

Mill, godowns, houses gutted in 3 districts

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Fire gutted a paper mill, two jute warehouses and around 60 houses in Munshiganj, Gaibandha and Dinajpur yesterday.

The fire started at Afil Paper Mills, a sister concern of Akij Group, in Gazaria of Munshiganj, reports our correspondent.

Four people were injured during the incident. Of them, Parvej Mridha, member of a firefighting unit, was rushed to a hospital.

The fire might have originated from the motor room of the mill around 11:30am, said Gazaria police.

On information, six firefighting units rushed to the spot and doused the flame after four hours of hectic efforts, said OC Hedayatul Islam Bhuyian.

The mill authority claimed that the loss caused by the fire could go over Tk 1 crore.

Meanwhile, about 300 maunds of raw jute were gutted in a fire that broke out at two warehouses at Kamarjani Market in Sadar upazila early yesterday, our Gaibandha correspondent reports.

Locals said the fire originated from the jute warehouse of trader Khorshed Alam and soon engulfed the adjoining warehouse of Bablu Shah.

The cost of burnt jute was estimated to be around Tk nine lakh, said Khorshed.

In Dinajpur, at least 67 houses were gutted in a fire at Subarnakhuli village in Khansama upazila of the district, reports our correspondent.

The fire originated from the kitchen of Farida Khatun around 3:00am and soon engulfed the adjoining houses, said locals.

The affected families claimed that the loss caused by the fire could go up to Tk 3 lakh.



Locals cultivate paddy on the dried up portion of the Mahananda river that also sees stranded boats due to emergence of large shoals in the once flowing water body in Chapainawabganj district.

PHOTO: RABIUL HASAN

Where are the Mahananda river's rights?

RABIUL HASAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Once alive with human activity and brimming with fish, the Mahananda river born of Nepal's Himalayas and traversing India's Malda district to reach Bangladesh at Bholahat upazila of Chapainawabganj now runs dry in places. Where cargo boats and passenger launches used to plough river currents, farmers now plough crops. The 95 kilometre waterway through Bangladeshi territory that empties into the Padma river in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila is often reduced to a trickle, if it flows at all.

"There used to be fish aplenty in the Mahananda," says fisher

Hara Haldar from Gohalbari village in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila. "Now the river is almost dead. It's difficult to earn a living from fishing but I have no alternative."

"We hardly find any fish due to the drastic fall in water levels," says another fisher, Premadon Haldar from Prantik Para in Chapainawabganj town. Many fishers have already quit their ancestral profession.

According to Water Development Board officials, India has constructed several dams along the important trans-border watercourse. The restricted flow causes ecological damage and hardship for people downstream.

"We used to reach different

parts of the district by launch or steamer, plying the river," recalls senior citizen Shahfiqul Alam from Hujrapur in the town. "People used to transport agricultural products and various goods by river. Now we can hardly imagine such activity."

A good number of markets were established along the riverbank to take advantage of river transport links. In bygone days these markets bustled; now they are silent. Several canals that once connected the river to areas further afield are no more. The potential for on-water transport even in small boats is all but lost. With their natural life cycle disrupted, freshwater fish species are gone.

The Indian dams have left

little of the river but sand, and there, on the riverbed, farmers grow paddy.

Some find advantage in the predicament. Local influential people are dumping garbage along the riverbank as a prelude to land grabbing, especially in the Khal Ghat and Puration Bazar areas of Chapainawabganj town.

"The river's situation is alarming," says the Chapainawabganj coordinator of environmental organisation Save the Nature M.A. Mahub. "If steps are not taken immediately the river will dry up completely. Protecting the river from encroachment and pollution is a must to secure biodiversity and people's livelihoods."

But with municipal sewage yet discharged into the river, though there is barely a river to be found, to address even pollution is no easy task.

"On 5 February 2017 we sent a Tk 187 crore proposal to the Planning Commission to dredge the Mohananda and construct a rubber dam in Sadar upazila," says the Water Development Board's executive engineer in the district, Syed Shahidul Alam. "Siltation has caused an alarming decline in navigability. Underground water levels have also fallen due to siltation." Whether such measures will be sufficient to revive a once-vibrant river is unclear.

Six sued for killing girl after rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

The Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-1 of Jhalakathi yesterday fixed April 5 for hearing of a case filed against six people on charge of killing a teenage girl after rape.

The case was filed earlier yesterday with the tribunal against the six, including a retired policeman, said Akkas Shikder, lawyer of the complainant.

The deceased was Kajal, aged about 12, daughter of Heron Howlader of Banoripara upazila in Barisal.

The accused are retired policeman Abdul Mannan, his relatives Anwar Hossain, Ferdousi Begum, Sharmin Aktar and village doctor Sanjoy Kumar.

Victim's father Heron said Kajal was a house help at Mannan's house where she was sexually abused and tortured. He said Kajal was taken to Banoripara Hospital on March 8 in a critical condition and shifted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, Barisal. She died there on March 11, he added.

Rocket launcher recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A rocket launcher was recovered from Khayertala area in Sadar upazila of the district on Wednesday.

Officer-in-Charge Shamsuddoha of Sadar Police Station said some labourers found the rocket launcher when they were digging earth there on Wednesday afternoon.

Police recovered the rocket launcher when the labourers informed them, he said.

Shamsuddoha said the rocket launcher might have been kept under the earth during the Liberation War in 1971.

Beer Nari Sammanona for war heroine Ganobala

The Daily Star published a report on her in December last year

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

War heroine Ganobala Barmoni of Baraipara village under Gokunda union in Lalmonirhat Sadar has been nominated for Beer Nari Sammanona-2017, thanks to the initiative of 71 Foundation, a Dhaka-based platform of freedom fighters.

Earlier on December 2 last year, The Daily Star published a report on her with the headline "Horrors of '71 still haunt war heroine Ganobala".

"After reading the touching story of Ganobala Barmoni in the Daily Star, we collected detailed information of her. We will award her Beer Nari Sammanona-2017 at a function to be held at Bangladesh Mahila Samity auditorium in Dhaka on March 31," said Uday Shawkat Ali, secretary of the organisation.

"We are also trying to get her recognition as a freedom fighter," he said.

"This year 11 war heroines from different areas of the country will be given the honour. Eleven female freedom fighters were given Beer Nari Sammanona last



War heroine Ganobala Barmoni.

year and eight others were given the same in 2015," said Dr Khaled Shawkat Ali, chairman of the organisation.

The 71 Foundation's message brought a sort of consolation for Ganobala, now 76, but she could hardly smile.

"I forgot how to smile after the tragedy that befell me during the Liberation War," said Ganobala, who witnessed murder of her husband Dr Shashi Mohan Barmon by the Pakistan occupation army in 1971, before herself undergoing brutal torture at their camp.

Later she started working as a domestic help for living.

KALPANA CHAKMA CASE Next hearing on May 2

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A Rangamati court on Wednesday fixed May 2 for next hearing on no-confidence petition in Kalpana Chakma abduction case.

Earlier Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust filed a petition seeking judicial inquiry into the case.

On November 28 last year, Kalpana Chakma's elder brother Kalindi Kumar Chakma filed a petition, rejecting the probe report of the case before the Court of Chief Judicial Magistrate.

On September 7, the investigation officer had filed the investigation report without identifying any abductor.

Armed criminals abducted Kalpana Chakma, then organising secretary of Hill Women's Federation, from her Baghaichhari house in Rangamati on the night of June 11, 1996.

Mother waits for martyred son's recognition

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Forty five years after the country's final victory against the Pakistan occupation forces, mother of a martyred freedom fighter is still waiting for his recognition.

The woman, Firoza Bewa, 78, lost her husband Abdul Aziz 25 years ago and is now living with her two sons Harunur Rashid and Abul Kalam at their home on Fire Service Road in Lalmonirhat town.

She has appealed to the government for recognition of her son as a martyred freedom fighter.

Firoza and her family earlier lived at Kalipur village in Titas upazila (former Daudkandi upazila) of Comilla and they settled in Lalmonirhat town after the independence.

Inspired by his maternal uncle Motiur Rahma Bir Uttam, Abdul Baten Shamim, son of Firoza Bewa, joined

the Liberation War at the age of 21.

He fought as a member of Langolbong camp in Narayanganj under Sector No 2. His body number was 036.

Shamim received bullet injury in

hospital on January 14 in 1972.

The martyred freedom fighter was buried at Azimpur graveyard in Dhaka. "Before his death, Shamim told us that he fought for the country's independence and killed many Pakistani soldiers and Rajakars. I have no photograph of him but his face always floats in my mind. I have his death certificate given by Ramna Police Station and a slip testifying his burial at Azimpur graveyard," said a tearful Firoza Bewa.

"In February this year, I submitted documents to the Titas upazila freedom fighters' verification committee for recognition of my son as a martyred freedom fighter. Many co-fighters of my son were present during the verification," she said.

Firoza's son Abul Kalam said, "Our mother always prays for the departed soul of her martyred son Shamim. Sometimes she cries, recalling his memory."



Firoza Bewa at her home on Fire Service Road.

Mobile phone trader stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Unidentified criminals stabbed a man to death in Patnitola upazila of Naogaon on Wednesday, police said.

The victim was Aminul Islam, 35, son of Shamsul Haque of Rangamati village in Dhamoirhat upazila and owner of a mobile phone shop in Nazipur area.

Locals found him at Patnitola bus stand from where he was taken to Upazila Health Complex. The doctors declared him dead.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Patnitola Police Station Mazharul Islam said there were several stab marks on the body.

Wheat blast fear cuts farming Farmers expect high yield for good weather

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Cultivation of wheat decreased this year due to fear of wheat blast, but farmers are expecting good production of the crop, thanks to favourable weather.

Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Pirojpur Md Abul Hossain Talukder said wheat was cultivated on 215 hectares of land this year, while it was 288 hectares last year. Average production from one hectare of land was 720 tonnes last year.

Nazirpur upazila has the highest production of wheat in the district.

Fazar Ali, a wheat cultivator of Baniary village in the upazila, said fewer farmers cultivated wheat this year compared to last year. "But those who cultivated wheat got good production," he added.

Farmers said they did not get expected production last year because of unfavour-

able weather, but they are happy with the production this year.

"This year we did not face any trouble in growing wheat as the weather was very favourable," said farmer Jalal Uddin Khan, adding that there were no attacks by insects.

Farmers said they spend around Tk 7,000 to grow wheat on one bigha of land, and get over 20 maunds of wheat.

"Those in our area who did not grow wheat this year cultivated other crops like sunflower and maize," said Sipon Sheik, a farmer in the upazila.

DD Abul Hossain said Pirojpur is safe for cultivating wheat. "We are creating awareness among the farmers for cultivating wheat largely through display of hybrid wheat," he said, adding that wheat cultivation area will hopefully increase next year.

He also said farmers get more wheat than paddy for the same production cost.



A growing wheat field at Char Matibhanga village in Nazirpur upazila of Pirojpur.

PHOTO: STAFF