

## MOITREE EXPRESS Plan to complete immigration, customs formalities on board

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government ponders completing customs and immigration formalities of the passengers traveling in the Moitree Express operated between Dhaka and Kolkata on board as part of its plan to upgrade services.

"Due to lack of quality management, the number of passengers in the Moitree Express drastically came down in the recent times," Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain told reporters after a meeting at the ministry yesterday.

According to ministry sources, the number of passengers on the day when the train service started in April last year was 300, but last week it came down to 24.

Stating that passengers' hassles could be brought down provided that the customs and immigration procedures are completed on board, the minister said, "As the issue requires engagement of two countries, it should be decided after a discussion with India."

"We would request India to improve their services in the express train once we take adequate measures on our part," Abul Hossain said.

He said the government is also considering some other services, including e-ticketing for the passengers.

The minister instructed the railway authorities to add a luggage wagon to the train to carry the luggage of the passengers to avoid passengers' harassment.

## Five killed in road crashes

METRO DESK

Five people were killed and four others were injured in separate road accidents in Natore and Satkhira in the last two days.

A correspondent in Natore reports: Three people were killed and four others were injured in separate road accidents in Natore yesterday.

The dead were identified as Sadek Ali, 45, Shuvo Kumar, 42, and Momena Begum, 55.

Sadek and Shuvo died on the spot when a speeding newspaper-laden truck turned turtle on Natore-Dhaka highway and fell into a roadside ditch at Agran Bazar in Baraigram at about 7:30am.

The injured were rushed to a local hospital.

In another accident, Momena Begum was crushed under the wheels of a passenger bus while she was crossing the Natore-Bogra highway at Chowgram in Singra upazila at about 12:00noon.

Our correspondent in Satkhira adds: Two people were killed in separate road accidents in the district in the last two days.

The dead were identified as Abdur Rahman, 40, and Saiful Islam, 30, an employee of Satkhira Unnayan Sangstha (SUS), a local NGO.

Abdur Rahman died on the spot yesterday when a truck hit the rickshaw van he was traveling in on Kalaroa-Sarashkati highway at Sarashkati Bazar at Kalaroa.

In another accident, Saiful was seriously injured when a Satkhira-bound bus knocked him down while he was crossing the Satkhira-Assassuni highway at Dhulihar Bazar on Wednesday.

He was taken to Satkhira Sadar Hospital and later shifted to Khulna 250-bed Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries early yesterday.



Members of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports march towards the Prime Minister's Office from Mukhtang in the city yesterday, causing a massive traffic congestion. The committee took out the procession in protest against the government decision to lease out three offshore gas blocks to multinational companies.

PHOTO: STAR

## Submergence tolerant rice variety to be released this yr Can survive maximum 18 days under water

BSS, Dhaka

The first ever submergence tolerant rice BR-11-sub-1 jointly developed by the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is expected to be released this year.

"The variety of rice would be released this year, if we could complete the experiment of the variety of rice successfully", Director (research) of BRRI Dr MA Salam told BSS in an exclusive interview.

He said the work for innovating submergence tolerant variety was started with joint initiative of the BRRI and the IRRI in 2005-06 in order to develop submergence tolerant rice by transplanting submergence gene to BR-11 dhan.

The evaluation team of the National Seed Board will go at field level experiment on the variety this year and they will submit the report to the technical committee for releasing the variety.

Referring to the field level experiment of BR-11-sub-1, director general of Seed Wing of the Ministry of Agriculture Anwar Faruque said it was very effective last year and the variety will be formally

released this year, if the field level experiments are completed successfully.

He said, "We have already distributed the seed of the variety at farmer levels this year and we expect it will be leased in December next."

The newly developed BR-

## Razzaque inaugurates tissue culture lab

METRO DESK

Food and Disaster Management Minister Dr Abdur Razzaque inaugurated a greenhouse, orchid net house and plant tissue culture laboratory at DEBTEC Laboratory at South Panishail in Gazipur on Wednesday, says a press release.

The orchid plantation project will be helpful for underprivileged women of Modhupur in Tangail to produce, cultivate, distribute and market disease-free orchids.

Dr Kazi Mezbah Uddin Ahmed, managing director of BKSF, Dr Jashim Uddin Ahmed, general manager of BKSF, and Abdur Sattar Dulal, executive director of PKS, among others, were present on the occasion.

11-sub-1 looks exactly like BR-11, Dr Salam said adding the production rate, lifetime and height between BR-11 and BR-11-sub-1 is same.

He said the average production rate of both the varieties is five metric tons per hectare.

He said BR-11 is cultivated in about 40 percent land among the total rice cultivation in the country during Aman season. But nearly 80 percent of cultivated BR-11 rice got damaged, in a submerged condition, he added.

According to the study, the newly developed submerged variety can survive maximum 18 days after inundation of water, said Dr Salam adding but it depends on quality of water, temperature as well as environment.

He said the longevity of the submerged rice plants would increase if the water is clean, but in case of muddy water its longevity would decrease.

The BRRI along with a numbers of private organisations would work to produce seeds for field level cultivation of the variety.

A total of 70 'baby trials' would be taken place for producing seeds this year, he said adding 'mother trial' would also be carried out for seed production.

## Rate of deaths of children under 5 declines

Says UNICEF report  
METRO DESK

The rate of deaths of children under five years of age continued to decline in 2008, said a UNICEF report released yesterday.

The data shows a 28 per cent decline in the under-five mortality rate, from 90 deaths per 1000 live births in 1990, to 65 deaths per 1000 live births in 2008.

According to these estimates, the absolute number of child deaths in 2008 declined to an estimated 8.8 million from 12.5 million in 1990, the base line year for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), says a press release.

"Compared to 1990, 10,000 fewer children are dying every day," said UNICEF Executive Director Ann M Veneman. "While progress is being made, it is unacceptable that each year 8.8 million children die before their fifth birthday."

The new estimates are the result of collection and analysis of a range of data sources by demographers and health experts from UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, the World Bank and the United Nations Population Division, guided by technical advisers from a number of major academic institutions.

## Fire at Unilever godown in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Fire broke out at a godown of Unilever Bangladesh Ltd at Kalurghat in Chittagong yesterday.

Witnesses said the fire occurred on the roof of a three-storey rented storehouse at around 11:40am.

Around 56 thousand date-expired cans of body spray and deodorant were stockpiled on the roof of the storehouse where some workers were working to release gases from the cans, said fire services sources.

A lit cigarette might have caused the fire, they said.

The blaze spread fast and came down to second floor damaging a portion of the godown, they added.

However there was no casualty.

Eight fire fighting units from the city's four fire stations rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze at around 1:35pm.

Fire Service and Civil Defence authority primarily estimated the loss at Tk 4.20 lakh while the origin of the fire could not be ascertained immediately.

Assistant Director of Fire Service and Civil Defence ABM Nurul Hoque said a three-member probe body was formed to find out the cause of the fire.

## KR Hasan takes charge of JDPC

METRO DESK

Kazi Rezaul Hasan joined as the executive director of Jute Diversification Promotion Centre (JDPC) of Ministry of Textile and Jute on September 2, says a press release.

Earlier, he performed duties as the chairman of Private Centre Consultative Board under International Jute Study Group.

# \$55m deal with ADB to improve water services

METRO DESK

Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the government of Bangladesh signed an agreement for a \$55 million soft loan yesterday to improve small-scale water services which would help cut rural poverty and address the climate change impacts.

The deal would also help improve production of food crops as well as increase access to water, says a press release.

Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and ADB Country Director Paul J Heytens signed the agreement on behalf of the government and ADB respectively at ERD office at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city.

The assistance from ADB's concessional Asian Development Fund would be used to finance 230 sub-projects across the country in the areas of flood management, drainage, water conservation and irrigation.

Funds would also go to strengthen the capabilities of central and local government agencies overseeing the sector, and to develop water management cooperative associations - grassroots organisations responsible for day-to-day operations of small-scale water services.

The project would help boost income opportunities for food production, strengthen household food security, improve access to water for the poor and reduce the risk of flooding.

About 1.7 million people are expected to directly benefit from the project, and special attention would be given to the needs of vulnerable groups, including women, with 30 percent of all

grassroots-level water management committee posts in the water management cooperative associations to be reserved for women.

The project would build on the lessons learned from two other successful ADB assisted-projects in the country's small-scale (less than 1,000 hectares) water resources sector.

ADB's 32-year loan -- with an eight-year grace period carrying a one percent interest charge and 1.5 percent for the balance of the term -- makes up 51.3 percent of the total project cost of \$107.3 million.

International Fund for Agricultural Development would extend a \$22 million loan, administered by ADB, while the government of Bangladesh and project beneficiaries would make contributions equivalent to \$30.3 million.

IGRD and cooperatives ministry would be the executing agency for the project which is due for completion in December 2017.

Around 80 percent of Bangladeshis live in rural areas where poverty levels reach over 50 percent and where over two-thirds of the population is landless.

With its flat topography and location at the confluence of three major rivers, the country is highly prone to severe flooding during heavy monsoon rains, cyclones, tidal surges and the predicted impacts of climate change.

These physical pressures on the country's limited land base have been aggravated by weak management of water facilities, poor maintenance, limited community participation and weak service delivery.

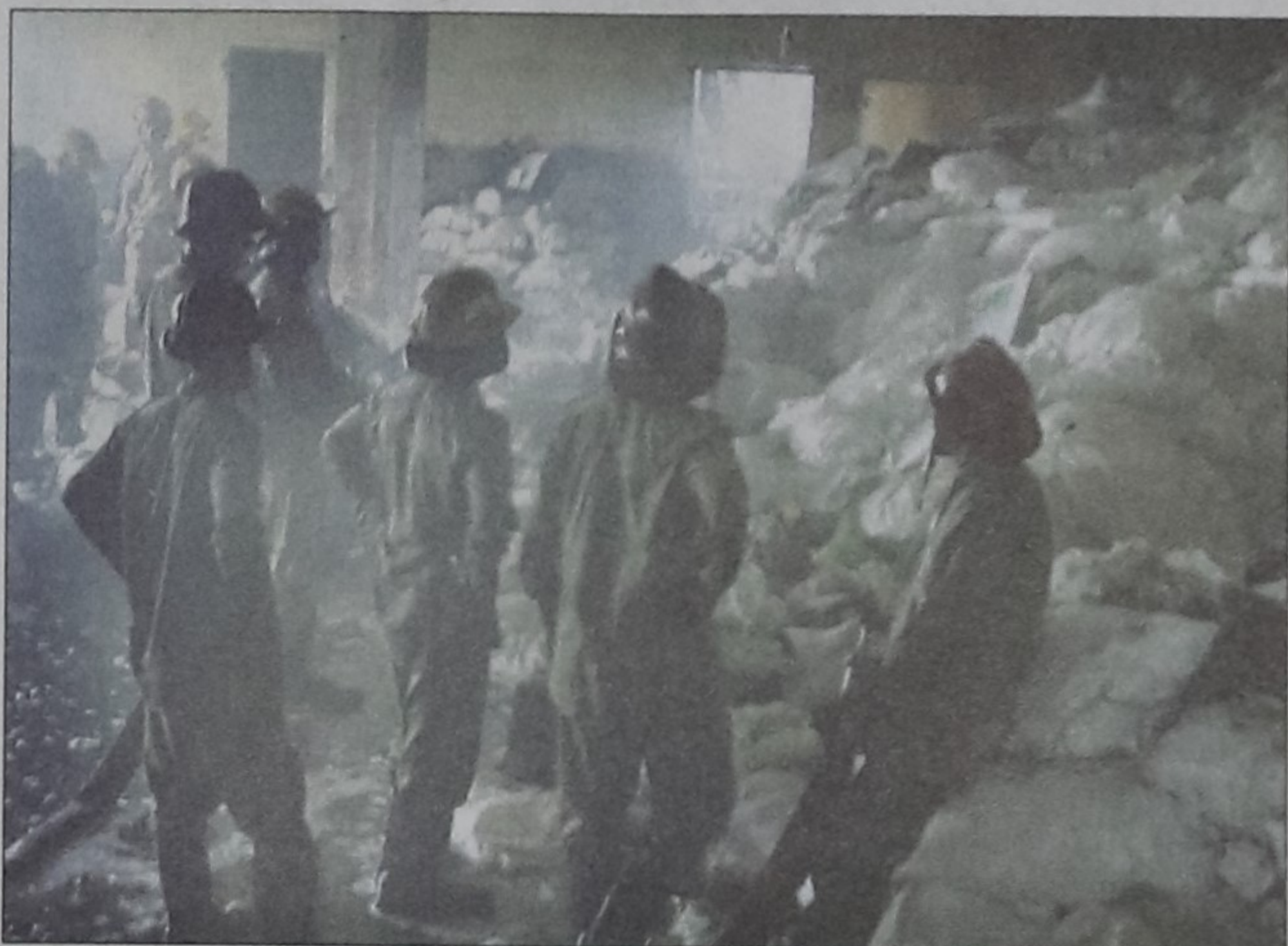


PHOTO: STAR

Firefighters examine the damage after extinguishing a fire that broke out at a godown of Unilever at BSCIC Industrial Area at Kalurghat in Chittagong yesterday.

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