

WEATHER FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S TEMPERATURES

DHAKA 31.4 H 23.6 MYMENSINGH 31.4 H 22.3 CHITTAGONG 32.0 H 24.5 SYLHET 32.5 H 22.5 RAJSHAHI 31.5 H 22.0 RANGPUR 31.3 H 18.7 KHULNA 32.5 H 23.2 BARISAL 31.8 H 22.4 COX'S BAZAR 32.0 H 24.4

Weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky over the country in 24 hours till 6:00pm today, says the Met office. The sun sets in the capital today at 5:11pm and rises tomorrow at 06:18am.

UNFIT BUSES
66 cases filed on first day of DSCC drive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) yesterday filed 66 cases against drivers and imposed a fine of around Tk 1.27 lakh on the first day of a month-long drive against unfit buses.

Three mobile courts in association with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and Dhaka Metropolitan Police carried out the drives in Golap Shah Mazar, Motijheel City Centre and Khilgaon Khidmoh Hospital areas.

They also sent two unfit old buses to dumping stations and seized papers of 14 buses, said a DSCC official.

The crackdown was launched following a recent meeting between 26 service providing organisations and DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon.

The penalties were imposed as many of the drivers did not have licenses or were aged below 18. Some of the buses were also parked illegally while others had unauthorised additional seats installed, he added.

Old, unfit buses are increasing the risk of accidents and adding to traffic congestion, he said.

Noakhali univ student loses life in road accident

Three in other districts
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A brilliant student of Noakhali Science and Technology University died as a pickup hit her on Sonapur road in Takkar area of Noakhali yesterday.

Fauzia Moslem of pharmacym stood first in every academic examination, said the university students.

Witnesses said after taking class, Fauzia, a final year student and a daughter of Moslem Uddin, was returning home in West Shahapur village by an auto-rickshaw.

When the vehicle reached Takkar area, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw rammed it from behind, leading Fauzia to fall on the road.

Immediately, the pickup fatally ran her over.

She was declared dead at Noakhali General Hospital.

Our Jhenidah correspondent reports, a college student was killed as a bus hit him from behind while he was returning home from Barobazar by riding a motorbike on Jhenidah-Jessore road in Baishakhi intersection area of Kaliganj upazila on Saturday night. Pranto Saha, 20, son of Prokash Saha, was a student of BMCC college in Jessore.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports, Bahadur Karigor, 40, a rickshaw-puller, was killed as a truck hit him in the city's Bayezid area yesterday.

A Bagerhat correspondent adds, Akkas Fakir, 36, a driver of a Nosimon, was killed as a bus hit his vehicle on Bagerhat-Khulna highway in Bagerhat Sadar upazila yesterday.



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Once known as the city of dighis (large ponds), Sylhet is losing its water bodies at an alarming rate. Unplanned urbanisation and negligence of the authorities concerned are pushing these vital arteries to the brink of extinction. The ones that are still surviving, like this one in Kazi Tula area, lies neglected. Though the Sylhet City Corporation, owning authorities of the reservoir, has fenced it, unabated dumping of waste from the nearby residents continues to threaten its existence. The photo of Kazir Dighi was taken recently.

Of dead and dying dighis

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Once Sylhet city was known for its dighis (large ponds) -- flowing uninterrupted under the open sky without any fear of encroachment or pollution.

But over the years, most of these vital organs have fallen victim to urban sprawl. Now, they either exist in papers or as a name of an area. Meanwhile, the existing ones are struggling to survive due to a lack of care.

The centuries-old ponds Ramer Dighi and Machu Dighi are long gone but the areas -- Ramer Dighi Par and Machu Dighi Par -- still bear the names of the reservoirs.

The ponds were owned by the family of one Bimalendu Das alias Sadhu Babu, an influential landlord.

The around 10-acre Machu Dighi was situated in the greater Taltola area. It was sold to a businessman whose family eventually filled it up completely by 2000.

On the other hand, Ramer Dighi (around 10 acres) was sold to a contractor. It was filled up by 2010.

Locals with the help of rights organisations tried to put up a resistance but to no avail as the authorities concerned continued to turn a blind eye when it came to saving the water bodies, they alleged.

The family of Sadhu Babu had another pond, Sadhu Babur Dighi. The around 2-acre reservoir was sold in the 80s and was replaced by concrete structures.

Not just these three, many other dighis in Sylhet city had suffered the same fate.

If anyone visits Bara Bazar in Amberkhana area, he or she would be surprised to learn that the urban maze there used to be a huge pond. According to historians, the around 20-acre Rajar Mar Dighi (King's mother's pond) was named after King Gour Govinda's mother and was dug up around eighth century.

But over the years, the reservoir was filled up and buildings were erected upon it. Now all that remains is a small ditch filled with garbage.

Besides, Chhara Dighi at Chhara Dighi Par, Janur Dighi in Zindabazar, Lal Dighi at Lal Dighi Par, Beka Dighi near Lal Dighi,

Sagar Dighi at Sagar Dighi Par and many other ponds in the city only exist in history books or as sign boards.

Meanwhile, due to unabated encroachment and dumping of waste, the reservoirs such as Dhopadighi at Dhopadighi par, Dastidar Bari Dighi at Subidbazar, Lala Dighi at Laladighi Par, Majumdar Bari Dighi at Majumdar Bari, Murari Chand Dighi inside Murari Chand College and Kajal Dighi at Niorpul are now struggling to survive.

A survey on the wetlands of Sylhet city

but to no avail," he said.

Mohammad Ashraful Kabir, coordinator of Bhumi Sontan Bangladesh, a rights organisation, said, "Once our city used to be adorned with dighis. Most of those are lost to urbanisation and the remaining ones are in death throes."

Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) Sylhet chapter, said dighis are necessary to mitigate waterlogging crisis in an area and also useful during fire incidents. It is also beneficial for the environment.

When asked, Enamul Habib, chief executive officer of SCC, said, "To save the water bodies, we will initiate an awareness campaign soon as the responsibility lies

nator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (Bela), Sylhet division, said the association has been working to save the ponds for years.

"We recently filed a writ petition to protect the Majumdar Bari Dighi from encroachment and pollution. What we need is a concerted effort to save the water bodies."

When asked, Enamul Habib, chief executive officer of SCC, said, "To save the water bodies, we will initiate an awareness campaign soon as the responsibility lies



This is where the Machu Dighi used to be. The large pond has been filled up not so long ago to turn it into a concrete jungle. Now all that remains is the memory of the serene water body and the name of the area that still bears its name -- Machu Dighi Par. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

was carried out from 2007 to 2008 by the department of civil engineering and environmental science of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology as per request of the Sylhet City Corporation (SCC).

Prof Jahir Bin Alam of the department told The Daily Star that according to the survey, Sylhet city has lost most of its ponds at an alarming rate, and prompt action is needed to save the existing ones.

"We also recommended the corporation to take strict measures against the grabbers and re-excavate the dying ponds,

Most of the dighis are owned by the city corporation. Yet, no survey has been done in the last 10 years to know the exact number of water bodies or their conditions, he said.

SCC has fenced some of the dighis such as Lala Dighi and Jatarpur Dighi but most of the water bodies remain unprotected.

The authorities concerned have to take proper measures to save the reservoirs. "A master plan is needed to protect the remaining ponds and excavate new ones," Kim said.

Advocate Shah Shaheda Akhter, coordi-

with all to save the dighis."

Contacted, Ariful Haque Chowdhury, SCC mayor, said the city has already lost many of its dighis. "We have to protect the remaining ones."

"We have plans to save all the existing ponds from encroachment and pollution."

According to SCC, in August this year, the corporation undertook a project to beautify Dhopa Dighi by constructing a floating restaurant on and a walkway around it.

'Robber' killed in 'gunfight' with Rab
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A "top robber" enlisted by the home ministry was killed in a "gunfight" between his cohorts and Rapid Action Battalion in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The elite force also claimed to have recovered 44 firearms and a huge cache of ammunition during the operation in Maheshkhali upazila.

Deceased Mokarram Hossain alias Jambu, 38, led local gang "Jambu Bahini", said Rab. He lived in the upazila's Kutubjom union.

Maj Ruhul Amin, commander of Rab-7 in Cox's Bazar camp, said Mokarram was accused in 12 criminal cases including murder, rape, robbery, abduction and extortion.

Maj Amin claimed that they were tipped off that a gang was preparing to conduct a robbery in the sea. For this they took position with firearms in Kutubjom. Sensing their presence, the gang opened fire on them, and the force retaliated in self-defence, he claimed.

After a 30-minute encounter, the gang fled and the criminal was found bullet-hit. He was declared dead in a local hospital, he said.

Sufia Kamal's anniversary of death today
UNB, Dhaka



The 18th death anniversary of Poet Sufia Kamal, founding president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and a pioneer of Bangalee women's emancipation, will be observed today.

Social and cultural organisations have chalked out various programmes marking the day. Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote along with noted cultural personalities will pay tributes to the poet by placing floral wreaths at her grave at Azimpur Graveyard.

A memorial meeting will be organised by Social Protection Committee, a platform of 72 social organisations, will be held at Bangladesh Mahila Parishad at 3:00pm.

Sufia Kamal was also instrumental in naming the first women's dormitory of Dhaka University as Rokeya Hall. During the Liberation War, she worked for helping women hurt during the war and campaigned for bringing to justice Pakistani war criminals.

Born on June 20, 1911, Sufia Kamal was awarded the Bangla Academy Award for Literature (1962), Lenin Centenary Jubilee Medal (1970) from the Soviet Union, Ekushey Padak (1976), Czechoslovakia Medal (1986), Jatiya Kabita Parishad Award (1995), Begum Rokeya Medal (1996), Deshbandhu CR Das Gold Medal (1996) and Independence Award (1997) for her works.

Poet Sufia Kamal died on November 20, 1999.

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With winter approaching, water has gone down at Putamara haor in Baishakhi area of Sylhet. Taking advantage,

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR