

No fervour this year

Panchagarh to pay tribute to boat-capsize victims on Durga Puja

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

This year, Durga Puja will bring no joy to the Hindu community in Panchagarh.

Devotees are set to observe their biggest religious festival unceremoniously, to pay tribute to those who have tragically passed away in a boat capsized in Korotoa river last Sunday.

Boda and Debiganj upazila units of Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Oikya Parishad, and Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad held separate meetings at their upazila headquarters yesterday and took the decision, said general secretary of district unit Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad Bipen Chandra Roy.

The leaders of the organisations will also arrange special prayers on Saptami for the deceased and donate cash to the victims' families.

A total of 296 mandaps are being prepared to observe the puja in the district, said Bipen.

Meanwhile, divers were still at work to find the three missing persons -- Bhupan Chandra Barman (40), Soren Chandra Barman (65), and Joya Rani (4) -- in Korotoa, days after the incident.

A boat carrying over 100 passengers -- mostly Hindu devotees -- on their way to Bodeshwari temple to observe Mahalaya capsized in Korotoa in the Panchagarh's Boda upazila on Sunday afternoon.

At least 69 bodies were recovered until yesterday evening.



On the occasion of the 224th death anniversary of Rajarshi Bhagya Chandra, artists of India's Rajarshi Bhagya Chandra Cultural Foundation performed a traditional Manipuri dance at Manipuri Rajbari Mandap in Sylhet on Thursday. Bhagyachandra, a Manipuri monarch of the 18th century, was the initiator of "Manipuri Raas Leela" dance.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Funeral of Ranesh Maitra held with state honour

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

The funeral of Ekushey Padak-winning journalist and columnist



Ranesh Maitra was held with state honour in Pabna yesterday afternoon. A veteran of the Language Movement and Liberation War, Ranesh breathed his last on September 26. He was 89.

Around noon yesterday, his body reached his Beltola road house from Dhaka where family members, relatives and well-wishers gathered to pay their respects.

His body was then taken to Pabna Rafikul Islam Bokul Independence Square around 2:00pm where people from all strata of life placed flowers at his coffin.

Deputy

Speaker

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'Dissolve current parliament'

Ganatantra Mancha announces rallies in 8 divisional cities

DU CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of "Ganatantra Mancha", a new alliance of seven political parties, demanded dissolving of the current parliament and urged for fair elections under a caretaker government.

The demand came from a rally yesterday in front of the National Museum in Shahbagh.

Speakers at the rally said this government is autocratic and cannot be trusted to ensure democracy and good governance.

"The government has created a culture of fear, by abduction and enforced disappearances of those who criticise any decision taken by the government and the oppression carried out by them," they said.

Ganatantra Mancha will hold eight divisional rallies throughout October, declared Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon.

Among others, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President ASM Abdur Rob, Nagarik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna, and Gono Odhikar Parishad Member Secretary Nurul Haque Nur, spoke at the rally, presided over by Jonayed Saki.

Battery-run vehicles add to Khulna's power woes

DIPANKAR ROY

Despite the energy crisis, hundreds of battery-powered vehicles, easy-bikes and vans are plying Khulna roads consuming huge amounts of electricity everyday.

Locals have urged authorities to take strict measures against them as this is a luxury they can't afford amid the ongoing crisis.

According to Khulna's traffic department, there are over 30,000 battery driven easy bikes in the city. There are no statistics on the actual figures of electricity-powered vehicles, as they are mostly unregistered.

Many traders, who set up illegal lines to charge these vehicles have benefitted from this situation, earning thousands each day.

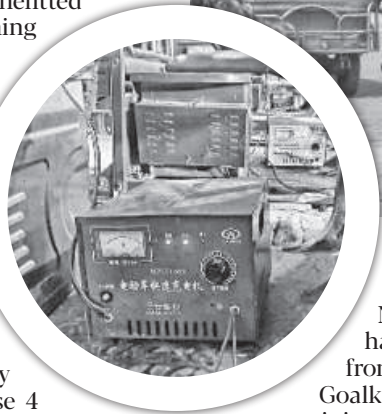
These businesses don't even have the approval to charge vehicles, as they only have residential meter approval from West Zone Power Distribution Company (WZPDC).

According to experts and easy bike drivers, five batteries are used to operate an easy bike, with a 200 amperes capacity each. Rickshaws and vans use 4 batteries, which are 120 amperes each.

Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, professor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at Khulna University of Engineering & Technology Kuet and WZPDC director, said 1 kilowatt of electricity is required to charge a 1,000 ampere battery for one hour.

So, 10 kilowatts of electricity is needed to charge an easy bike for 10 hours.

If 30,000 easy bikes need to be charged daily in the city, then 300,000 kilowatts of electricity is used for charging. The government is losing huge revenue as a result.



Robiul Alom, an easy bike driver of Khalishpur's Notun Rasta area, said he has to pay Tk 14 per unit from a charging point at Goalkhali and the vehicle takes a minimum of 8 to 10 hours to get fully charged.

Md Moshir Rahman Milon, general secretary of Easy Bike Sramik League, said they don't know the exact figure of easy bikes, but it might be over 25,000.

He defended easy-bikes, pointing out its affordability and popularity among low and middle income groups.

Sheikh Ashraf Uz Zaman, president of Greater Khulna Development Struggle Coordinating Committee, said, "Huge amounts of electricity is being consumed by

illegal battery-run three-wheelers. If we can control these, the power shortage will reduce."

He demanded that the district authorities conduct drives against these illegal charging points.

Tanveer Ahmed, assistant director of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), said they're aware that illegal battery-run vehicles are plying Khulna roads and highways.

BRTA doesn't give registrations and route permits for easy-bikes and battery-run rickshaws.

However, some local government bodies -- union parishads, pourasavas and city corporations -- have unofficially permitted them to ply, as they're popular in use due to their cheaper fares, he added.

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Palm trees to the rescue

Rural library plants 500 seeds to reduce lightning casualties in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Tangail*

A rural library in Tangail planted palm seeds beside Gharinda Railway station yesterday to play its part in preventing lightning casualties.

The youths of Batighar Adarsha Pathagar planted 500 palm seeds on both sides of the Joydevpur-Bangabandhu bridge railway line yesterday with the motto -- "planting more palm trees to reduce lightning casualties".

Led by founder Kamruzzaman Sohag, library treasurer Mansur Helal, librarian Sajjad Hossain, members Sumon Miah, Mohammad Ripon, Shamim Al Mamun, and other volunteers participated in this work.



Kamruzzaman Sohag, a sub-inspector of police by profession, told The Daily Star, "Palm trees play an important role in preventing natural disasters like lightning. Tall trees help reduce lightning casualties."

Sohag established Batighar Adarsha Pathagar at his Chaurakarra village in Tangail Sadar upazila in 2010 when he was a student of the criminology and police science department of Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University.

Since then, the rural library has been conducting various social programmes to cultivate reading habits among people and build a knowledge-based society, said the organisers.

'Afraid of losing it all over again'

Sand bags dumped in Teesta shoal washing away; locals complain of irregularities

S DILIP ROY

In just one month, the sand-filled geo bags, dumped to prevent river erosion in Teesta shoal, are washing away.

The bags were dumped recently to prevent river erosion at Purbo Kalmati village of Khuniagach Union in Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila.

Locals, however, alleged of gross irregularities in the process and said if this continues the river bank will start to erode.

They further alleged that geo bags were filled with less sand and dumped abruptly. They also asked the Water Development Board (WDB) officials to explain the situation, but to no avail.

Monnaf Ali of Purbo Kalmati village, said, "The number of geo bags used were way less than what was originally promised."

Because of this, within a short period of time, the bags are washing away into the river.

"Due to river erosion, my home and arable land has already been eaten up by the Teesta. Now my family has been living in another piece of land by the river bank. I'm afraid of losing everything all over



again," he said.

A worried Rupali Begum of the same village, said the erosion has stopped for now, but if the water level rises, it may recur. The government spends a lot of money to dump sand-filled bags to prevent erosion, but due to irregularities, the erosion continues.

Contacted, sub-divisional engineer of Lalmonirhat WDB Abdul Quader said 5,500 geo bags were dumped in Purbo Kalmati village at a cost of Tk 30 lakh. This has stopped river erosion for now, he said.

However, Mizanur Rahman, executive

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Standing on the hull of a traditional boat, fishers throw in their nets in the seemingly calm waters of the Kirtankhola to catch fishes like pangash and ayer. This photo was taken in Barishal recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS