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"We fully agree the causes, solutions to the crisis lie with Myanmar, and that's why we're using all tools at our disposal to help."
CANADIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO BANGLADESH BENOIT PRÉFONTAINE
IN DHAKA PAGE 3



"When our physicians and sisters start with asking patient how he or she is with a smiling face, the patients feel 50 percent cured."
CRP FOUNDER VALERIE ANN TAYLOR AT ITS HEADQUARTERS PAGE 3



"I don't think justice can ever be or ought to be instant and justice must never ever take the form of revenge."
CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA SA BOBDE ON THE KILLING OF 4 SUSPECTED RAPISTS BY POLICE PAGE 14



Fresh onslaught on Meghna

River custodians turning a blind eye to filling up of Meghna foreshore by influential grabbers

TAWFIQUE ALI

A river under onslaught. An open defiance of a High Court order. And inept river custodians.

These are the key ingredients of the recipe for the relentless and massive sand-filling, which is ongoing yet again in the Meghna.

During a recent visit to the Meghna -- which today is a hapless prey to ruthless grabbing -- in Munshiganj, about half a dozen unloading dredgers were seen dumping sand into the river in broad daylight to reclaim land from river foreshores and floodplains.

The yet-to-be identified land claimants have embarked on the encroachment at a point where the Meghna meets its tributary Menikhali channel in Islampur (Ganganagar) in Char Betagi mouja of Gazaria upazila.

The grabbing is taking place with facilitation of the Munshiganj district administration and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) -- the two foremost custodians of the river.

Asked who was reclaiming the land, a couple of workers at the spot replied that they were not aware of it. They said a

contractor had employed them to fill the river with sand, but they refused to name names.

"The half a dozen river custodians like BIWTA and local administration seem blissfully unaware of the plundering of the river or else it could not have happened," said an outraged Md Abu Sadeque, a local villager and fisherman.

Sheikh Masud Kamal, a BIWTA joint director and port officer of Narayanganj river port, during a telephone conversation, at first said he was not even aware of the sand-filling in the Meghna and its foreshores.

Pointed out that this correspondent had visited the river recently and saw the encroachment firsthand, Kamal said, "I will be sending a team to inspect the location... But I cannot say exactly when I can let you know what is happening."

Told that the river-filling had been going on for at least a couple of months, he backtracked on his earlier comments and said, "We have allowed them to fill the site with sand, using unloading dredgers on a limited scale for a short while to set up a petroleum company."

Asked whether BIWTA had issued a

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A man tries to fish in the Meghna while huge metal pipes pour silt on the river to fill it up at Gazaria of Munshiganj. A private petroleum purification plant is filling up the river, defying a High Court order. Such illegal acts have become rampant and the authorities concerned remain oblivious to those.

PHOTO:
RASHED SHUMON



Govt plans to set up virtual court: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government was thinking of introducing a virtual court in the country.

Speaking at the National Judicial Conference-2019, she said it would reduce the risk and hassle to move notorious criminals to and from jail.

She also hoped that judges, being accountable to the country, its people and the constitution, would help ensure the rule of law and justice using their merit and creativity.

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98pc textbooks sent to upazilas

All set for Jan 1 book festival in schools

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Almost all the new textbooks have reached upazilas and the process has begun to send those to schools for distribution among students on January 1.

For the last one decade, the government has been making sure that schoolchildren across the country begin their New Year with the uplifting smell of freshly printed textbooks.

It is always a daunting task to print over 35 crore textbooks for different subjects and send those to more than 1.25 lakh institutions almost at the same time.

But the authorities have met the challenge with flying colours, enabling the country to see almost 100 percent enrolment at primary and a significant rise in enrolment at secondary level.

The success also led to decrease in the dropout rate significantly at both the levels, say officials of National Curriculum and Textbook Board.

Well-designed textbooks in required number is one of the effective ways to improve classroom instructions and learning outcomes, they added.

As of yesterday, said NCTB Controller of Distribution Prof Ziaul Haque, 98 percent of textbooks for the academic year 2020 have reached the upazilas.

The government is set to distribute 35,39,14,197 copies of textbooks among 4,27,52,198 students on the first day of 2020.

Since 2010, it has distributed 296 crore copies among 43.19 students.

"Bangladesh has set a rare example in the world through distribution

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Total number of
TEXTBOOKS
35.39cr

Total number of
STUDENTS
4.27cr

Govt spending on
FREE BOOKS
Tk 1,011cr

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Malaria cases drop by 62pc

WHO report mentions remarkable success of Bangladesh in 2017-18

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Bangladesh witnessed a remarkable 62 percent decline in the prevalence of malaria in 2017-18, said a World Health Organization report.

There were a total of 5,133 presumed and confirmed malaria cases detected in 2017, which dropped to 1,919 the following year.

Praising Bangladesh for its efforts to eradicate the mosquito-borne disease, the report said, "Two countries in the region reported substantial decline in total reported cases between 2017 and 2018: by 62 percent in Bangladesh and by 21 percent in Thailand."

In Bangladesh, only seven malaria patients died in 2018, which was 13 in 2017. The number was 37 in 2010, the report mentioned.

WHO, in its "World Malaria Report 2019" released on December 4, said women, children and economically vulnerable groups were hit the hardest. It summed up the progress made by countries and the current problems to overcome.

This year, Bangladesh witnessed the deadliest attack of dengue, another mosquito-borne disease that killed 112 people, although unofficial figures are much higher.



On this day in 1971

DECEMBER 8

Pakistan army regiments become detached from one another. They have no way to flee back to Dhaka. General Jagjit Singh is told to march towards Dhaka with his troops. Meanwhile, a brigade is told to march forward towards Mymensingh from Haluaghat.

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, chief of Indian army, asks the occupying Pakistan

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'My daughter couldn't have killed herself'

Says Rumpa's father

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Although police found some clues, mystery over the death of Stamford University student Rubaiyat Sharmin Rumpa was yet to be resolved.

On Wednesday, her body was found near a building on an alley of Siddheshwari Circular Road in the capital.

Yesterday police said Rumpa, 22, had visited the 11-storey building -- Ayesha Shopping Complex -- around 5:00pm on that day. One of her schoolfriends lives on the fourth floor.

During the visit, Rumpa shared her frustration over personal issues and even cried before her friend, said police, quoting the friend.

Around 5:30pm, Rumpa left the building for giving tuitions to her fourth grader student near her home in Shantibagh.

Around 6:40pm, she returned to her home and

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The weightlifters lifted the gloom around the Bangladesh camp after three days without a gold, as Ziarul Islam (L) and Mabia Akter Simanta (R) struck gold. Things got even better soon after as fencer Fatema Mujib won the country's third gold of the day.

PHOTO:
COLLECTED

Mabia ushers in second gold rush

ATIQUE ANAM from Kathmandu

Mabia Akter Simanta ended Bangladesh's three-day gold-drought at the 13th South Asian Games yesterday before two more gold medals on the day turned it into Bangladesh's best day of the Games since Day 3.

The 2016-edition gold medalist lifted a total of 185 kilos in women's 76-kg category of weightlifting in Pokhara -- 80 kilos in snatch and 105 kilos in clean & jerk -- to beat Sri Lanka's BC Priyanthi by one kilo.

In doing so, Mabia became the first athlete from Bangladesh in this millennium to win gold medals in



Fatema



back-to-back SA Games.

The 20-year-old Bangladesh Ansar sportswoman was delighted to have won back-to-back gold medals, setting her personal best effort.

"We needed this gold. I am really happy that it came. It was difficult this time around as there were more competitors. There was more pressure on me as everyone expected me to win, unlike the last time when I was a rookie," said Mabia, who lifted three kilos less than her Sri Lankan counterpart in snatch before overtaking her by one kilo in clean & jerk.

Mabia had won her 2016 gold in Guwahati in 63-kg category. In three years, she has gained weight, which forced changes in her training methods and diet. She has also received rewards for her feat of 2016.

However, one thing that has not changed is practice

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