

Brick kilns eating up Tangail forests

2 lakh tons of firewood burnt only in Ghatail annually

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

About two lakh tons of firewood are used in brick fields in Ghatail upazila annually by violating government rules.

Reserve forests in the region are shrinking day by day as trees are felled indiscriminately for use in brick kilns endangering the ecology.

According to a survey, at least 15 lakh trees are axed in the area during each dry season.

At least 15 thousand maunds of firewood are required in one round in a brick field while most of the brick fields produce bricks eight times a year.

According to an estimate, at least 120 thousand maunds of

firewood are required at each brick field in a year.

In the brick fields, timbers are being used violating official rules by allegedly managing a group of officials and employees of administration and Forest Department.

During a visit to several areas this correspondent found 15 brick fields within reserve forests of Dhalapara and Rasulpur unions. Timbers are used indiscriminately in the brick fields in stead of coal.

According to official rules, each brick field should have a 120 feet high chimney. But in most cases its height varies from 25 feet to 30 feet. Because of this phenomenon, the ecology is being threatened.

A brick field owner told on condition of anonymity that executives of Brick Field Owners Association maintain liaison with the administration. It is a common practice to donate money in its fund which ranges between Tk 30,000 to 40,000, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Piled up firewood and timber at a brick field in Ghatail.

AL opposing voter list to foil polls: Mannan

BSS, Narsingdi

BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Co-Operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has alleged that Awami League and its allies are obstructing preparation of a fresh voter list as part of a conspiracy to foil the next general elections.

They are doing this sensing their defeat in the next parliamentary election, he said while addressing separate public gatherings at Sadharchar union in Shibpur upazila in Narsingdi district.

Preparation of a fresh voter list is a continuous process and as part of the process, the Election Commission (EC) has engaged school teachers in the job.

Referring to Awami League demand to bring reforms to the existing system of caretaker government, he said it was a creation of Awami League.

"Awami league says against the caretaker government when it faces defeat in election," he added.

"They (AL) will have to wait for another 10 months when the BNP government will hand over power to a neutral caretaker government.

Referring to the rise militant activities across the country, he said militancy rose during the tenure of Awami League government as it could not take any action against the culprits. The present government is arresting them, he added.

He said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia termed the recent bomb blasts as a national problem and invited Awami League to sit for dialogue on the issue. But it did not respond to the call. It rather termed the dialogue a drama. This is unfortunate, he said.

Khairul Kabir Khokon MP, former lawmaker Abdul Ali Mridha, local BNP leaders Abul Haris Rikabder, Nazrul Islam, Gulzar Bhuiyan, Abul Hossain Khan Angur also addressed the meetings.

Some 100 local AL activists formally joined BNP at a function held at Bannar Bazar in the upazila.

Four cattle traders shot dead by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Four Bangladeshi cattle traders were shot dead Monday night and Tuesday morning by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in Indian territories close to the border when they were returning home with cattle.

border areas in Ghoja Danga and Tarali in Swarnpnagar thana in North 24 Pargana district in India.

Mukal Hossain, 28, son of Arif Hossain of village Gayeshpur in Satkhira Sadar upazila was shot dead at Ghoja Danga in Swarnpnagar thana in North 24 Pargana district opposite to Laxmideri border in Satkhira Sadar upazila. He died on the spot, others returning home with him told BDR.

In another incident, three out of four cattle traders were shot dead at Tarali in Swarnpnagar thana Tuesday morning.

Maj Asad, of 41 Rifles Battalion confirmed the incidents and said a letter protesting the killing has been sent to BSF.

The bodies could not be identified as those were taken by BSF, he said.

Maj. Asad said, BDR men heard 7 to 8 shots inside Indian territory near the border.

Fugitive convict held in Barisal

BSS, Barisal

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) Thursday night arrested a fugitive convict and a former Union Parishad (UP) chairman along with his two associates from Gournadi upazila of the district.

RAB sources said a Rab team raided Sharikol village at about 11 pm and rounded up Qumrul Ahsan Himu, 38, former chairman of Agorpur UP in Babuganj upazila, along with UP members Rezaul, 30 and Liton Kazi, 35.

The arrested are being quizzed to recover arms and ammunition they possess.

Himu is accused of 14 cases including eight for murders. He was sentenced to life in two murder cases, the sources said.

Himu and his accomplices were involved in extortion, murder, robbery, rape and other crimes in the area, police said.

VIP guesthouse built on minister's compound

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Patuakhali District Council has built a guesthouse for VIPs on the compound of the house of Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury at Kathal Tali village, about 20 kilometres from Patuakhali district town.

The six-room two storied bungalow was built in 2003-2004 financial year at a cost of about Tk 67 lakh, sources said. As per rule, a guest house has to be built either at district or at upazila headquarters.

"We built the guest house on special considerations", District Council Secretary Abdul Bareq told this correspondent when contacted.

He became annoyed when asked why the guest house was built on the compound of the minister's house. He declined to talk further.

When contacted over cell phone during his visit to the area recently, Minister Altaf Hossain said, "I want to develop this area. Not only the dak-bungalow, I want to establish school, collage, mosque, temple, hat-bazaar in the area to change the village.

"I also have a plan to set up another modern dak-bungalow at Mirzaganj upazila headquarters at a cost Tk 1.50 crore," he said.

Some local people alleged that the circuit house is used by the minister's relatives and for holding arbitration meetings.

The minister denied the allegation. "Foreigners use the guest house when they come to the area and I pay the rent from my pocket", he said.

Jubo League council foiled in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A Jubo League council at Kalikapur union in the Sadar upazila was postponed yesterday as Jubo Dal called a protest meeting at same venue at the same time.

Police and locals said, Jubo League had earlier called its council at Hetalia High School ground at 3 pm. Jubo Dal also called a meeting there at the same time protesting countrywide bomb blasts. Police postponed the meetings.



PHOTO: STAR

The VIP guesthouse built on the compound of Altaf Hossain Chowdhury's house in Kathal Tali village in Patuakhali.

GAIBANDHA AGRICULTURE TRAINING INSTITUTE

Resources underutilised for lack of govt attention

OUR COREPONDENT, Gaibandha

The Gaibandha Agriculture Training Institute (ATI), the lone academic institution in Northern districts for training on agro-fishery, belies the objective it is supposed to serve.

Lack of teachers, shortage of facilities for academic studies and training and accommodation problem for students are the main obstacles. Its vast campus and physical infrastructure can not be utilised properly only due to lack of attention by the government to solve the problems.

Repeated appeals to the authorities concerned to solve the problems could make little change over the years, ATI authorities told this correspondent.

The institute was set up on 86 acres of land in 1954 on the southern outskirts of Gaibandha town. The institute has about 600 students from Bogra, Joypurhat, Naoaon, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Gaibandha.

At least 15 posts of teachers are vacant for long.

Students face acute accommodation problem. There are only two hostels, one for male students having 190 seats and the other for females with 60 seats. Campus sources said 7 to 8 students stay in each four-seated room in the hostels.

Though unbelievable, there is no dining arrangement and water supply system in the hostels. The hostel compounds wear an eerie look at night in absence of lights. Once fused, lights are rarely replaced, many students complained while talking to this correspondent during a recent visit.

At classrooms, benches and tables are inadequate to the need.

Many of the students are to take lesson standing, they alleged. Toilets both at hostels and at the academic building are not cleaned regularly.

Despite its vast campus, students do not have any playground.

No election of student's union in this institute was held during last decade and none took initiative for holding election despite repeated appeals from students.

There are 45 acres of agriculture lands under the institute, which are not properly utilised only due to lack of planning, manpower and logistics. These lands, along with the six ponds in the compound are virtually unutilised, they said.

As there is no boundary wall, miscreants move on the campus freely. Pilferage and snatching are regular events on the campus. Students even become victims of local toll collectors.

There is no medicare service for students. The institute has no transport.

When contacted, its principal Aminul Huq said lack of teachers and funds are the main obstacles in development of the institute. He admitted that the ATI could be turned into a good institution to produce a large number of well trained people who can play a great role in development of the country's agriculture and fishery. But that needs allocation of funds and appropriate planning.

He said plans and requirements were sent to the authorities concerned much earlier, but to no effect.

He said the ponds and agriculture lands are being cultivated as per instruction of higher authorities and one third of the sale proceeds are deposited to the government.



PHOTO: STAR

The administrative building of Gaibandha Agriculture Training Institute.

10X3

15X3