

Jatka catching goes on as culprits slip thru' dragnet

Huge fry seized in Dhaleswari drives but none held or purnished

FARHANA MIRZA, Munshiganj

Law enforcers seized 1,005 maunds of *jatka* ((young hilsa bellow nine inches long) from passenger launches in the Dhaleswari River in the district during February to April but none has been arrested or punished for the callous act that poses threat to hilsa stock.

To help growth of the popular fish, the government imposes ban on catching of *jatka* from February 1 to May 31 every year.

But frequent drives and seizure of huge *jatka* in

Munshiganj district have apparently failed to stop illegal catching of *jatka* during the ban period.

From February to April, the coastguard conducted 66 drives and seized huge *jatka* in 21 of the drives, said Ferdous Alam, station commander of Coastguard Bangladesh in Narayanganj.

"The *jatka* is being seized mostly from passenger launches but the *jatka* owners cannot be identified after seizure. If we take initiative to seize the launch or arrest launch staff, passengers get agitated," he said.

When asked how they identified the launches before drives, Ferdous said *jatka* is often carried in the Dhaka-bound launches coming from Bhola, Borhanuddin and Barguna and these launches cross Munshiganj in early hours.

The law enforcers also seized 14 lakh 98 thousand metres of current nets worth Tk 8 crore and 54 lakh from February 1 to April 6.

Such current nets are often set in the rivers to catch small fishes including *jatka*.

However, authorities

could not take any action against around a hundred current net producing factories in Munshiganj due to 'legal complications'.

According to Fish Resources Preservation Act catching, carrying and selling of *jatka* is banned from February 1 to May 31.

The punishment of such crime is jail term from one month to six months or Tk 1000 fine, or both. If anyone gets involved in the illegal act for the second time the punishment will be doubled.

When asked why none

was punished for such crimes till now, the district fisheries officer of Munshiganj said, "We have stopped *jatka* catching in the district. Most of the seized *jatka* comes from other areas in launches. Action against authorities of *jatka* carrying launches is needed to check the illegal act."

"Only a mobile court can give verdict on the spot, but no mobile court was present during the drives. The upazila nirbahi officers have fund for mobile court drives," he added.

Munshiganj Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Shahanara Yesmin Mili said Munshiganj rivers are free from *jatka* catching and so, their mobile courts conduct drives in different markets.

"The *jatka* is often carried in large passenger launches that come from other districts. If a mobile court conducts drives in the launches and seize any launch on charge of carrying *jatka*, we will have to take the responsibility to send the passengers to their destinations," she said.

She suggested conducting mobile court drives in Bhola and Barguna areas from where *jatka* is taken onto the launches.

Munshiganj Deputy Commissioner Azizul Alam said they had urged the launch owners not to carry illegal *jatka*. As the instruction is ignored, the authorities concerned are being ordered to take necessary steps.

During three of the most successful drives on March 23, April 2 and April 5, coastguard seized 150 maunds, 210 maunds and 100 maunds of *jatka* respectively from passenger launches in the Dhaleswari River and dumped the item on the riverbank.



STAR: FILE PHOTO

Coastguard seizes one hundred maunds of *jatka* (young hilsa below nine inches long) during a drive in the Dhaleswari River on April 5. Inset, law enforcers burn huge illegal current nets on the bank of the river on March 25. However, none were arrested during the drives.



SNIPPETS

Youth jailed for stalking

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A mobile court on Monday sentenced a youth to one-month imprisonment for sexually harassing a schoolgirl. Police said, Sujon Mia, son of Haider Ali of village Purbo Belka in Sundarganj upazila used to tease a student of class six at Belka MC High School on her way to school and home. On Monday, when the girl went to a tailoring shop at Belka Bazar for taking delivery of her clothes, Sujon entered the shop and embraced her with an ill motive. As the girl raised a hue and cry, people rushed to the spot and rescued her. On information, police arrested Sujon and produced him before a mobile court.

Boy hacked to death

UNB, Lalmonirhat

A 7-year-old boy was hacked to death for plucking mango at an orchard at Balapukur village at Saptibari union in Aditmari upazila on Sunday night. The boy, Dulal Hossain, was son of Abdul Gani Mia of the village. Police and locals said, Zahir Uddin, 15, son of Farid Uddin picked up a quarrel with his neighbour Dulal over plucking mango on Sunday evening. Later Zahir along with his friends caught Dulal and took him to a maize field on the bank of a canal. There they killed Dulal with sharp weapons and dumped the body on the spot. Police arrested Zahir on Monday.

Kid burnt alive

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A 3-year-old girl was burnt alive in a devastating fire in Bhabanipur village under Malanchi union in Sadar upazila on Monday evening. The deceased, Molina Begum, was daughter of Mohir Uddin of the village. Assistant Director (AD) of Pabna fire station Md Lokman Hossain said that the fire originated from a stove at the residence of Mohir Uddin at about 6pm. During the fire, little Molina could not come out of the house and was burnt alive.

Woman commits 'suicide'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

An elderly woman allegedly committed suicide by taking poison at village Tengrakhal in Shyamnagar yesterday. The victim was identified as Sabura Khatun, 55, wife of Anowar Ali of the village. Quoting local people police said, Sabura took her life by taking liquid pesticide at her house at about 8:00am. She committed suicide following a family feud, police said.

Villagers marooned, boro flooded as dyke collapses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Boro paddy on over 200 bighas of land has went under water as the dyke of a canal at Atraishuka village in Santhia upazila collapsed on Sunday.

Water Development Board (WDB) sources said the dyke collapsed in the afternoon as some locals were digging holes in it (dyke) to take water from irrigation canal of IT-3 for their fish projects nearby.

Several hundred villag-

ers have been marooned and fish from at least 10 ponds washed away.

Md Kobibur Rahman, executive engineer of WDB in Pabna, said some influential people are cultivating fish near the irrigation canals of IT-3 and S-19 illegally. They damaged the dyke by making holes in it, he added.

"We have closed the sluice gate of the cannal to prevent water from entering the village," the engineer said, adding that

repair of the damaged dyke is going on.

WDB formed an inquiry committee immediately after the incident on Sunday. The committee will investigate the matter and collect the names of the fish farmers responsible for collapse of the dyke, WDB sources said.

After getting report from the committee, we will file a criminal case against the fish farmers, Executive Engineer Kabir said.



PHOTO: STAR

Atraishuka village in Santhia upazila of Pabna district has been inundated following collapse of the dyke of a canal at the village on Sunday.



PHOTO: STAR

Officials and employees of Habiganj municipality form a human chain in front of Durjoy Memorial in the town yesterday demanding withdrawal of a 'false' case filed against the mayor and some municipal staff by a ruling party man on Sunday.

CASE AGAINST HABIGANJ MAYOR

Human chain, rally on first day of agitation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, SYLHET

Officials and employees of Habiganj municipality yesterday launched an agitation programme demanding withdrawal of a "false" case filed by a ruling party man against the mayor, a councillor and some staff members on May 6.

The programme was announced at a press conference at the auditorium of the municipality on Monday. As part of the programme, the municipal officials and employees formed a human chain and held a rally in front of Durjoy Memorial in the town yesterday.

Addressing a rally at the venue, the speakers said their agitation demanding withdrawal of the case will continue until May 14. If the demand is not met by May 14, the mayor, councillors and municipal staff will begin an indefinite strike from May 15, they added.

Chaired by Mayor GK Gous, the rally was addressed, among others, by Poursava secretary Zaved Iqbal Chowdhury, councillors Dilip Das, Abul Hashim, Junaid Ahmed, Mohammad Alamgir, Zahir Uddin, Nur Hossain and Lovely Begum.

The agitating officials and employees of the municipality will abstain from work for six hours today, hold a protest rally on the Pourashava ground on May 10, observe a half-day hartal on May 13, and daylong work abstention on May 14.

Meanwhile, Senior Judicial Magistrate's

Court yesterday granted bail to Mayor GK Gous and four others in the case.

At the Monday's press conference, Mayor GK Gous, also the general secretary of BNP district unit, alleged that a group of ruling party men came to the municipality office in a procession during opposition-called hartal on April 22 in the name of handing over a memo to him protesting the proposed municipal tax.

Suddenly, the AL men went on the rampage and vandalised the pourasava office and some vehicles in front of the office, he alleged.

The mayor said Poursava Secretary Zaved Iqbal filed a case with Habiganj Police Station the same day against town unit AL President Sharif Ullah, General Secretary Mukul Acharya, former district BCL president Motassirul Islam, general secretary Sultan Mahmud and 40 to 50 others ruling party men, but police did not record the case.

Being influenced by the ruling party men, police recoded a 'false' case against me and staff of the municipality after 12 days of the incident, the mayor further alleged.

Mayor and others told the press conference that one Abdul Awal of Josher Abda area in the municipality filed the case as complainant.

In the case statement, he alleged that mayor and staff members physically assaulted them when they went to the municipality office for handing over a memo on April 22.

NETRAKONA

20 AL men sued on extortion charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

A case has been filed against 20 activists of Awami League on charge of realising illegal toll from four people in Rangchati union of Kalmakanda upazila.

One Altab Hossain of village Rangchati lodged the case with Kalmakanda police station on Sunday night.

The accused are Abdul Ali, Abdul Mannan, Aftabuddin, Joban Ali, Mojibur Rahman, Habibur Rahman, Md Abdul Mannan, Fazlu Mia, Nazrul Islam, Mokaddesh Ali, Faizuddin, Wadud Mia, Joynal Mia, Hossain Ali, Kachu Mia, Abdul Barak, Abdul Malek, Rashid Mia, Choifol, Budda Mia and Shahjahan of the village, said police.

Abdul Wadud, officer in-charge of the PS, said the complainant and three others of the village took lease of Babukhola Ferry, Notun Bazar ferry, Panchgaw ferry and Ramnathpur ferry terminals of the upazila from Rangchati union parishad on February 8 this year.

The accused drove away the lease holders from the terminals on April 16 as they refused to pay Tk 50,000 demanded by them, the OC added.

The OC identified all the accused as the activists of Kalmakanda upazila Awami League.

He further said that they launched a drive to arrest the accused.



PHOTO: STAR

Mass hysteria affected people undergoing treatment at Khargachhari Adhunik Sadar Hospital.

MASS HYSTERIA

19 more fall sick in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

At least 32 people of Guimarapara area under Matiranga upazila in the district fell sick during the last couple of days as a mass psychogenic illness spread in the area.

Ten of the affected people were admitted to Khagrachhari Adhunik Sadar Hospital on last Thursday and 19 others were admitted yesterday, hospital sources said.

"The disease first appeared in the village on April 2 and affected 15 teen-aged boys and girls in a week. Consequently it sprayed to the whole village, said Haripada Tripura, member of Guimara union parishad.

The patients fell down suddenly and became unconscious with convul-

sion. After regaining consciousness, they felt weakness and pain in the body and started behaving in a crazy way, said Ratandhan Tripura, father of a patient, who was hospitalised yesterday.

Ratandhan blamed some local charmers for 'causing' the disease by incantations to gain financial benefit.

Khagrachhari District Civil Surgeon Dr Hassan Imam Chowdhury said three medical teams are working in Guimarapara area and the situation is under control now.

"Outbreak of mass psychogenic illness usually occurs during time of worry and anxiety. The sickness is aggravated by malnutrition, tension and lack of tolerance. The victims mostly belong to the age group of 12 to 25 years," he said.