



A picture of the Louhajang river at Khudirampur in Tangail Sadar upazila taken in mid-April shows the river containing coloured liquid as toxic wastes from the nearby textile mills find their way into the water body. Right, unscrupulous people construct a wall to 'establish' ownership of the land of nearly dead Elongjani river at Nallapara in Delduar upazila of Tangail.

PHOTO: STAR

Encroachment, pollution wreak havoc on Tangail rivers

Low flow in the Jamuna due to withdrawal of water from upstream causes ripple effect

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Most of the rivers in the district are heading towards virtual death as the riverbeds remain waterless for nearly half of the year. There is some water flow in a few places, but it is so polluted that it cannot be used for any purpose, including irrigation, and vehicles are seen crossing the dried up riverbeds.

purchase centres there. But all these are past stories and now only some small engine boats can ply the same rivers during the dry season. As only a little water is available for about six months, the river transportation system in the district is in disorder. Most rivers in the district have silted up as they cannot carry silt too far due to reduction in their flow, said former water expert of United Nations engineer SI Khan. Water flow in the Jamuna river has reduced a lot due to withdrawal of water from upstream, he said. The situation has affected other rivers in the district, including the Dhaleswari, which have also silted up and their water containing capacity has decreased greatly, he said. "India has already constructed, and is constructing, at least six dams in different places upstream of Teesta river, including in

Gozaldoba. As they have redirected water flow to other places by constructing dams on the sub-rivers (upa nodi), the water flow has reduced in the main rivers (mul nodi) Teesta, Brahmaputra and Jamuna," Khan said. "If we get 50 percent share of Teesta water, and if we can reduce the cross sections of the rivers to get faster water flow, the rivers in the district will revive," he added. Fishermen and boatmen, who are mainly dependent on the rivers for their livelihood, are direct victims of drying up of the rivers. There are very few fish as their sanctuaries have been destroyed. District Water Development Board (WDB) Executive Engineer Shajahan Siraj said there are many rivers, canals and water bodies (beels) in the district and they play a vital role in protecting the environment. The Dhaleswari, New Dhaleswari, Louhajang, Elongjani and Jhinai are silted up every year and their courses are changed

due to indiscriminate lifting of silt, earth and sand, he said. The Buriganga Dredging Project was taken as a priority project of the office of the prime minister to ensure free water flow from Jamuna river to Buriganga river through Pungli river, he said. The work will start soon as the work order has been given for dredging the river, he added. "Although most of the rivers in Tangail are drying, no step has been taken to save them. Besides losing navigability, the rivers are victims of mindless pollution and grabbing by influential quarters," said environmental activist Masudur Rahman Rana. Deputy Commissioner Khan Mohammad Nurul Amin said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken short, mid and long term plans to protect the rivers, canals and water bodies in the country, he said.

'Robber' killed in police raid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur
An alleged robber was killed as police shot him during a drive in Gopalganj yesterday. Two other robbers and a police constable were also injured during the incident. The deceased was Tota Mondal, 45, son of late Khobir Ulla Mondal of Vellabariya village in Rajbari's Pangsha upazila. Md Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kashiani Police Station, said informed that a gang of 7/8 robbers were looting a bus and a truck in Dushor Bridge area around 3:00am a police team raided there. Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the robbers hurled stones at them, leaving a constable injured. At the time, police opened fire, leaving three robbers injured. Of them, Tota later died at Khulna Medical College Hospital. Two other injured robbers Haran Mondal, 30, son of Kashem Mondal of Rajbari Sadar, and Abir Hasan, 32, son of Rajob Ali of Jhenaidah, were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said the OC. The injured constable is undergoing treatment at Fairdpur Medical College Hospital.

FORCING DAUGHTER INTO PROSTITUTION Woman, second husband arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali
Police detained a woman and her second husband from Angarpara village in Barguna Sadar upazila early yesterday in connection with the case for forcibly engaging her daughter into prostitution. Following a case filed by the 16-year-old victim with Barguna Sadar Police Station on Monday night, police detained Lailee Begum and her second husband Abdul Khalek, who were later sent to jail through a Barguna court yesterday. Quoting the victim, OC of Sadar Police Station Mohammad Masuduzzaman said Lailee married her neighbour Abdul Khalek after her husband died when the victim was only 19 months old. Her mother stopped her schooling when she was in Class VII at a madrasa and since then she had been put into prostitution forcibly by her mother and stepfather. The girl became pregnant and last week she gave birth to a baby girl, who was later allegedly killed by the duo, the victim told the journalist at the police station. Three days after delivery, they again tried to force her into the same work but as she refused to do so they beat her mercilessly. Hearing screams, neighbours rescued her and took her to the police station, she added.

2 arrested with arms, ammo

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj
Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested two men with two pistols, nine bullets and four magazines from Dhaka Bus Stand area in the town yesterday. The arrestees are Abu Sayed alias Sabuj, 24, son of Gazlur Rahman of Kaliganj village in Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj and Akkas Ali, 45, son of Saheb Ali of Jhilbunia village in Bagerhat's Morelganj upazila. On secret information, the elite force raided the bus stand area around 9:30am and arrested the duo with firearms and bullets. Later, they were handed over to Sadar Police Station. A case was filed in this connection, said Rab-5 sources.

Jute farmers face setback as rain damages plants

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilhamari
Hailstorms and untimely rain have ruined large tracts of jute fields in the district, causing severe setback for jute growers. Untimely rain accelerates growth of grass and unwanted weeds that cover low lying jute fields in many areas, and the farmers are unable to root them out from wet and muddy fields. District Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Sub-assistant Agriculture Officer Arif Rabbani said a total of 2,025 acres of jute fields have been ruined in the district so far this year due to hailstorm and untimely rain, although farmers said the actual loss is much higher than that. He added that jute of local and tosha varieties was cultivated in 22, 626 acres of land this year, which is 3,211 acres less than last year's 25,837 acres, as farmers are losing interest in jute cultivation due to adverse weather and low price. Visiting some affected jute fields at Dogasi village in Sadar upazila, this correspondent found that grass and unwanted plants covered low lying fields, hindering growth of jute plants. "I cultivated jute on two acres of land and managed to weed out an acre before the rain started, but the rest is about to be ruined as I

could not weed it out due to continuous rain," said Abdul Jabbar, 55, owner of the field. "If we go for weeding in favourable weather it will need more day labourers, increasing production cost. To avoid loss, I will plough the field to cultivate Aus paddy," said Abul Kashem, 62, of Khaga Titpara village in Dimla upazila. "Only one month is left before we start harvesting from July. The jute plants are supposed to be 3ft to 4 ft in height as the seeds were sown in the first week of April, but they are now only 1ft to 1.5 ft in affected fields, and there is little hope of recovery," said farmer Bidhan Roy of Khatali village in Jaldhaka upazila. "Two hailstorms with heavy rain in May scattered most of the jute plants in my village, which was like a bolt from the blue to us as we took loan on interest from money lenders," said farmer Monwar Hossai, 50, of Ketkibari village in Domar upazila. "Farmers are likely to recover affected jute fields by engaging family labour as they know how to face adverse situations," said District DAE Deputy Director Abul Kashem Azad. "We encourage the farmers to cultivate Aus paddy on the damaged jute fields to make up for the loss caused by hailstorms and untimely rain," he added.



A farmer sees his jute field, covered with weeds due to untimely rain during the last couple of weeks, at Dogachhi village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila. PHOTO: STAR

Flavour of the season

Sweet Palmyra fruit even sweeter for farmers this year, amid growing popularity

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY with ANDREW EAGLE

It's easy to take good things for granted. The native Palmyra palm, locally known as a tal tree, is a familiar village resident. For generations its sweet fruit has been enjoyed, its sap tapped to make jaggery. But in Bagerhat the palm is so ubiquitous that in recent years consumers lost interest. Farmers cut down many palms in response to a market lull. This year however, the popularity of black-husked, gelatinous fruit is back. "I bought seven Palmyra fruit for Tk 6 each," says Lizu Akter, a household manager from Baraipara in Bagerhat Sadar upazila. "They're delicious! I prefer the middle part of the flesh, where the fruit is neither too hard nor soft. It's perfect to use when we break our Ramadan fast of an evening, especially as coconuts are much more expensive."



Green Palmyra palm, favourite for its juicy pulp during the ongoing summer, is loaded onto vehicles for sending to different places including Dhaka. The photo was taken at Fatepur Bazar in Kachua upazila of Bagerhat a few days ago. PHOTO: STAR

"My children like Palmyra fruit very much," says a neighbour, Farida Khatun. "I do too." It's not only village families that are rediscovering the delights of Palmyra fruit. Every day from across Bagerhat at least Tk 3 lakh worth of the fruit are being shipped to Dhaka. Trees which farmers had

come to view as unproductive are once again bringing in a pretty penny. It's quite a turn around, considering that in recent years Palmyra fruit were simply left to rot in the field. "I used to have 125 Palmyra palms," says farmer Ashim Kumar from Sangdia village in Kachua upazila. "I felled most of them since as a crop they weren't viable. Nobody wanted to collect the sap as it is hard work and costly. We used to

nearby Charkathi village. "We are thinking of planting more Palmyra palms." Wholesalers are also benefiting from the fruit's renewed popularity. "Each fruit costs around Tk 4 to buy from a farmer," says Illus Sheikh, a trader from Fatepur Bazar in Kachua. "Most of them we send to Dhaka to sell for up to Tk 20 per piece." "We will make up to Tk 3 lakh selling Palmyra fruit this season," says Akber, another trader at the same market. "Coconuts have become pricey. In Dhaka a coconut retails for as much as Tk 70 and here they cost up to Tk 50, when they are available. Palmyra fruit on the other hand is easier on the household budget. People prefer it these days." "Palmyra palm farmers were a little discouraged over the last few years," says the agriculture department's deputy director in Bagerhat, Aftab Uddin. "But now they are earning a good income from its fruit, without the need for any extra investment. We are encouraging farmers to plant Palmyra palms. The trees have an added benefit of offering protection from lightning strikes."

2 electrocuted, 2 killed by lightning

STAR COUNTRY DESK
Two men were electrocuted in Rajbari and Faridpur while a minor and a farmer were killed by lightning in Jhenidah and Faridpur. A man died from electrocution at Mukundia village in Rajbari Sadar upazila on Monday morning, reports our Faridpur Correspondent. The deceased was farmer Babul Gazi, 48, son of Motalab Gazi of the village. Family members said Babul came in contact with a live electric wire while he was working at his house. He later died at Rajbari General Hospital. Meanwhile, Badsha Mollik, 55, son of Rohim Mollik of Faridpur's Boalmari upazila came in contact with live electric wire when he went to cut bamboo beside his house. He later died at a hospital, said Sukanto Datta, sub-inspector of Boalmari Police Station. Apart from this, a farmer was killed by lightning at Chilarchar village in Faridpur Sadar on Saturday. The victim was Mahabub Sardar, 32, son of late Abu Talab Sardar of the village. In Jhenidah, a thunderbolt struck a seven-year-old boy, leaving him dead on the spot at Krishnanagar village under Shailakupa upazila on Saturday. The victim was Hridoy Das, son of Bizon Das of the village, reports our correspondent. The incident took place when he along with his grandmother was returning home after taking a dip in the Garai river, said police and locals. Injured grandmother was admitted to Kushtia Medical College Hospital, said Alamgir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Shailakupa Police Station.

UP member held as trees felled illegally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna
A local union parishad (UP) member was held on charge of cutting roadside trees at Natunvarenga village in Bera upazila on Sunday. The arrestee, Md Abdur Rahim, member of ward No 2 of Natunvarenga UP, was sent to jail through the court. Bera Police Station OC Md Mozaffar Hossain said Rahim and his men cut 20 to 25 valuable trees beside Natunvarenga-Kushia road on Friday, ignoring the protest of the villagers. Local elite Md Khalilur Rahman, also a member of the forestation committee in the village, filed a case against Rahim with the police station on Saturday night and police arrested Rahim from his residence the next day, the OC said, adding that the arrestee admitted his crime to police. "If Rahim is guilty he must be punished. He will not get support from the UP," said UP Chairman Md Amzad Hossain.