

WITH TODAY'S ISSUE

LIFE
STYLE

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

Celebrated theatre personality Ferdousi Majumdar is honoured on World Theatre Day

PAGE 9

CASTRO'S COLUMN

In an opinion piece, the Cuban leader says his country needs no gifts from the US

PAGE 8



Losing fish to tobacco

Residues of the toxic plant, excessive pesticide from farmlands flowing into carp-breeding Halda river

MINHAJ UDDIN with ANDREW EAGLE

As the nation's and possibly South Asia's major natural breeding ground for carp fishes like ruhi, katol and mrigal (Indian carp) from where fishermen collect spawns, the 98-kilometre Halda River that runs through Khagrachhari is unique.

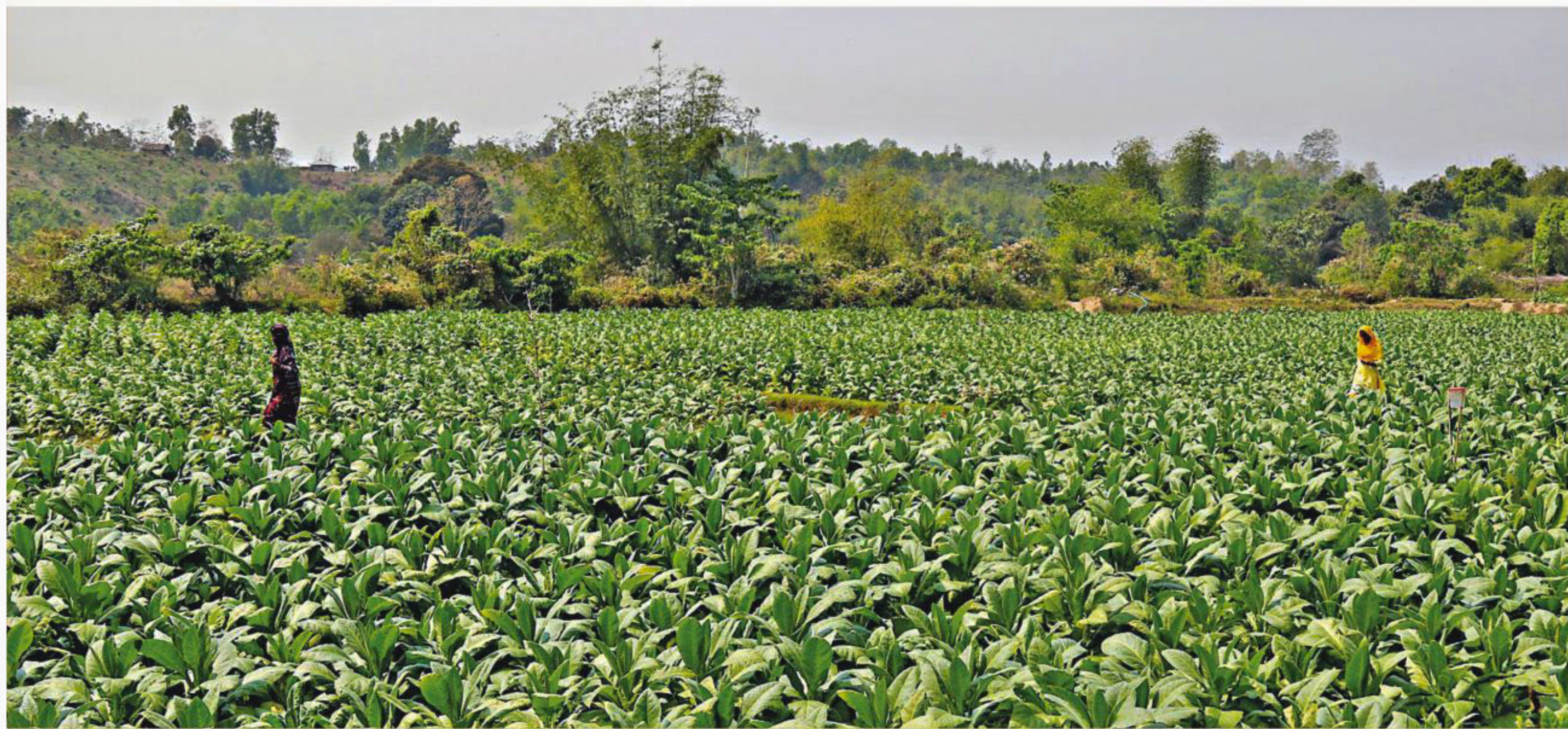
The number of fish eggs laid in the Halda has declined over the years, however, due to various manmade hazards, including cutting of the river's serpentine bends and oxbow lakes, industrial waste and sewage contamination, indiscriminate riverbed sand extraction and illegal fishing. With the river's condition already precarious comes a new hazard: tobacco farming.

"Due to the unique biodiversity of the Halda," says Manzoorul Kibria, an associate professor of Chittagong University's zoology department and Halda specialist, "reforestation of the river's hinterlands is recommended, and nearby croplands should use organic fertiliser and pest control. Unfortunately, unprecedented tobacco farming is moving the river's ecology towards even greater degradation."

In the last three years the number of farmers growing tobacco in Khagrachhari's Manikchhari upazila, which lies within the sensitive Halda catchment, has increased from none to 50. Tobacco requires large amounts of fertiliser and pesticides. Runoff joins the Halda, as the river runs along acres of tobacco fields only a few feet away.

"Toxic residue comes from upstream," says Kibria. "The changing chemical traits of the Halda's water in the fish spawning zone will have a serious impact."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



A large tobacco field in Manikchhari upazila of Khagrachhari. Excess fertiliser and pesticides used on the crop there eventually wash down to the Halda river. *Bottom left*, the field overlooking a stream near the origin of the river. *Bottom right*, fishermen are seen catching fish fry around 80km downstream from the field.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS



CONTEMPT OF COURT Two ministers kept mum at cabinet meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Food Minister Qamrul Islam and Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq, who have been convicted of contempt of court, have neither violated the constitution nor broken their oath of office by making comments on the chief justice, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

"So there is no obligation for them to resign as there was no violation of the constitution," he told reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting.

The convicted ministers attended the cabinet meeting, but kept mum.

However, their presence in the meeting indicates that they would continue to

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Crisis-ridden Biman to offload its boss

Long-standing chairman Jamaluddin is set to be replaced by Enamul Bari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Air Marshal (retd) Jamal Uddin Ahmed is about to be shown the door as Biman Bangladesh Airlines is likely to reconstitute its board with a new chairman.

Jamal had been at the Biman cockpit despite speculations over the last seven years that he would be removed soon. Biman had been in the reds in six of the seven years he was at the helm.

"We will send a proposal to the Prime Minister's Office in a couple of days for the prime minister's approval. After the approval, we will issue gazette notifications," Civil Aviation Minister Rashed Khan Menon told The Daily Star last night.

Highly placed sources in the ministry said the ministry would propose the name of the recently former Air Force chief, Air Marshal (retd) Muhammad Enamul Bari, as the new chairman.

Former FBCCI president Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, barrister Tanjib-ul Alam, and BGMEA president Siddiqui Rahman would be proposed as members of the Biman board.

Senior secretary to the Prime Minister's Office, secretary to the finance

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5



Jamal Uddin

Enamul Bari

HC rejects writ over Islam as state religion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday rejected the writ petition that challenged the legality of a constitutional provision giving Islam the status of state religion.

Fifteen distinguished citizens under the banner of Sairachar O Samprodaikota Protirodh Committee (Dictatorship and Communalism Resistance Committee) had filed the petition with the HC in 1988.

Yesterday, the HC passed the rejection order on the ground that the petitioners have no jurisdiction to move such a petition, as they are not aggrieved by the provision, Additional Attorney General Murad Reza told The Daily Star.

The HC bench of Justice Naima Haider, Justice

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Exhumation of body ordered

Investigators seek fresh autopsy; only family members quizzed so far; no suspect arrested yet

STAR REPORT

A Comilla court yesterday ordered the exhumation of the body of college student Sohagi Jahan Tonu for a fresh autopsy.

The Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court passed the order following a prayer from investigators. Comilla Superintendent of Police Shah Abid Hossain confirmed this to The Daily Star.

Asked about the report of the previous autopsy, Officer-in-Charge Manjur Alam of Comilla Detective Branch (DB) of police said they have not received it yet.

On the question why investigators prayed for a fresh autopsy, he said, "It's for the sake of investigation."

Earlier, SP Shah Abid said investigators believe Tonu was killed following an attempted rape. But they have to wait for the autopsy report to say anything for sure.

Tonu's friends allege that she was raped before being murdered. They also accuse the local administration of

MORE ON PAGE 3



TONU MURDER

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Govt to cut oil prices, finally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to cut fuel prices in a month, as oil prices continue to remain low on the international market for nearly two years now.

The price of furnace oil would be reduced in a week, and a circular to this effect would be issued soon, Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, told The Daily Star yesterday.

An official at the ministry said its price would be slashed by Tk 15-16 a litre.

The price cut on other fuels such as diesel, petrol and octane would come within a month, said the official on condition of anonymity.

Diesel prices would be slashed by Tk 10-15 a litre. And the prices of petrol and octane would be brought down to a level that would allow the government to make a profit of Tk 20-25 a litre, said some other officials at the ministry.

The price of diesel and kerosene now stands at Tk 68 a litre, octane at Tk 99 and petrol at Tk 96.

An official of Bangladesh Petroleum

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

Girl dies as her scarf gets tangled with auto motor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A college girl died after her scarf got entangled with the motor of an auto-rickshaw she was riding on in Shanir Akhra area yesterday.

Afrin Akhter Juthi, 18, along with two classmates was going home from a lunch party around 4:30pm. She was an HSC candidate from Motijheel Model School and College.

Kazi Wajed Ali, officer-in-charge of Kadamtali Police Station, said they did not find the scarf, but saw strangle marks on her necks.

Sources in Dhaka Medical College said they also saw several strangle marks around her necks.

Anjuman Akhi, one of the classmates, said as the auto-rickshaw reached Goyal Bari Mor, Juthi suddenly shrieked and banged her head with the frame of the vehicle. There was

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



A woman shows marks of surgery done on her neck at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed. She was injured when one end of her scarf got tangled in a prop-shaft of an easy bike. *Inset*, a woman's scarf falls through a gap under the driver's seat of an easy bike where the prop-shaft is located.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Beware when on easy bike

CRP finds injuries from scarf-strangulation rising alarmingly

TAMANNA KHAN

All she felt was a sudden jerk and then her limbs went numb. Twenty-year-old Sumaiya Sweetie was paralysed for life from the neck down.

"There was no pain and I could talk but I could not feel my hands and legs," said Sweetie.

She was lying on a bed at the female ward of the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) while talking to this correspondent recently.

Sweetie had an accident in a three-wheel battery-run auto-rickshaw, popularly known as easy bikes, on June 25 last year.

She was six months pregnant.

"I was going with my husband to the boat jetty from Barisal Sadar, where I live with my in-laws," Sweetie said. "I was sitting on the passenger seat just behind the driver's seat."

Sweetie was wearing a salwar kameez and an urna (long scarf) wrapped around her head and neck.

One loose end of the urna went through a gap between the driver's seat and the passenger seat, on which Sweetie sat, and got entangled with the motor's prop shaft, about 20 minutes after the vehicle started moving.

Unaware of where the loose end of her urna ended up, Sweetie just felt a sudden pull and that was that.

She is now paralysed from the neck down. Her baby, by a

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6