



Rakhine girls present a captivating traditional dance at the inaugural function of the three-day 'Mega Beach Carnival, Kuakata 2017' yesterday. The festival aims at making the picturesque sea beach area more popular among tourists from home and abroad. PHOTO: STAR

## THREE-DAY BEACH CARNIVAL KUAKATA BEGINS

# Airport to be built to attract tourists: Muhith

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The government will build an airport in Payra sea port area to ease communication for visitors in Kuakata sea beach, a tourist spot with immense natural beauty in the southern district. Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith made the announcement yesterday morning while inaugurating as the chief guest a three-day 'Mega Beach Carnival Kuakata, 2017', aiming to make the area more popular among the tourists. Making Kuakata more attractive along with development of communications by roads, river and air is needed to introduce it positively to tourists from both home and abroad, he said. "We have a plan to develop Kuakata as an attractive tourist spot within two years. Now one can reach Kuakata from Payra port easily. The authorities of Payra port will hopefully take step for development of Kuakata sea beach area," he said. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had announced 2016 as "Tourism Year" and Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation

(BPC) and non-government tourism organisations will organise round-the-year events till 2018 as part of the Tourism Year's programmes to brand Bangladesh as a unique tourist destination, said Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon. All three bridges on Patuakhali-Kuakata road have already been completed and construction work of a new bridge on the Payra river at Lebukhali is going on, he said. After completion of the Padma Bridge, the number of tourists from home and abroad would rise in Kuakata and consequently, more employment opportunities will be created, he added. Closing ceremony of the carnival will be held on the night of January 16. Kuakata in the south of Patuakhali has an 18-kilometre-long and 3-kilometre-wide sandy beach. From the beach, one can have an unobstructed view of both sunrise and sunset over the Bay of Bengal. In the three-day carnival, special entertainment facilities have been

arranged for the tourists, such as beach football, beach cricket, volleyball, kite flying, local games, water bike, ATB rides, boat rowing, beach lighting, camp fire, Kuakata-Sundarbans sea cruise etc. Adventurous feats like ascending and descending, tree top activities, adventure gear shop, fire camp, BBQ, forest trekking, walking and cycle rally are being also organised there. Besides eye-catching natural view of Kuakata, diversified lifestyles of the Rakhaine people, a historic well, boat of ancient period, and Buddhist and Hindu temples would be of special attraction for visitors. Chief Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad ASM feroz, lawmakers Md Mahbubur Rahman Talukder, AKM Jahangir Hossain, ABM Ruhul Amin Howlader and Shawkat Hasanur Rahman, National Board of Revenue Chairman Md Najibur Rahman and Local Government Division secretary Abdul Maleq addressed the grand opening ceremony chaired by BTB Secretary SM Ghulam Farooque.

# Santals firm to get back lands, still cry for justice

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

No steps have been taken for rehabilitation of Santal families evicted from Sahebganj cane farm in Gobindaganj upazila, nor is there any initiative for their rehabilitation, even two months after their eviction, complained Santal residents in Madarpur village. A clash ensued between farm labourers, police and Santals in Sahebganj cane farm area of Rangpur Sugar Mills on November 6 last year. Houses of Santals were torched and looted. Three Santal men were killed and six went missing during the clash. Thirty people, including nine policemen, sustained injuries. "We cannot forget the fateful day of eviction, and we are determined to get back our forefathers' lands," said widow Amena Hembrom, who took shelter near Madarpur church. Shocked by their eviction, many Santal families went to other places, but they are still hopeful of getting back their forefathers' lands, she added. "I am still living near Madarpur church with my family in a makeshift shed, and have

been suffering for want of job and adequate food. I lost all my belongings during the eviction," said Tedu Tudu of Madarpur. "We have no source of earning because we do not get work. How long can we depend on the NGOs and other voluntary organisations? We urge the government to resolve the issue of Santal's lands," said Shawrini Kisku of Madarpur. A one-member judicial probe committee headed by Chief Judicial Magistrate Mohammed Shahidullah has been conducting an investigation. He visited Joypurpara and Madarpur on Tuesday for the third time and recorded the statements of the members of evicted families and the officials, employees and contractors of Rangpur Sugar Mills. "The policemen involved in the eviction should be brought under the rule of law, whether the Santals get their lands or not," said Dipok Kumar Pal, Coordinator, Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities, Gaibandha unit. "Construction of cluster villages three-kilometres from Sahebganj cane farm is going on for the shelterless Santals," said Deputy Commissioner Abdus Samad.

# Migratory birds on rise in Baikka Beel

The number increases to 10,712 from last year's 8,832

MINITU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The number of migratory birds as well as native species has increased in Baikka Beel in Srimangal upazila this year. About 10,712 birds of 40 species were counted during a survey on January 11 and 12. The number was 8,832 last year and 6,991 in 2015. The survey team led by Paul Thompson, adviser of CREL (Climate Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods) project, conducted the counting of the birds, Mazharul Islam Zahangir, regional coordinator of the project, said. Mazharul quoted Thompson as saying that during the survey 40 species of birds, including 16 migratory and 24 native aquatic, were counted in Baikka Beel. According to the recent survey, funded

by CREL and organized by Bangladesh Birds Club, four new species of aquatic birds, including falcate duck, gray leg goose, northern lapwing and common shell duck, were found, Mazharul said. Earlier, about 1,174 birds, migratory and native species, were counted in the first ever survey conducted by the same organisation in 2005, he added. "In the last few years we have planted many trees, including palmyra seed, so that birds can make their nests and boost their population naturally" Mazharul said. Baikka Beel, a water body comprising of 1,000 hectares of land, was declared sanctuary for birds and fishes by the government in 2003, aiming to protect and restore aquatic biodiversity in the haor area.

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# Babul elected Mymensingh Press Club GS

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Md Babul Hossain of The Janakantha was elected general secretary of Mymensingh Press Club on Friday. Other office-bearers are vice-presidents: AZM Imamuddin Mukta (BSS) and Dr KR Islam, joint secretary: Md Saiful Islam (The Naya Diganta), treasurer: Faruquzzaman Khan and departmental secretaries: Amit Roy (The Jugantor), Md Aminul Islam (The Daily Star), Md Mustafizur Rahman and advocate Mamun Mahfuz. Mir Golam Mustafa (Samakal), advocate Anwarul Hasan Rumi, advocate Md Mozammel Haque, Md Abdul Hashim (Dainik Jahan), Rabindranath Paul (Ajker Kagoj), MA Matin (The Daily New Times) and Prof Mohammad Reazul Islam were elected executive committee members.

# 200-year-old Guti Khela, a legacy of zamindars

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

A 200-hundred-year-old local game with a large brass ball, popularly known as Guti Khela, was held in Phulbaria upazila of the district on Friday. Thousands of people, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and age thronged the venue in Boroiaata near Laxmipur Bazar in Deokhola Union to enjoy the game. This traditional game is held to mark Poush Sangkranti, locally known as Kahura, every year, locals said. Guti Khela Smriti Sangsad organised the event. Competing villages are required to take the guti (a brass ball weighing around 30-kilogram) from Boroiaata to their village, locals said. The villagers who succeed in taking the guti to their village, showing their physical strength, are declared the winners. People of some 20 villages from Phulbaria, Muktagachha, Sadar and Trishal upazilas participated in the game this year. The team from Sarotia village in Phulbaria was the winner, villagers said. Deukhola Union Parishad Chairman Abdul Hadi said the whole

area was in a festive mood as people from far away villages visited Phulbaria to enjoy the game. This traditional game, introduced by Mymensingh zamindars, has been celebrated in the area for some 200 years, said AZM Imamuddin, a senior journalist of Muktagachha upazila, who was also a player of the game in his youth. The then zamindars of Muktagachha and Boilor in Trishal introduced the game to measure the strength of their subjects, said Abdul Aziz of Laxmipur, quoting elders. There is no prize for the game but the winning team is accorded a reception in Phulbaria's Laxmipur village. Participation in the game brings unbound joy and festivity for us, and the game is still regarded as a sign of tradition and heritage, said Rezaul Karim, a youth of Laxmipur village. Mymensingh Zila Parishad Chairman Prof Yusuf Khan Pathan, Secretary of the district Awami League (AL) advocate Moazzem Hossain Babul, city AL President Ehtesamul Alam, Zila Parishad member Tajul Islam Bablu, Ruhul Amin and Keamat Ali Zinnah witnessed the game, among others.



A flock of purple swamphen, among many migratory birds, that arrived in Baikka Beel in Moulvibazar's Srimangal upazila this year. The photo was taken on Friday. PHOTO: STAR



The 'guti' (brass ball), used in the 200-year-old game 'guti khela,' being carried to Boroiaata village in Deokhola union under Phulbaria upazila of Mymensingh, from where people of nearby villages will try to wrest it from their opponents and take it to their village. PHOTO: STAR

# Fish trader murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police recovered the body of a fish trader at Ghatail upazila yesterday. The deceased was Abdus Samad, 50, son of late Foroz Ali of Tolajon village under Deolabari union. Quoting family members, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ghatail Police Station Mohammad Kamal Hossain said Samad went missing on Friday evening. Locals later found his body in a cane field in adjacent Kutubpur village yesterday morning. The body bore marks of injuries on its throat and one eye was gouged out, the OC said.

# Tomato growers, buyers all smiles

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Good yield of tomato cultivated on vast tracts of land in the Brahmaputra river basin of Jamalpur Sadar upazila has made both growers and buyers happy with the handsome profit. Farmers of Lakkhichar, Tulsirchar, Narundi, Ranagachha and Sharifpur unions cultivated the vegetable on 1,300 hectares of land in the river basin areas meant for the vegetable cultivation. The growers made a net profit of Tk 50,000 or more harvesting 125 to 130 maunds of tomatoes from one bigha last year. The number of growers has increased to around 4,000 and 2,250 more bighas of land have come under cultivation, exceeding the targeted area of 7,500 bighas this season, said Sakhawat Ikram, Sadar upazila agriculture officer.

Growers started harvesting tomato in mid-December that would continue till mid-February. In a little over three weeks (up to January 8), they have recovered the production cost of Tk 30,000 per bigha and are now making profit by selling in local wholesale markets at Tk 500 to Tk 550 per maund. A maund of the produce sold for Tk 1,400 to Tk 1,600 for a couple of weeks early in the season, they added. "I have cultivated tomato on one-and-a-half bighas of land at Char Jatharthapur spending Tk 45,000. I started reaping tomatoes in mid-December and I have already harvested 75 maunds, earning Tk 70,000 till the first week of January," said Mohammad Golam Rob, 50, of Masimpur village. "As per the prevailing yield, I will be able to harvest 125 maunds more by mid-February and earn Tk 50,000 at an average

price of Tk 400 per maund," he added. A number of growers, including Wahab Dewani, Hamu Dewani and Habu Miah of village Madhyerchar echoed the same. Meanwhile, a good number of buyers from different districts are engaged in purchasing huge amounts of tomato from the growers at local wholesale markets to sell it in remote areas. Around 1,800 tonnes of tomato from four wholesale markets are carried to other parts of the country every day, including Dhaka, said Sakhawat, adding that the wholesale buyers are making good profit in the vegetable business. "All this has been possible as the farmers were given knowledge by agriculture officials on how to grow the vegetable plants through preparing lands with proper soil treatment and modern methods of cultivation," the agriculture officer said.