirbhai Officer Mahmudul Hasan of confirmed the incident.

He said there are 10 tonnes of fertiliser with dealers in Shailkupa upazila. Arrangements have been made for supply of more fertiliser and farmers will get their required quantities today, he told this correspondent.

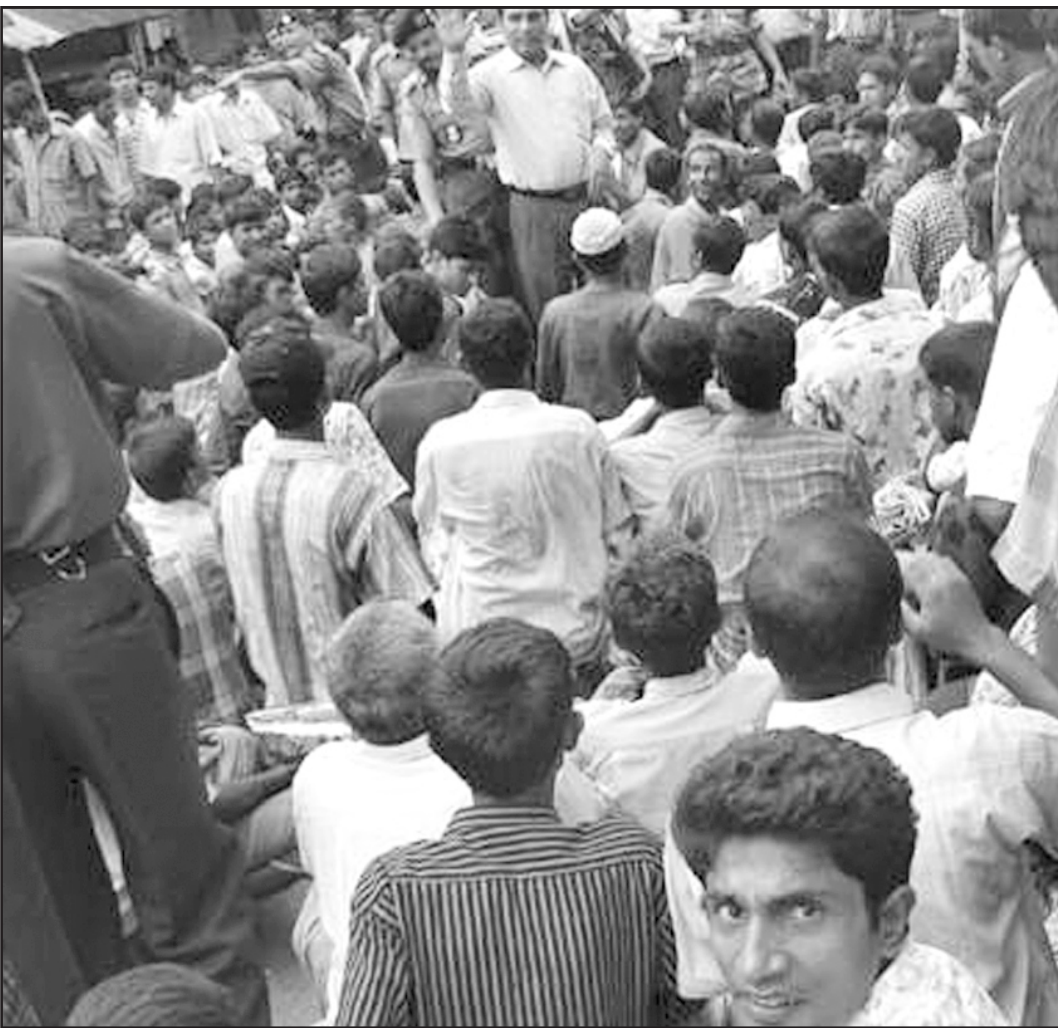


PHOTO: STAR

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Jhenidah Mezbahul Islam assuring farmers of adequate supply of fertiliser. Farmers blocked the Khulna-Kushtia highway at Shailkupa yesterday for the vital agri-input.

Tk 1.5cr rubber stolen from Madhupur gardens in 4 yrs

Theft is main problem for profit-earning BFIDC gardens, officials say

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Raw rubber worth at least Tk 1.5 crore was stolen from profit-earning rubber gardens of Bangladesh Forest Industry Development Corporation (BFIDC) under its Madhupur zone in last four years, official sources said.

Unofficial sources however claimed that raw rubber worth around Tk 5 crore was stolen during the period.

Talking to this correspondent, BFIDC officials admitted that theft of raw rubber is the main problem, which continued despite deployment of security personnel in gardens.

They said a section of garden staff could be involved in incidents of theft.

Rubber gardening was started in the area in 1987, covering on 8,000 acres of forestland. Four gardens have been raised in Pirgachha, Chandpur, Sontoshpur and Komlapur in Madhupur upazila in Tangail district.

Commercial extraction of raw rubber started in 1994. The gardens started earning profit in 2003-2004 financial year. So far, they earned a total profit of Tk 29.34 crore by selling rubber in domestic markets, official sources said.

About 2,000 tonnes of rubber were produced in the gardens during 2006-2007 financial year, which earned a profit of Tk 12.50 crore. The profit was Tk 10.50 crore during FY 2005-2006.

This correspondent during a recent visit to the rubber gardens talked to BFIDC officials of Madhupur zone, garden workers,



PHOTO: STAR

A rubber garden of BFIDC in Madhupur.

workers' leaders and local residents.

Assistant Manager Tozammel Hossain said the extracted rubber was sold in auction to buyers including Bata Shoe Company and Gazi Tyre Industry at BFIDC sales centre in Dhaka.

"We earned a profit of Tk 25 lakh by selling rubber in July", he said.

Tozammel and some other officials said the profit could be more if rampant theft of raw rubber could be stopped.

To stop stealing, 48 security guards were appointed in 2005 to guard the gardens. Of them, 24 were deployed in Chandpur and 12 each in Sontoshpur and Komlapur gardens. A process is on to appoint more 12 security men for Pirgachha garden, the officials said.

Patrol teams comprising security

personnel and BFIDC officials patrol the gardens.

Several cases were filed with Modhupur police station. Thirteen people were arrested and six truckloads of stolen raw rubber were seized in last one year, the officials said.

An organised gang of thieves are engaged in stealing raw rubber.

Most of them are from Madhupur upazila in Tangail and Muktagachha and Phoolbaria upazilas in Mymensingh, sources said.

The gang engages local poor people at small remunerations for stealing rubber from gardens, they said.

The authorities sometimes recover stolen rubber and take alleged thieves into custody but this did not produce any result, they added.

An official seeking anonymity said several leaders of rubber garden workers and some raw rubber collectors are involved with the gang.

Several illegal markets have sprang up in Madhupur in Tangail and Phoolbaria in Mymensingh where the stolen rubber is sold at throwaway prices.

Some buyers from Dhaka come to the markets and purchase the stolen rubber, they claimed.

Official price of rubber is around Tk 150 per kilogram but it is sold at between Tk 50 and 60 in the illegal markets, they said.

Unabated stealing also damages rubber plants as thieves collect raw rubber by cutting the skin of plants indiscriminately, some garden inspectors said.

BFIDC Assistant Engineer Nazrul Islam said the stealing can not be stopped as the gardens have been raised in four different areas in an unplanned way. It is difficult for small security teams to guard those.

Besides, residences of local people in the garden areas is also a problem, he said.

When contacted, BFIDC's Madhupur Zone General Manager Abdul Halim Sarkar, said theft can not be stopped due to inadequate number of security personnel and lack of fences around gardens.

"We are virtually helpless as it is very difficult to fencing such big and scattered gardens. Thieves may steal fences also", he added.

Govt sincere to redress flood damage, says Iftekhar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Foreign Affairs Advisor Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday said the government is sincere to redress sufferings of flood affected people and help them recover from the damage.

There is sufficient stock of relief materials for flood victims. A vigorous rehabilitation programme would be launched soon to rehabilitate the affected people in different areas of the country, he added.

The advisor was addressing a flood review meeting at Sunamganj Circuit House yesterday afternoon. District level officials and the elite attended the meeting.

Sunamganj Deputy Commissioner Saber Hossain briefed the meeting on the situation and rehabilitation programme.

An amount of Tk 1.24 crore has been sanctioned for house construction and agriculture, he told the meeting.

The foreign advisor said the government will continue its programmes in all sectors to achieve desired goals and called upon officials and others concerned to ensure that the targets are achieved. Election will be held as per the road map, he added.

Speakers at a discussion held here yesterday evening said political will is a must for preservation of biodiversity of the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world.

WORKSHOP TOLD S-W dists at high risk of HIV/AIDS

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Speakers at a workshop held here yesterday said the southwestern (S-W) districts in the country are at high risk of HIV/AIDS as no entry points are checked here properly.

Ad-Din Care Centre, Jessore, organised the workshop titled, 'Life Skills Education Youth Friendly Health Services and Accessing Condom for Youth-2007' in collaboration with National AIDS/STD Programme of Bangladesh Government (GOB) and Save the Children.

Held at Kushtia Pourasabha auditorium, the workshop was presided by Kushtia civil surgeon (CS) Dr Abu Taher while it was attended by Mohammad Hossain, director of health of Khulna division as chief guest.

Among others, Kushtia convenor of TIB Prof Sudhin Kumar Lahiri, Advocate Nargish Chowdhury and journalist Amanur Aman addressed.

2 outlaws surrender in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two cadres of the outlawed Janajuddho faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) surrendered to police yesterday.

The outlaws are Mithay, son of Ansar Ali and Akkas, son of Azgar Ali of Katchubaria in Mirpur upazila.

Earlier, the outlaws communicated to Mirpur police through cell phone and expressed their willingness to surrender on Sunday morning, police said. The outlaws also wanted assurance from police that they would not be 'crossfired' after surrender.

However, they did not deposit any firearm during surrender.

BJMC chairman assures arrear payment before Eid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Angry workers made an attempt to assault Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) chairman Ataharul Islam when he went to Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills here yesterday noon.

The BJMC chairman was accompanied by four members of a high level team who came here from Dhaka.

However, security forces rescued him from wrath of over 100 retrenched workers who laid a siege in front of the mill gate.

While addressing the workers, the chairman regretted his failure to give assurance to them in payment of arrear wages and other dues as the government is yet to allocate fund for them. He assured his sincere effort to convince the government for allocating fund for them before Eid-ul-Fitr.

'Political will need to protect Sundarbans'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Speakers at a discussion held here yesterday evening said political will is a must for preservation of biodiversity of the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world.

Rupantar and Swadesh, two local NGOs, jointly organised the discussion on the occasion of a premier show of 'Badaboner Kantha', a documentary film on the Sundarbans, jointly produced by Steps Towards Development, a national NGO and Rupantar.

Held at Satkhira Deputy Commissioner's (DC) conference room, the discussion was presided by Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC-Revenue) Mahmud Hasan while it was attended by Satkhira DC Mohammad Kefayetullah as chief guest.

Speakers hailed the two NGOs for producing the documentary to create awareness among people living around the Sundarbans. The film depicted how over six lakh people

living near to the Sundarbans earn a living from the forest resources. The documentary said the community must have access to resources and community people should be strongly involved in natural resource management.

Speakers stressed on integrated efforts of all concerned to protect the Sundarbans as the forest is now under threat of extinction following unabated extraction of forest resources by unscrupulous timber traders with the help of some dishonest forest officials. They stressed on creating substitute income opportunities for people living near the Sundarbans to decrease their dependence on forest resources.

They called on government to take stern action against the people who extract forest resources. They also urged the government to take a long-term project to protect the Sundarbans from extinction.

ATTACK ON BRITISH HC Court records statement of local journalist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Deposition by prosecution witnesses in one of the two cases filed in connection with the grenade attack on British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury continued for the 6th day yesterday.

Sylhet Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal Judge Dipyoman Sarker yesterday recorded the statement of journalist Muhibur Rahman of local daily Jugabheri, who among others was injured in the attack on the British High Commissioner at the shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal (RA).

With him, deposition of 16 prosecution witnesses was recorded since August 26. Fifty-seven prosecution witnesses will be examined, court sources said.

Bangladesh-born British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury and 70 others were hurt in the grenade attack that killed three persons. The attack was made after Juma prayers on May 21, 2004 on the premises of the shrine.

Those killed were Special Branch Assistant Sub-Inspector of police Kamal Uddin, Habibur Rahman Habib and Zobayer Ahmed Rubel.

Officials from the Scotland Yard, UK also visited the spot earlier to probe the incident.

Sylhet district judge on July 12 acquitted 20 of the accused as their names were dropped from the charge sheet. They were arrested after the grenade attack.

Days after the incident, the cases were transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) as police failed to find clues to the incident.

CID filed two charge sheets-one under the Explosives Act and the other for killing- against four persons. They are chief of outlawed Islamist militant outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad Mufti (Huji) Abdul Hannan, his brother Mofizur Rahman and Huji operatives Delwar Hossain Ripon and Sharif Shahedul Alam alias Bipul.

'COMPETENCY' TEST

Pry schoolteachers in northern dists apprehend losing MPO

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

A large number of teachers of non-government primary schools in the northern districts are worried of losing Monthly Payment Order (MPO) following issuance of a recent government order asking them to face competency tests.

The Primary Education Directorate issued the order on July 31. The order asked the teachers to face the 'competency' tests by November 18. For failure, the official order warned, suspension of MPOs.

There are 900 non-government primary school teachers in the entire northern districts.

Under the official Compulsory Primary Education Programme,

the government is providing salaries to the teachers through MPOs since 1991. But the government put a condition to enjoy the benefits of MPO. Officially, it has been assessed that the teachers who passed only the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination are 'incompetent' teachers. In a similar manner, the teachers who have

third division in both the SSC and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations are treated as 'incompetent' teachers. Teachers of such categories must face competency tests conducted by the Education Department.

However, the teachers having SSC and HSC certificates with at least one second division are treated as 'competent' teachers. Many teachers have entered the teaching profession fulfilling the official requirements before 1991.

Earlier, the government took several attempts to hold 'competency' tests but in face of stiff opposition from teachers' associations and political parties, the attempts were foiled.

On contact, Babu Griza Prosonya Roy, Nilphamari district unit president of Bangladesh Non-government Teachers' Association said 98 percent of non-government primary school teachers underwent the required training courses like Certificate-in-Education (C in Ed) from Primary Teachers' Training Institutes (PTI) in their districts. They also received subject based

and cluster based trainings to acquire competency, he said.

While contacted, Mansoor Ali, general secretary of a faction of Non-government Primary School Teachers' Association said to this correspondent over cell phone that most of the teachers entered the teaching profession fulfilling the government requirements before 1991. Many of them are near to their retirement age. If some of them fail to pass the competency tests, they would face acute economic hardship following suspension of MPOs, he said terming this 'inhuman'.

Meanwhile, a writ petition was filed, opposing the government move, with the High Court (HC) Division of Supreme Court on August 21.

Non-government Primary Teachers' Association office secretary Rezaul Haque submitted the writ petition on behalf of the teachers. The HC division bench comprising of Justice Sayed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Farid Ahmed issued a 'Rule Nisi' on the government on August 26.



PHOTO: STAR

A flood-hit women at Rahmatganj in Sirajganj cradle her goat while moving to safety yesterday as her house in the town was inundated again in a fresh spate of flood.