

Swiss envoy pays farewell call on president



UNB, Dhaka

Swiss Ambassador to Bangladesh Nathalie Chuard on Thursday paid a farewell call on President Abdul Hamid at Bangabhaban.

During the meeting, the head of the state sought continuous cooperation from Switzerland in the economic development and expansion of trade and commerce in Bangladesh, President's Press Secretary Md Joynal Abedin told the news agency.

Referring to the effects of climate change, Hamid said Bangladesh and Switzerland would work together to this end.

About the Rohingya repatriation issue, he said Rohingyas are getting various support from different donor countries and agencies, but the peaceful repatriation of these people remains a major challenge.

The president sought continued cooperation from Switzerland to end the crisis.

The outgoing ambassador lauded the unprecedented development of Bangladesh in different sectors, including trade expansion and women's empowerment.

The envoy thanked the president for his overall cooperation during her tenure in Bangladesh.



The regional round of the season 3 of The Daily Star Newspaper Olympiad was held at ZH Sikder University of Science and Technology in Shariatpur yesterday. A total of 284 students from Shariatpur and Munshiganj districts participated in the event. Of them, 50 participants were selected for the finale in Dhaka on March 20 where they will compete with participants from across the country.

PHOTO: STAR

'Not enough space for artisans at craft fair'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A month-long craft fair and folk festival is currently ongoing at Folk and Craft Foundation in Sonargaon, Narayanganj.

Every year, this fair is organised to promote traditional folk art. This year, 32 shops have been allotted for 64 artisans from different parts of the country. As a result, artisans have been facing problems in terms of the space allotted to them.

Talking to the artisans, this correspondent found that they weren't aware about this allotting system. Besides, in other years, an honorarium (Tk 500 per day) was allotted for an artisan along with an associate. But this year, the organisers skimped out on payment for their associate.

Rashida Begum, an artisan working with jute products, said, "I came to this fair this year for the first time. I'm already having such a bad experience since I can't showcase most of my products due to a lack of space."

Many other artisans shared similar grievances.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader opened the fair on January 18. State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khaled was also present.



Former MP Shahidul Islam passes away

UNB, Narail

Former Narail-2 lawmaker and Khelafat Majlish leader Mufti Shahidul Islam passed away on Thursday. He was 65.

He breathed his last around 12:30am at his madrasa "Abu Hurayra" in Manikganj, said Mostafizur Rahman Alek, president of Narail Sadar BNP.

Mufti Shahidul had been suffering from various diseases including diabetes for a long time.

Shahidul, also the founder chairman of Al-Markazul Islami, left behind his wife, two sons and four daughters to mourn his death.

The first namaz-e-janaza of Mufti Shahidul was held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Juma prayers.

Later, he was buried in front of the Al-Markazul Islami Complex after the second namaz-e-janaza. The Khelafat Majlish leader was elected to parliament in a by-election from Narail-2 constituency on BNP-led four-party alliance's ticket in 2002.



Even in winter, there's erosion

At least 50 homesteads devoured by Jamuna in Sirajganj's Chowhali

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

"I have never seen such erosion in winter," said Md Abdul Karim, a resident of Binanai village in Sirajganj's Chowhali upazila, who currently lives under the open sky amid the cold winter.

"We are habituated with rampant river erosion over the years. But all these years, we could breathe a sigh of relief in winter. To our surprise, the silent Jamuna became furious in last few weeks devouring our homesteads," said Karim.

Sajeda Khatun, another resident of the village, said, "I have repeatedly shifted my house since monsoon. Now I have nowhere to go. Nobody cares enough to help us."

According to sources, 50 people have lost their homesteads for sudden river erosion on the last three weeks, while several hundred people -- living beside the river -- shifted their houses for evading erosion in Baghutia union of the upazila.

Contacted, Md Babul Sarkar, member of ward-3, however, said nobody was prepared for such an untimely erosion in winter.

"The river used to be calm in winter. However, this year, Jamuna river has turned furious and started devouring homesteads quickly," he



said.

"Erosion victims are living in crises and we are unable to help them, due to the lack of preparation," he added.

Md Abul Kalam, chairman of Baghutia union parishad, said at least 50 homesteads were devoured in Jamuna in three wards of the union, stretching across one-kilometre area from Binanai to Char Salimabad in the last three weeks.

"Seven educational institutions are presently under the threat of erosion. We need permanent protection work for saving villages beside the river in Baghutia union," he said.

"Water development board (WDB) earlier dumped sand bags from Binanai to Char Salimabad point but the

already went under the river. We have already reported about the sudden erosion seeking help for the victims," he added.

Contacted, Milton Hossain, sub-divisional engineer of Sirajganj WDB, said Jamuna is flowing downstream, so the river's upstream is badly affected.

"River erosion generally occurs due to the fluctuation of water levels in the river. As the water level recedes, the river flows downstream and so, the river's upstream dries up rapidly and erodes," Milton said.

WDB has already submitted a project of Tk 46 crore for the remaining work to protect the riverbank from erosion three-kilometre area.

However, the project is yet to be approved, said Milton.

Parliamentary team attends PUIC meeting in Algeria

UNB, Dhaka

A three-member team of Bangladesh Parliament yesterday participated in the 48th meeting of the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Union of OIC Member States (PUIC) in Algeria.

The head of Bangladesh delegation and also the chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Md Shahiduzzaman Sarker spoke at the meeting, said a press release.

Shahiduzzaman requested the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) to strengthen its support to Bangladesh over the peaceful repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar from Bangladesh.

He also raised the Rohingya issue while talking to PUIC general secretary.

Two other members of the Bangladesh team are Abu Reza Muhammad Nezamuddin MP and SM Shahjada MP, according to the press release.

Man held with 20kg venison in Sundarbans

UNB, Khulna

The forest department officials on Thursday evening detained a man with 20kg venison from the Nilkamal area of the Sundarbans in Khulna.

The detainee was identified as Hiru Akon of Barguna. Zahirul Islam, in-charge of Nilkamal Wildlife Sanctuary in the Sundarbans, said a patrol team of the forest department detained Akon, "a member of a deer poaching gang," while he along with others was trying to flee the scene after sensing the forest officers' presence.

The team also seized a fishing boat, a gun, 19 rounds of bullets, equipment used to trap deer, and sharp weapons. "Akon was sent to jail on Thursday and legal action will be taken against others," Zahirul said.

Woman dies as truck runs her over in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A woman was killed as a truck ran her over in Dinajpur town yesterday.

Sarada Bala, 60, wife of late Niranjan Roy from Dainur village in Dinajpur Sadar upazila, died on the spot, said police.

The woman was riding pillion on her son's motorbike, said Tanvirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Dinajpur Sadar Police Station. When the motorcycle arrived at Moharaja Mor in the town around 12:30pm, she fell from the speeding bike and the truck crushed her. Her son was unhurt, said police.

Locals caught the truck, but its driver and assistant fled.

Here, a woman rows the boat

FROM PAGE 5
village. On the east bank of the river stands Meermadan village. The Rauna Kheyaghat (boat terminal) is the only way for the people of Doani to reach the east bank via boat.

One Elem Gazi used to ferry passengers between the villages.

However, after his passing, the men of Doania refused to take up the task, as the difficult job does not even pay well.

That is when Akhlma decided to take up the mantle from the late Elem Gazi. The same men who refused to take the job in the first place were strictly opposed to the idea. But Akhlma took the responsibility anyway and succeeded in making a living.

After a year, her brother Abdul Mannan Mridha brought her a new boat. The boat has stayed with her ever since, for the last 20 years.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw Akhlma ferrying passengers of all backgrounds -- students,

day labourers, patients and elderlies.

She received this correspondent with a wide smile when he hopped in and joined the journey.

"I collect Tk five from each passenger per trip. I earn Tk 200-300 per day," she said.

"However, I'm always sympathetic to the cause of schoolgoers and the impoverished," she added.

This warm nature of Akhlma made her a popular figure in the village.

"She is always kind to her passengers, especially the kids. People of our village sing praises of her bravery and kind heart," said Abdul Latif, a local.

However, Akhlma believes her days on the boat are numbered.

"I have grown physically weak. It would have been great if I got an investor for setting up a shop or starting poultry farming," she said.

"A few years ago, my youngest daughter's husband abandoned her and their child. Now I take care of them as well. So my savings will not sustain

us for long if I retire now without any alternative plan," she added, in a rather sad tone, with her smile beginning to fade.

18 years gone

FROM PAGE 3
counsel of the case, said there are 171 witnesses in the charge sheet. The depositions of 47 witnesses have been recorded so far.

The investigation officer, Sylhet's ASP (CID) Meherun Nesa Parul filed a supplementary charge sheet against 32 persons by including 11 new names on December 21, 2014.

She accused 35 persons including Khaleda Zia's former political secretary Harris Chowdhury and the then Sylhet mayor Ariful.

The trial began in September 2015. Thirty-two people, including former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, were indicted in the case in 2015. The probe was delayed by 10 years.

The CID investigated the case thrice. The charges were framed on October 22, 2020 in the explosives case.

Nobody's children

FROM PAGE 3
According to the Ministry of Social Welfare, there are currently only two drop-in centres and one emergency shelter for them.

A 2021 joint study by Consortium for Street Children, Commonwealth Foundation, LEEDO, Grambangla Unnayan Committee and Ahsania Mission also mentioned that 98.5 percent of street children are deprived of education, work an average of 10 hours a day, while 35 percent of them are involved in begging.

"A child, first of all, has the right to shelter, safety, food, and education, all of which apply to street children as well. But they are not enjoying any rights, moreover, they are falling victim to sexual and physical abuse," said Save the Children's director for Child Protection and Child Rights Governance Abdullah Al Mamun.

"These children also face economic abuse and more importantly, are involved in drugs and many other criminal activities. As a result, their overall conditions are worsening day by day," he said.

(The report is translated by Nilima Jahan)

DNCC partners

FROM PAGE 3
behalf of their respective organisations in the USA on Thursday (local time), said a DNCC press release.

Detroit City Deputy Mayor Todd Bettison, DNCC Secretary Mohammed Masud Alam Siddique and Bangladesh American Public Affairs Committee Chairman Ehsan Takbim, among others, were present during the signing

ceremony.

Atiqul said relationship between the USA and Dhaka will be strengthened through cooperation by Detroit city on several issues including cleanliness, traffic management, drainage system and urban development as per the deal.

Atiqul confirmed his counterpart Michael E Duggan's visit to Bangladesh in February next year.

Tea garden at cost

FROM PAGE 5
the lease of the land near Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary in Habiganj's Chunarughat upazila some years ago. The sanctuary was a safe habitat for wildlife and hosted century-old trees.

On January 19, the tea estate decided to expand its garden by setting trees in the leased area on fire. The fire spread over to the wildlife sanctuary, killing dozens of animals and destroying countless trees.

During a recent visit to the place, this correspondent found proof of the devastation as he saw charred bodies of capped langurs, barking deer, Indian civets, hilly mynas, squirrels, herons and countless other wildlife lying all over the sanctuary.

'NOBODY KILLED THE ANIMALS'
An investigative team of the forest department said there was no evidence of wildlife burning. Locals and environmentalists, on the other hand, slammed the report by saying they were not interviewed.

Khalilur Rahman, who

headed the probe body, said, "We have investigated the allegations and talked to local tea workers. We did not find any proof of the allegations."

"A probe body of the forest department is investigating the matter. Only they can tell the truth. I have nothing to say beyond that," said tea estate manager Moin Uddin.

Nasir Uddin Khan, a village doctor of Daragaon area, said, "I go to Hatimara tea garden almost every day. I have seen the burnt corpses of many animals after the wildfire. Many century-old trees have been uprooted." Rather than conserving wildlife, the forest department is taking the side of the perpetrators. This is regrettable.

Robi Costa, coordinator of Mita Foundation, said, "The forest department investigated the matter without interviewing any experts. Only tea workers were interviewed. They will not speak up against the tea estate as their job is on the line."

"When I wanted to speak with the probe

body, they refused. I was even threatened by the tea estate officials for talking to journalists," he added.

Tofazzal Sohel, general secretary of Bapa Habiganj unit, said, "The garden authorities have cut down at least 150 trees from three hills in the church area, most of which are 50 to 100 years old." Various species of wildlife have been burnt by the fire initiated by the tea estate. Having lost their permanent habitat, many animals are now at risk of falling into the hands of poachers, he added.

Duck laying

FROM PAGE 5
an egg and did not find anything unusual and said it tasted the same as other eggs.

Galachipa Livestock Officer Sajal Kumar Dash said the domestic species of duck may have cross-bred with another. It is not possible to answer the question about the black eggs yet. He said they can explain the matter after running some experiments. There is no reason to panic.