



VICTORY DAY CELEBRATION

1) Wreaths heaped before the National Memorial in Savar on Victory Day yesterday as people from all walks of life paid tribute to the Liberation War martyrs. 2) People from all walks of life through the memorial. 3) A wreath being placed on behalf of the families of the seven Bir Sresthas. 4) Injured Liberation War veterans pay respect to their martyred fellows. 5) Chiefs of the three armed forces and the state minister for liberation war affairs saluting the martyrs and observing a moment of silence for the war heroes. 6) Foreign friends of Bangladesh during the Liberation War also arrived to pay their respects. 7) Members of Bangladesh Army stage a special parade at the National Parade Ground in the capital marking the day. 8) Reenactment of Commander of Pakistan's forces in "East Pakistan" General AAK Niazi's surrender to General Jagjit Singh Aurora, commander of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Command, at the Race Course (Suhrawardy Udyan today) on December 16, 1971. Students of Dhaka University's Department of Theatre recreated the scene at a programme organised by Sector Commanders Forum and Liberation War-71 at Suhrawardy Udyan.

PHOTO:
SK ENAMUL HAQ,
ANISUR RAHMAN,
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Patenga fishermen on decline

SHAHENOOR AKTHER URMI,
Chittagong

Declining fish stocks, unavailability of government support, rising prices of fishing materials, lack of capital and competition from outsiders are causing a gradual decline in the number of fishermen and vessels in Patenga.

Many fishermen who have held on to the profession for generations are now opting for other means of livelihoods.

"There were around 250 boats in Patenga's community of fishermen four years back but now less than 100 remain to fish in the Bay of Bengal," said Shaypal Das, secretary of Patenga Matsyajibi Somobai Samity.

"Most fishermen do not have the capital to buy the materials required in fishing and so have to rely on loan sharks," he said.

Unable to catch enough to repay the debt, some have sold off their boats and fishing nets. Moreover with no form of government support available, many finally left the profession, he said.

"Many of them now work as day labourers in different factories in Chittagong Export Processing Zone and Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone (KEPZ)," he added.

Boat Owners' Association President Yar Mohammed said, "We usually buy the boats and fishing nets from those who leave the profession."

Fishermen always borrow money from loan sharks before going fishing in deep waters, committing to repay the loan on their return. But fish stocks have declined and they cannot catch enough to repay the loan all at once, he said.

The loan sharks charge a monthly interest of around Tk 200 for every Tk 1,000 borrowed, he added.

"Competition rises during the Hilsa season when fishermen from Noakhali and other coastal belts of greater Chittagong arrive to reach better fishing grounds," he said.

One fisherman, Gopal Jaladas, 35, said, "I left my traditional profession of fishing

three years ago as it was impossible to maintain my family through fishing. Now I work as a day labourer at KEPZ."

One 65-year-old seasoned fisherman, Nitto Lal Jaladas, entered the profession at the age of 12 and is still carrying on.

Most fishermen now do not own boats or nets as these are no longer affordable. Some five to eight of them are hired by boat owners for a monthly salary of Tk 10,000, he said.

They usually stay at sea for eight months, getting only a three-to-four-day leave every two months or so to be with their families, he added.

These fishermen are not very happy with the remuneration they get for their fishing voyages.

Expressing his anger, a young fisherman, Prokash Babu Jaladas, said, "Boat owners always cheat us saying that the catch was not good. We are paid only one-third of what we are supposed to get."

One boat owner, Shuvashish Jaladas, denied the allegation.

"We are not cheating the fishermen. In a day's trip, we invest Tk 1,500 for around 20 litres of diesel and two meals for each fisherman. However, we can not catch enough fish to recoup our investment," he said.

"We always try to pay sufficient wages to all the fishermen we hire," he added.

The community of fishermen in Patenga is not listed yet in District Fisheries Office and so do not get any support, including being issued identity cards and training on disaster preparedness and on tackling piracy.

District Fisheries Officer Provati Devi said, "Patenga is not listed in our record books yet. We are taking an initiative for helping them."

The fishermen urged the government to pay attention to their needs so that they can sustain their livelihood.

"Every time the media and different organisations console us. But we never get anything. Day by day our lives are becoming worse," said one fisherman, Abdul Karim.

Road crashes kill 21, injure 66

METRO DESK

Twenty-one people were killed and 66 others injured in road accidents in Munshiganj, Gopalganj, Chapainawabganj, Rangpur, Chittagong, Dinajpur and Pabna on Saturday and yesterday.

Our Munshiganj correspondent reports, all of the four youths, travelling on a single motorcycle, died instantly when a bus hit the bike from the opposite direction at Somoshpur in Shreenagar upazila yesterday evening.

The victims were Ruhul Amin, 25, Apu, 23, Hridoy, 21, and Aslam, 28.

Angry locals blocked Dhaka-Mawa highway for about an hour.

A correspondent from Gopalganj reports, six unidentified people were killed and 30 others injured in a collision between a bus and a truck on Dhaka-Khulna highway near Gerakhola bridge in Moksudpur upazila yesterday afternoon.

The identities of the deceased could not be known.

In Chapainawabganj, a truck hit a motorcycle in Sherpur of Gomostapur upazila yesterday, killing the motorcyclist and his co-rider instantly, said police.

The deceased were Sagor, 27, and Shafiqul Islam, 50.

In another accident, a tractor overturned at Enayetpur in Gomostapur around 7:30pm on Saturday, killing a man instantly and injuring 16 others.

The deceased was Bazlu, 60, of Shibganj.

Five injured were admitted to Rajshahi

Medical College Hospital while the others to Gomostapur Upazila Health Complex.

Yet another accident, an elderly woman Golenur died as a truck ran her over on Chapainawabganj-Sonamasjid land port highway at Sarkar square in Shibganj upazila Saturday evening.

In Rangpur, three passengers were killed and 20 others injured when a coach skidded off Dhaka-Rangpur highway in front of Rangpur Palli Bidyut Samity-1 of Mithapukur upazila on Saturday night.

Two of the deceased were Shahidul Islam, 35, and Azaharul Islam, 48.

Five injured were admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital while the others were taken at Mithapukur Upazila Health Complex.

In Chittagong, Ahad Ali, 80, died as a bus hit him on CEPZ intersection in the city yesterday morning.

In Dinajpur, Kawsar, 13, son of Kalim Uddin of Ulipur in sadar upazila, and a class VI student of Green International School, died instantly as a truck hit him while he was riding a motorbike at Balubari in the town yesterday.

In another accident, an unidentified young motorcyclist died instantly as the motorbike hit a tree beside Bochaganj-Dinajpur road in Chandipur of Bochaganj upazila yesterday afternoon.

In Pabna, Marzia, 4, daughter of Golam Mostafa, died instantly in a collision between a Nosimon and another vehicle in Lokhmipur of Chatmohar upazila in the district on Saturday evening.