



WITH TODAY'S ISSUE

Showbiz

IT'S PLAYING WITH FIRE

US, UN warn Myanmar over use of religion for political ends

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MARADONA TO VISIT DHAKA?

Franchise football league organisers claim they will bring the legend to launch event

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Silenced by SALINITY

Rising salt content damages croplands forcing farmers to change livelihood

SOHEL PARVEZ

More than a decade ago, Muroti Halder, now 50, used to have a hectic schedule at this time of winter.

Fresh harvest of Aman paddy used to arrive at their yard and Muroti and her family members had to remain busy in threshing, boiling and sun-drying the paddy.

The entire area was full of activities. Aroma of the newly harvested paddy used to fill the air.

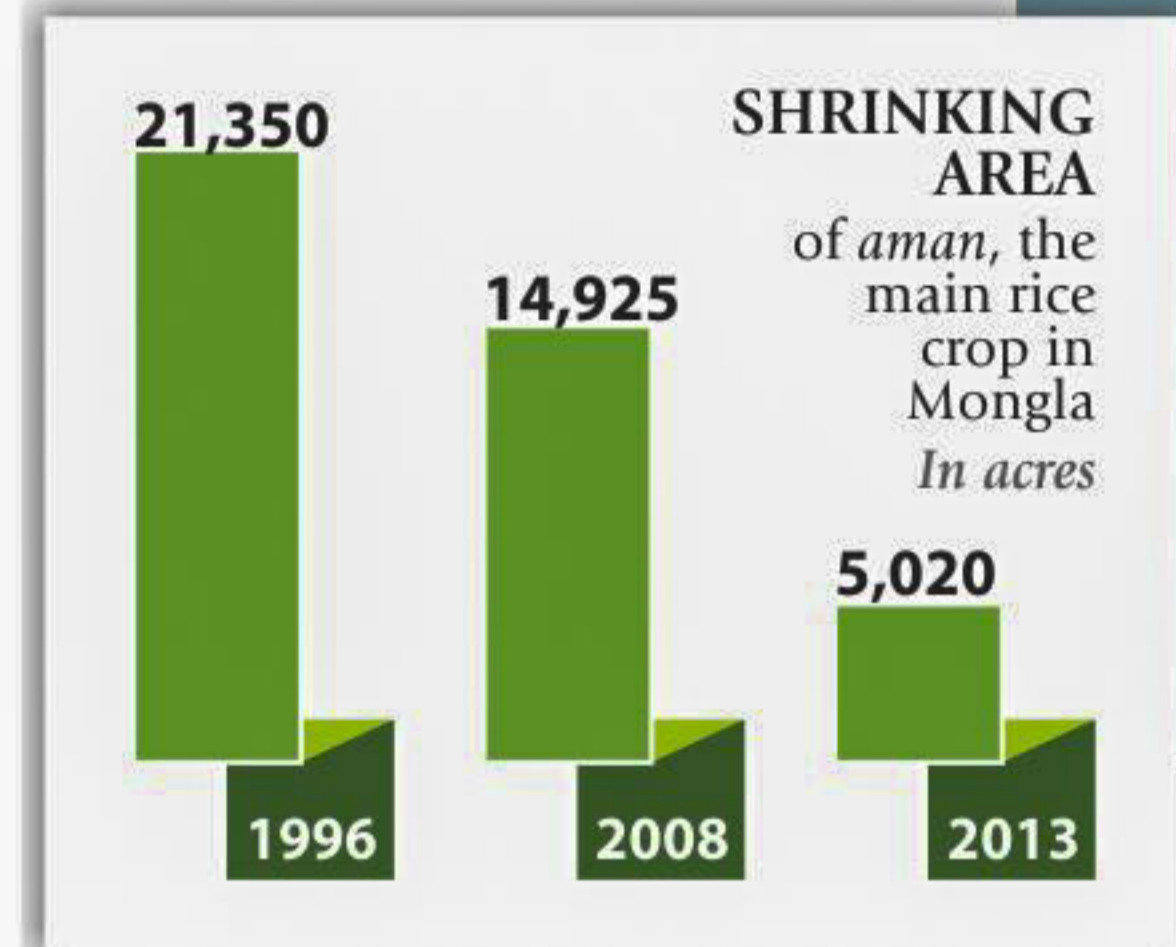
These are only beautiful memories now.

For the last several years, Muroti's family and their neighbours in Keyabunia village, six kilometres away from the southwestern seaport town of Mongla, cannot grow rice on their land due to rising salinity.

A fall in freshwater flow from the upstream, rising sea level, shrimp cultivation and its uncontrolled expansion, and congestion in canals for embankments built

by politically influential people are mainly responsible for salinity in Mongla and other southwestern coastal areas.

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A farmer had attempted to grow rice on this submerged piece of land in Mongla upazila in Bagerhat but extreme salinity in the soil allowed only a handful of plants to survive, which are unlikely to be of any use. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

UN urges restraint

Worried at latest political violence in Bangladesh, UN rights commission asks for effective probe into all killings

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over the political situation in Bangladesh, the United Nations Human Rights Commission yesterday urged all political parties to show restraint and bring an immediate end to violence.

"The deepening political violence in Bangladesh, resulting from the failure by the two major political parties to resolve their differences peacefully, is very disturbing," said the UN body in a statement yesterday.

Spokesperson for the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights, Ravina Shamdasani said, "We are concerned about the potential for the violence, which has already led to deaths, injury and disruption, to spiral, as seen in the run up to the 2014 elections."

"We also call on the authorities to ensure the prompt, impartial and effective investigation of all killings committed -- irrespective of whether they were committed by State or non-State actors," said the statement.

It said the government should also

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BLOCKADE VIOLENCE 2015 (JAN 5-16)

DEATHS 23

INJURED MORE THAN 700

VEHICLES TORCHED AROUND 200

SOURCE: DAILY STAR REPORTS

New terror strike feared in Europe

Intel agencies warn 20 sleeper cells ready to strike several European countries; Belgium foils cop killing plot

AGENCIES

There could be as many as 20 sleeper cells of between 120 and 180 people ready to strike in France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, a Western intelligence source has told CNN.

The source told CNN national correspondent Deborah Feyerick that European Union and Middle East intelligence agencies had identified an "immi-

nent threat" to Belgium, and possibly also to the Netherlands.

The warning comes against the backdrop of the deadly attacks in Paris last week and anti-terror raids in Belgium on Thursday that have European counterterrorism agencies scrambling to identify and thwart potential threats.

European security services in recent weeks have

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Around 1,300 Indian trucks loaded with goods for Bangladesh are stuck at Sonamasjid Land Port in Chapainawabganj as the indefinite nationwide blockade enforced by the BNP-led 20-party alliance continues to hurt trade. Perishable items in many trucks have reportedly started rotting.

PHOTO: STAR

Land port left inoperative

1,300 Indian trucks with perishable goods stranded at Sonamasjid as C&F agents, Bangladeshi trucks not available amid blockade

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The ongoing blockade has virtually crippled the second largest land port of the country, dealing a heavy blow on exporters and importers of both Bangladesh and India.

Despite several government orders and subsequent efforts by law enforcement agencies, Sonamasjid Land Port in Chapainawabganj remains practically inoperative for over a week.

The district is a stronghold of Jamaat-e-Islami, a key ally of the 20-party alliance

that has been enforcing the nonstop countrywide blockade since January 6.

Port sources said Jamaat activists coerced port staff, including Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) agents, into abstaining from work and prevented entry of Indian cargo trucks into the Bangladesh side of the border.

As a result, at least 1,300 goods-laden trucks are stranded on both sides of the border at the moment, which prompted the Indian High Commission in Dhaka to request the Bangladesh government to take necessary steps to clear those trucks. Of the

total stranded vehicles, 1,000 are on Indian side of the border and 300 are on Bangladesh soil.

"The last time goods were loaded and unloaded here was on January 8 and that too was done amid tight security," said Nurul Bashir, assistant commissioner of the port Customs, yesterday.

Moreover, there's a shortage of trucks to carry goods from the border to their destinations across the country. Around 500 vehicles, including a good number of cargo-laden trucks, were torched and

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Open talks for polls

BNP urges govt; blockade to continue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday urged the government to open an effective dialogue aimed at a free and fair election by moving away from the "policy of killing the opposition men".

"We are again urging the government to engage in an effective dialogue immediately to hold a meaningful election to return people's power to them," he said in a statement.

Rizvi made the call at a time when the BNP-led 20-party alliance has been enforcing countrywide non-stop blockade since January 6, paralysing normal life and economic activities.

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JCD leader killed in 'gunfight'

Rab terms him 'arsonist'; 20-party says it's extrajudicial killing, calls 36-hr hartal in Rajshahi div from tomorrow

STAR REPORT

An alleged arsonist was shot dead during a "gunfight" with law enforcers in Chapainawabganj yesterday as violence, arson and hit-and-run attacks by blockade supporters continued across the country.

According to Rapid Action Battalion, Motiur Rahman, 22, a union-level leader of pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, was the main man behind arson and bomb attacks in Chapainawabganj, reports our district correspondent there.

The BNP has called a 36-hour hartal from tomorrow in Rajshahi division protesting the killing.

Major Kamruzzaman, commander of Chapainawabganj camp of Rab-5, said Rab personnel in a special drive arrested three people -- Motiur, Hazrat and Shyamal -- at Kansat around 3:00pm on Thursday for their alleged involvement in recent destructive activities in the area.



Motiur Rahman

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ARSON ATTACKS DURING BLOCKADE

A dozen burn victims fighting for life

JAMIL MAHMUD

With no sign of let-up in the mindless arson attacks, the Burn Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital presents a sordid picture of the brutality inflicted upon the country during the ongoing anti-government programmes.

With different levels of burns, 12 people who belong to the lower rung of the society have been writhing in extreme pain and fighting for their lives there.

They were burnt in arson attacks during the

blockade and hartals enforced by the BNP-led alliance since January 6.

Twelve more took treatment at the hospital. Two of them succumbed to their injuries, with car driver Abul Kalam Hawlader becoming the latest casualty yesterday.

Most of the burn victims are the breadwinners for their families and had no political affiliations whatsoever.

"I live by hardwork. What have I done to deserve

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