



Women in the hills busy collecting Boro seedbeds. After collection, they plant these seedlings in the field. The photo was taken in the Bhanga Mura area of Bandarban recently.

PHOTO: MONG SING HAI MARMA

BISHKHALI RIVER

Encroachment, legal dispute delay dredging

PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY, Bagerhat

Around 25 percent of the dredging work on the Bishkhali River in Bagerhat remains incomplete, despite the project deadline expiring last month, due to illegal encroachments and property disputes.

The Bangladesh Water Development Board launched the Tk 45 crore project in 2023 to dredge a 24-kilometre stretch between Morrelganj and Kachua upazilas, aiming to resolve water shortages and boost agricultural productivity. The project was initially set to be completed by December 2024. However, with approximately 3km still undredged, the deadline has been extended to December 2025.

BWDB officials attributed the delays to illegal structures built on river land and legal disputes in areas such as Ramchandrapur and Sagorkathi.

In Sagorkathi, Abul Bashar claimed ownership of land occupied by a house, cemetery, and mosque. "We are the rightful owners as per SA and BS records. Without compensation or rehabilitation, we cannot allow dredging on our purchased land. We have already filed a court case," he said.

In Ramchandrapur, Marjina Begum

said her family had purchased two kathas of land to build a house, unaware it would be reclaimed for river excavation. "We never knew the government would claim this property. Now we are left with nothing," she said.

Abu Raihan Mohammad Al Biruni, BWDB's executive engineer in Bagerhat, said that dredging is proceeding based on the river's CS records.

"Notices and public announcements were issued to illegal occupiers. Legal action will be taken if they do not remove the structures," he said. The BWDB has yet to receive court notice on Bashar's case, he added.

Once a vital waterway, the Bishkhali has suffered heavy siltation from years of neglect, causing severe irrigation water shortages.

Shankar Kumar Majumdar, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Bagerhat, said that Aman paddy is currently cultivated on 26,000 hectares in Morrelganj, Kachua, and Sharankhola upazilas, but only 9,000 hectares are used for Boro cultivation due to water scarcity.

"If dredging is completed, around 20,000 hectares of cropland can be cultivated during the Rabi season," he said.



A step forward for elephant conservation
Govt allocates funds for response teams in Ctg

SIFAYET ULLAH

The pre-dawn silence in Hajigaon, a village situated on the green hills of Chattogram's Karnaphuli upazila, is often shattered by the distant rumble of a colossal presence.

It's the sound of elephants, the gentle giants venturing out of the dwindling forests, seeking food and space.

For 46-year-old Mohammed Hashem, this is a call to duty. He starts his day by patrolling through the dense forests, trying to detect the subtle signs of elephant movements.

Hashem is a member of the Elephant Response Team (ERT), a group of locals assigned by the forest department to mitigate the escalating human-elephant conflict in the region.



The response team in Chattogram.

PHOTO: STAR

There are 130 ERTs working under the forest department in the country at present.

Since 2018, Hashem and his fellows have been on the frontlines, working to safeguard both the elephants and the human communities that share their habitat.

The ERT's main task is to identify elephants before they encroach upon human settlements, gently guiding them back to their natural habitat.

Despite their efforts, Hashem, like his fellow ERT members, has never received any financial support from the government.

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WINTER DISEASES

Hospitals grapple with influx of child patients



ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

Hospitals in Chattogram are struggling to handle a sharp increase in child patients suffering from cold-related complications during the winter.

During visits to various hospitals in the port city, pediatric wards were found filled beyond capacity. Many children were admitted with conditions such as pneumonia, bronchitis, and diarrhoea.

At Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), the situation was especially alarming. Parents crowded the ward and corridors, while nurses moved quickly between patients. Children were seen relying on nebulisers to breathe.

The Child Health ward's two units, with a capacity for 64 patients, were overwhelmed by more than double the number. On Thursday, 110 children were admitted to the ward.

Ikbal Hossain, who

brought his seven-month-old son from Chandanaish upazila, expressed concern. "I am worried. My son cannot breathe normally," he said.

Nur Hashem, who traveled from Cox's Bazar with his five-month-old son, said, "My son started having trouble breathing last Saturday. We went to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, but his condition worsened, and they referred us here."

In another bed, an eight-month-old girl was on a saline drip as her mother, Jesmine Sultana, anxiously looked on. Similar scenes were seen throughout the ward.

Dr Mohammad Musa, associate professor at CMCH's Child Health ward, said two-thirds of the admitted children were suffering from cold-related illnesses. He urged parents to act quickly if infants show symptoms such as rapid or difficult breathing.

He also recommended keeping children in smoke-

free environments, ensuring regular breastfeeding for infants, and maintaining good hygiene practices.

At Marine City Medical College Hospital, Dr Basana Muhuri, a professor in the Child Health department, reported a rise in child patients with similar complications.

She emphasised the importance of recognising warning signs, including convulsions, vomiting, rapid or difficult breathing, and loss of appetite.

"Parents must seek medical attention immediately if these symptoms appear," she said.

Dr Jahangir Alam, civil surgeon of Chattogram, said over 100 cases of diarrhoea are being reported daily in the city's hospitals. He attributed the surge to rotavirus, a common cause of diarrhoea in infants during winter. "Our hospitals and health complexes are ready to provide the necessary treatment," he assured.

Man beaten to death on robbery suspicion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A man was beaten to death by locals during an attempted robbery in Faridpur Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The villagers also recovered an air-gun and a machete from the scene.

The incident took place at Guchhogram area of Aliabad union under the upazila.

The deceased is Miran Khan, 34, a resident of Pochim Sadiapur village under the same upazila.

According to locals, a group of seven to eight armed individuals attacked the village, vandalising houses and attempting to break into them in the early hours yesterday.

Miran was detained by the locals while his cohorts fled. He was severely beaten by the mob, before being taken to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Some villagers, wishing anonymity, alleged that Miran was involved in various criminal activities in the area, including drug abuse, extortion and harassment.

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Ensure justice for Felani

Jamaat ameer urges govt; meets family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

The interim government should play an active role to ensure justice for Felani, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman said yesterday.

He said this after paying a visit to the family of Felani Khatun in Dakshin Ramkhana village, Kurigram.

Felani, 15, was shot dead by BSF troops on January 7, 2011, at the Anantapur border in Kurigram.

Her body was left hanging on the barbed wire fence for four and a half hours, sparking global outrage. The case remains unresolved in India's Supreme Court.

Shafiqur paid respects at Felani's grave and provided financial assistance to the family.

Speaking to Felani's parents, Nur Islam and Jahanara Begum, and her three brothers, Shafiqur said, "Fourteen years have passed since the killing of Felani on the border, but the Awami League government did not do anything to ensure justice."

He added, "The Felani murder shook the conscience of not only Bangladesh but also the people of the world. This was a worldwide discussion. Hence, a trial for Felani's murder should be held in the international court."

Coal production starts after 43 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Coal production at Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited resumed on Thursday night following a 43-day suspension for relocating equipment, said Khan Mohammad Zafar Sadiq, general manager (operation-mine) of BCMCL.

"Initially, production will continue on a trial-basis at a rate of 1,500-2,000 tonnes per day. Once the trial run is completed in a few days, daily production is expected to increase to around 3,500-4,000 tonnes," Sadiq added.

BCMCL officials explained that underground coal is extracted from designated pockets known as "Phases". Production at the 1414 Phase was halted following the depletion of its coal reserve. Equipment was subsequently relocated to the 1305 Phase in a salvage operation that took approximately 43 days.

The coal reserve at the 1305 Phase is estimated to be around 3.95 lakh tonnes, officials added.

Teachers stage demo for 10th grade salary scale

UNB, Dhaka

Teachers of government primary schools across the country staged a protest yesterday at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka, demanding implementation of the 10th grade salary scale for assistant teachers.

The demonstration began at 10:00am, with teachers arriving in large numbers.

They termed their current classification as third-class employees as unjust and demeaning to the teaching profession.

The protesters issued an ultimatum to the government, warning that they would escalate their movement if their demands were not addressed by 2:00pm. Later, they marched towards Shahbagh around 3:30pm, where police intercepted them near Shahbagh Police Station. The teachers continued their protest at the police barricade.

"We are paid as third-class employees, which we cannot accept as teachers. We demand immediate implementation of 10th grade pay scale for assistant teachers," said one of the protesters wishing anonymity.

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Teachers of government primary schools stage a protest at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka yesterday, demanding implementation of the 10th grade salary scale for assistant teachers.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS