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TOBACCO FARMING IN MANIKCHHARI

3 villages give it up

Toxic runoff from upstream polluted Halda river for years; a non-govt initiative helps famers return to other crops

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Growing various crops was the only source of livelihood for the people of Gorkhana, Chodurkhil, and Haldarchar -- three villages in Manikchhari upazila of Khagrachhari where the Halda river originates.

Farming in remote, rugged territory, they had to struggle to find buyers and were often forced to sell off their produce at low prices.

In 2007, farmers in these villages were approached by representatives of tobacco companies who proposed that if they cultivated tobacco, it would be bought from them at twice the market price.

Saira Begum, 45, of Gorkhana village of Manikchhari upazila, told The Daily Star they were tempted as the tobacco companies supplied seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides to the farmers for free.

Most importantly, she said, the companies would buy directly from their village, ridding the farmers of the hassle they face in selling their produce.

The farmers started growing tobacco as a cash crop and while it provided a steady source of income for them, it led to an environmental problem which became evident over

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A vested quarter has built an illegal road across the Ubdakhali river in Netrakona's Kalmakanda upazila so that dirt could be carried to a brick kiln that has no DoE clearance. Locals say that influential people built the road taking advantage of the river going dry. During monsoon, the river plays an important role in the transportation of people and goods.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Verdict to be delivered at noon today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The judgement in the case filed over blogger Avijit Roy's murder against six members of banned militant outfit Ansar al Islam is set to be delivered today.

Judge Md Majibur Rahman of the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka is scheduled to read out the judgement around 12:00 noon, Assistant Public Prosecutor Golam Sharuar Khan told The Daily Star.

The six accused are: Sayed Mohammad Ziaul Haque alias Major (sacked) Zia, Akram Hossain, Abu Siddiq Sobel, Mozammel Hossain Saimon, Arafat Rahman Siam and Shafur Rahman Farabi.

Of them, Zia and Akram are still absconding, while the four others are behind bars.

Earlier, 28 prosecution witnesses, including Avijit's father Prof Ajoy Roy, who passed away on

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ACC sues DGHS driver, wife

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Driver of Directorate General of Health Services Abdul Malek



alias Badal, who came to the fore for his alleged involvement in illegal recruitments, manipulating transfers and promotions and trading in fake currencies, was found to have amassed about Tk 1.5 crore illegally, according to a case filed by the ACC.

His wife Nargis Begum has illegal wealth worth about Tk 1.10 crore, the graft watchdog said.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) on Sunday night filed two cases against Malek and his wife.

ACC's Assistant Director Syed Nazrul Islam filed the cases, said Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, ACC's public relations officer.

The ACC began an enquiry into Malek and his wife's wealth in 2019 but the enquiry got momentum after Rab arrested Malek on September 20 last year and seized a firearm, a

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COUP IN MYANMAR

Small protests after troops deployed

2 hurt as police fire rubber bullets in Mandalay; Suu Kyi's detention extended



AGENCIES

Protesters in Myanmar kept up demands yesterday for the release of ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and an end to military rule despite the deployment of armoured vehicles and more soldiers on the streets.

Suu Kyi, detained since a February 1 coup against her elected government, had been expected to face a court in connection with charges of illegally importing six

walkie-talkie radios, but a judge said her remand lasted until Wednesday, her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, said.

The coup and arrest of Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi and hundreds of others have sparked the biggest protests in Myanmar in more than a decade, with hundreds of thousands denouncing the military's derailment of a tentative transition to democracy.

"This is a fight for our future, the future

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Freedom fighter sues OC, 8 others

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A freedom fighter has sued nine people, including two policemen, for illegally lifting stones from his property in Jaflong of Sylhet's Gowainghat upazila.

Insan Ali of Jaflong Nayabasti area filed the case with Sylhet Senior Special Session Judge's Court on Sunday. Later, the court tasked the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) with the investigation, said Insan's lawyer Shah Alam.

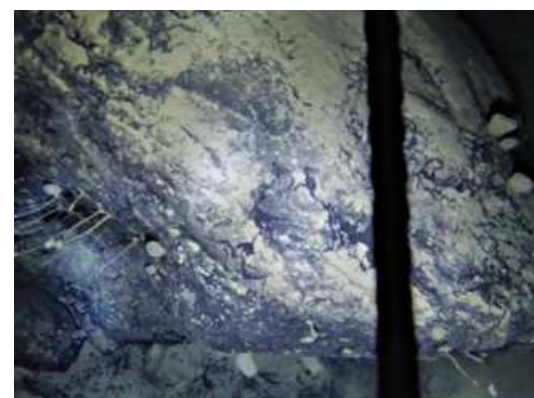
The accused cops are Officer-in-Charge Abdul Ahad of Gowainghat Police Station and Sub-Inspector of the police station Abdul Mannan.

The case statement says a group of unscrupulous traders with the help of the policemen has been illegally lifting stones from Insan's property and nearby government land under the Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) for around a month.

According to a gazette notification issued in 2015, around 15sqkm area, from the Jaflong-Dawki river

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Life found 900m under Antarctic ice



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have discovered life that "shouldn't be there" under a 900-metre-thick Antarctic ice shelf.

Immobile life forms including what appear to be sponges and possibly barnacles were spotted on a boulder beneath the Filchner-Ronne Ice Shelf, 260km away from open water that carries the food such organisms rely on.

The discovery was made after a team led by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) drilled through the ice shelf and dropped a camera into the hole in order to explore the seabed below.

Huw Griffiths, a marine biogeographer at BAS, told the New Scientist there were "all sorts of reasons they shouldn't be there", since the creatures likely survive on photosynthetic organisms that require sunlight absent at the bottom of the giant ice shelf.

According to the study, published in Frontiers in Marine Science, Antarctic ocean currents suggest the animals' food source could be drifting

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11 more die, 446 infected with Covid

UNB, Dhaka

Covid-19 claimed 11 more lives and another 446 got infected in Bangladesh in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

With the latest figures, the Covid-19 fatalities rose to 8,285 and the caseload to 541,038, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

In a handout, the DGHS said the daily coronavirus infection rate in Bangladesh rose to 3.15 percent from Sunday's 2.53 percent, while the overall infection rate stood at 14.01 percent.

However, the mortality rate remained almost steady at 1.53 percent for the past few days, said

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PRAYER TIMING FEBRUARY 16

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-25 12-45 4-30 5-57 7-15
JAMAAT 6-00 1-15 4-45 6-01 7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Nato will not leave before 'time is right'

Says Stoltenberg

AFP, Brussels

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday the alliance will not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan "before the time is right", ahead of a discussion by defence ministers on the deployment.

The ministers of the 30 Nato member states will on Wednesday and Thursday hold their highest-level talks since US President Joe Biden took office vowing to work closer with allies after four years of tensions under Donald Trump.

Top of the agenda for the virtual conference will be the fate of the alliance's 9,600-strong support mission in Afghanistan after Trump struck a deal with the Taliban to withdraw troops.

The deployment's future hinges on whether Biden agrees to stick to a May deadline to pull out foreign forces or risks a bloody backlash from the Islamist insurgents by staying put.

"While no ally wants to stay in Afghanistan longer

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Councilor-elect held for murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

Police in Patiya yesterday arrested newly elected councillor Sarwar Kamal Mosleh Uddin Rajib over the killing of a man in front of a polling centre on Sunday.

Sarwar was elected as the councillor of ward-8 in the Patiya Municipality election which was marked by allegations of voter fraud and violence.

Abdul Mabud, 45, brother of another councillor runner, was fatally stabbed during a clash between supporters of Sarwar and another contender in front of Gobindarkhil Government Primary School, said Rezaul Karim, said officer-in-charge of Patiya Police Station.

Locals said about nine people were injured in the

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টেকসই ও নবায়নযোগ্য জ্বালানি উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ (স্রেডা)

বিদ্যুৎ বিভাগ

জ্বালানি দক্ষ যন্ত্রপাতি স্থাপনে, ৫% হারে ঋণ গ্রহণ করুন।

জ্বালানি সাশ্রয়ের মাধ্যমে নিজে লাভবান হউন এবং দেশকে উপকৃত করুন।

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