



Two-third of Khulna city was inundated, following only 34 mm rain. While the waterlogging resulted in the breakdown of several vehicles, locals also had to suffer as the filing of the nearby canals prevented prevent the water to recede. This photo was taken yesterday. Story on page 4.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Man arrested with firearms, liquor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Bangladesh Coast Guard officials yesterday arrested a man with foreign liquor and firearms from a BRTC bus at Barguna's Patharghata.

The arrestee as identified as Sheikh Mominul Islam, 32, of Magurabhanga in Satkhira, confirmed Lt M Hasan Mehdi, staff officer (operation) of Coastguard South Zone.

Five airguns, one mechanised 9mm foreign pistol, five bullets and a bottle of foreign liquor were also seized from him, said coastguard officials.

Following a tip off, the officials searched a BRTC bus bound for Patharghata and arrested Mominul from Munsirhat on Patharghata-Mathbaria road. The illegal items were found hidden inside a bag in a box kept under Mominul's seat.

Mominul confessed that he planned to take these weapons to Dhaka via Patharghata.

Earlier, he had also worked as an arms smuggler, said Lt Mehdi.

When asked where the firearms were brought from, Lt Mehdi said they believe it was procured from neighbouring countries.

Mominul was handed over to Patharghata Police Station in a case filed under the arms and drugs acts.

REMA-KALENGA FOREST
Vulture population sees 15.4pc surge

MINTU DESHWARA

Since 1990, the number of vultures in the subcontinent has been rapidly declining. According to the Forest Department, there were 1,972 vultures in the country in 2008. In the last census from 2015, that number has fallen to 260.

Researchers say that vultures are on the way to extinction due to adverse environments, due to a lack of security and food shortage. Around 99.9 percent of the subcontinent's Bengal vulture is now extinct and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has declared the species as "critically endangered" around the world.

In recent years, while the reproduction rate of vultures has remained steady throughout the country, there has been a notable uptick in the Rema-Kalenga forest of Habiganj. The development has sparked optimism among those working to conserve vultures.

Notably, the fertility rate in this region rose from 57 percent in 2014 to a promising 72.4 percent.

The IUCN has been working with the Sufal Project of Forest Department, specifically on vulture care, in the country since 2014.

IUCN project director Sarwar Alam said there are around 260 vultures in Bangladesh. Once there were seven types of vultures in the country. Now, only the Bengal vulture is seen. Only two places are known as safe habitats for this vulture – one is the Rema-Kalenga forest, the country's second largest forest area at Chunarughat upazila in

The vulture is a beneficial animal of nature, as they are called nature's cleaners. All the stale and rotting dead bodies in nature are eaten and cleaned by them, keeping society free from numerous diseases.

Tofazzal Soheli, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's Habiganj chapter, said vultures live in



Habiganj; and the other is the Sundarbans in Khulna.

In Bangladesh, vultures population has come close to becoming extinct, due to the extensive use of drugs like Diclofenac and Ketoprofen on livestock. When vultures eat the carcass of an animal treated with these drugs, they end up dying within an hour or two. Thankfully, the government banned these drugs in veterinary medicine in 2021.

trees and raise their chicks there. Cutting down big trees, religious superstitions, and lack of food are also causes of vultures getting closer to extinction.

"To keep our environment healthy, beautiful and liveable, we feel that common people should be more aware of protecting vultures," he added.

Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Officer Mirza Mehedi Sorowar said recently a

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Hilsa brings hope to fishers

Fish worth Tk 444cr sold in August

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At the beginning of the season after a 65-day ban on fishing ended, fishermen in Patuakhali were having gloomy days in the sea as they were not catching enough hilsa and other fishes.

However, now the fishermen are elated as they are returning with huge cache of hilsa as well as other varieties from the sea, which they are being able to sell at good prices.

According to Patuakhali District Fisheries Office, fishes worth Tk 444 crore were sold in August at Alipur and Mahipur landing centres on south and north banks of the river Shibbaria in Patuakhali's Kuakata, surpassing all previous records. Of this, hilsa was worth Tk 356 crore while other fishes were worth Tk 88 crore.

The fisheries office also revealed that a total of 4,450 tonnes of hilsa have been sold at an average price of Tk 800 per kg, while 2,200 tonnes of other fish varieties were sold at an average price of Tk 400 per kg.



Talking to The Daily Star, fishermen said the sea is full of hilsa now as they are getting plenty of fish by casting their fishing nets every time.

On August 27, Abul Khair, a fisherman from Ramgati in Laxmipur, caught 170 maunds of hilsa in a row, which was sold for Tk 54.54 lakh at "Mithun Fish" shop in Mahipur fish market.

Local fishermen said this was the largest quantity of fish ever caught in a single fishing net on the coast.

Earlier on August 17, Salahuddin's trawler in Ramgati also caught 96 maunds of hilsa in a row, which was sold in Mahipur market for Tk 35 lakh.

Md Yunus, the operator of a fishing trawler, said this time the size of hilsa is also good, ranging from 800 grammes to more than 1 kilogramme each.

"Since we are getting good prices, hopefully we will be able to repay our loans," he said.

"After the 65-day ban on catching hilsa ended on July 23, the fishermen went to

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ROAD ACCIDENT
Man dies while returning with body of grandmother

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A banker, who was returning home with the dead body of his grandmother in a freezer car, was killed in a road accident yesterday morning in Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur.

Hridoy Mahin Alvee, 27, son of Meftahul Rahman of Dinajpur Municipality, worked as an officer at Al-Arafah Islami Bank in Dhaka.

Police said Alvee was bringing his grandmother's body, who had passed away in Dhaka on Thursday, back to Dinajpur. He was sitting in the front cabin of the vehicle when the accident took place as they approached Nurjahanpur village in Ghoraghat upazila around 7:30am.

Tragedy struck when the vehicle collided with a parked truck, resulting in severe injuries to both Alvee and the driver, Mithu Mia, 37.

Fire fighters transported the injured victims to Ghoraghat Upazila Health Complex. But, Alvee succumbed to his injuries.

Asaduzzaman Asad, officer-in-charge of Ghoraghat Police Station, confirmed that the injured driver, Mithun Mia, was transferred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital for further medical care.

Son hacks father to death in Ctg

UNB, Chattogram

A young man hacked his father to death over a family feud at East Puichhori Maizpara village of Banshkhal Upazila in the district on Thursday night.

The deceased Mohammad Badshah, 56, used to run a decorator business in Shahadat Market in the village.

Sudhanshu Shekhar Halder, Inspector (Investigation) of Banshkhal Police Station, said Badshah's son Enamul Haque recently bought a mobile phone by taking money from cash box.

Enamul was also putting pressure on his father to marry his girlfriend. On Thursday night, Badshah locked into a quarrel with his son over these things.

Following the altercation, Enamul hacked his father with a sharp weapon indiscriminately at any time of Thursday night, leaving him dead on the spot.

"We recovered Badshah's body yesterday morning after being informed by family members," added the police officer.

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Bdnews24 inaccessible

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Online news portal bdnews24.com was inaccessible for over 10 hours till filing this report till 10:30pm yesterday.

Suman Mahmud, chief reporter of bdnews24.com, told The Daily Star that they were trying to figure out what actually happened to their site.

We are working to resolve the issue, he said.

However, the higher-ups of the news portal suspect that it might have been hacked.

Meanwhile, bdnews24.com, on their official Facebook page, wrote, "For reasons beyond our control, we are unable to serve our audience through our news portal. We apologize unreservedly to all for the inconvenience caused. We vow to fight back to regain the means to restore the website."

BETEL LEAF CULTIVATION

A lifeline for Khasi women

MINTU DESHWARA

Alongside its tea estates, one thing that tourists also look to relish while visiting Sylhet is the local betel leaf cultivated there, also known as Khasi Paan.

Grown by the Khasis, an indigenous community living in the suburbs of Habiganj and Moulvibazar districts, the leaves are mostly cultivated in hilly areas near the homes of the community, locally known as punjee.

Khasi betel leaf, which is distinct in its taste and shape from other betel leaf varieties, serves as a natural remedy for minor injuries.

This product has turned into a unique cash crop and a symbol of self-sufficiency for Khasi women.

According to the Khasi Social Council, betel leaf cultivation is a major means of livelihood for 13 Khasi punjees – three in Habiganj and 65 in Moulvibazar.

"Khasi people are matriarchal, so women hold significant status within their families," said Ram Papang from Lutijuri punjee in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila.

Despite being independent, there are many challenges faced by around 40,000 Khasi women living in the



PHOTO: STAR

division, said Flora Bably Talang, general secretary of Kubraj, an inter-punjee development organisation.

"Khasi women mostly sell betel leaves to Bengali buyers visiting their villages although they can get better profits if

they directly go to the local markets to sell their produce. Though some Khasi women visit Sylhet's Jaintapur market, the ones in Moulvibazar often prefer selling the produce to local wholesale traders and tourists for lesser prices as

they are often maltreated by market syndicates," she added.

Flora claimed that Khasi women often face gender-based discrimination. Besides, it's a constant struggle for them to keep their gardens safe from miscreants who often steal their crops or damage them, said Flora.

Khasi sellers get around Tk 800-1,000 for a bundle of 2,880 leaves if they make the sales from home. However, the same bundle is sold for Tk 2,000-2,200 in the local bazars, mentioned Saju Marchiang, a cultivator from Lawachhara punjee.

"Despite working hard, we have to sell the leaves from homes for less than half the market prices," he said.

Furthermore, inadequate rains during dry seasons and intermittent

floods in the area during monsoons also sometimes damage the crop, he added.

Last year, key betel leaf markets in Sylhet and Sunamganj faced prolonged flooding that caused massive problems during harvest, he added.

"Inadequate rain can lead to cultivation delays, affecting the production volume. As cultivating betel leaves is the community's sole means of income, any fluctuation highly impacts them," said Gdision Pradhan Suchiang, president of Khasi Social Council and head of Magurchhara punjee.

During a recent visit to the area, this correspondent saw hundreds of Khasi women invested in betel plantations – plucking, cleaning and packing them. While some said they would sell off their produce to local markets, others were adamant.

Contacted, Musharraf Hussain Khan, additional director of Department of Agriculture Extension in Sylhet, said betel leaf farming is more profitable in the region than many other crops if correctly produced.

As the crop is not recognised as a priority crop, DAE has limitations when it comes to experimenting with its farming techniques and managing crisis situations, he added.

Cop dies after being hit by train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

A police constable died after being hit by a local train at Piyarpur railway station in Jamalpur Sadar upazila yesterday.

Shariful Islam, 46, was a police constable, working in Mymensingh police line.

Golzar Hossain, OC of Jamalpur Railway Police Station (GRP) said Chittagong-bound Six down train hit Shariful while he was crossing the Piyarpur Railway Station, leaving him critically injured.

Later, the locals took him to Jamalpur General Hospital. He was declared dead by the on duty doctor there.

No complaint was filed in this regard. The body was handed over to the family, police said.

Casualties caused by train accidents are common in Bangladesh.