

AGITATION FOR POWER CONTINUES

Highways blocked in Dinajpur, Gaibanda

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Several thousand people barricaded highways Dinajpur and Gaibanda yesterday demanding smooth power supply.

The demonstrators also held rallies and brought out processions urging the government to ease the power crisis and threatened of tougher agitation for non-

compliance.

In Dinajpur, people from different villages in Birganj upazila blocked the Dinajpur-Panchgarh-Thakurgaon highway at the upazila headquarters for about five hours from 11 am, our correspondent reported.

They held a rally and paraded the highway. The barricade created long snarl-ups on both sides caus-

ing sufferings to passengers.

On information, UNO Md Abdul Mannan and police officials rushed to the spot and tried to convince them to withdraw the barricade. But the demonstrators were unmoved.

At around 3 pm, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir came and assured them of immediate steps to ease the power crisis. They with-

drew the barricade on his assurance.

In Dinajpur, hardly a day passes without demonstration by people for smooth power supply.

In Gaibanda, several thousand people including students from Dariyapur area in the Sader upazila barricaded the Gaibanda-Rangpur highway for about two hours from noon for smooth power supply.

The demonstration was organised by the newly floated Palli Bidyut Grahak Sangram Parishad.

The demonstrators also paraded the highway and held a rally at Dariyapur Bazar. The rally was presided over by its convener Hasan Mahamud Siddique.

Gaibanda requires 25 MW power daily but gets only five to seven MW, sources in Palli Bidyut Samity said.

Work on B'baria grid substation to begin soon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A 132/33 KV power grid substation will be built in Brahmanbaria at a cost of Tk 60 crore to ease the power crisis in the district.

The demand for power in the district is 78 MW but it gets only 40 MW, Power Development Board (PDB) sources said.

The Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB) will build the substation and lands have been handed over to it, PDB Executive Engineer Mrinal Kanti Sen said. All official formalities have been completed and the work will begin soon, he said.

The project was approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC), he said.

When completed, the substation will supply more than 80 MW power, he said.



PHOTO: STAR
Durbar Network, a local NGO, organised a human chain at Satmatha in Bogra town yesterday demanding punishment to killers of housewife Monira Sultana.



PHOTO: STAR
People barricaded the Gaibanda-Rangpur highway at Dariyapur in Gaibanda yesterday for smooth power supply.

Hartal observed protesting AL leader murder

Fresh agitation programmes announced in Gopalpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed in Gopalpur upazila yesterday protesting killing of Dhopakandi union Jubo League convener Abu Sayeed.

Gopalpur unit of Awami League (AL) called the hartal. All kinds of vehicles including inter-city buses remained off the roads while all shops and business establishments were closed during hartal hours.

Awami League, Jubo League and Chhatra League (BCL) brought out separate processions and held a joint meeting in the bus stand area at around 11:30am.

Speakers alleged that the killers belonging to ruling BNP were not arrested although a murder case was filed with Gopalpur Police Station in this regard. They announced several programmes including processions and rallies across the upazila for the next few days.

Among others, Gopalpur upazila AL president Rakibul Islam Chhana, Gopalpur town AL president Abdul Jabbar, Sechchasebok League leader Moniruzzaman and Jubo League leaders Rafiqul Islam and Saiful Islam addressed.

It was alleged that BNP men attacked an AL procession at Kariata village of Hadira union in the upazila on August 15.

Abu Sayeed was hacked by a gang when he was returning in the morning to his Bhutia village home after attending a destitute feeding programme on August 15 marking the 31st death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He died at a clinic in Dhaka on Friday.

Abu Sayeed's elder brother Sirajul Islam filed a murder case with Gopalpur Police Station Friday night accusing 20 ruling party leaders and activists in Gopalpur.

SALEHI ISSUE 151 RU teachers protest violation of rules by VC

RU CORRESPONDENT

One hundred and fifty one teachers of Rajshahi University in a statement yesterday protested what they called violation of the University Act of 1973 by the vice-chancellor.

In the statement, they alleged that the university administration allowed RU Islami Chhatra Shibir president Mahabub Alam Salehi to appear at masters examination though his class attendance was only 16 per cent.

Salehi is a key suspect in the murder of geology and mining department teacher Prof Taher Ahmed, they said. Prof Taher was killed by hired killers on the campus on February 1.

The teachers in the statement said, "We are very much concerned that when general students were not allowed to appear at examination without 60 per cent class attendance, Salehi was allowed with only 16 per cent because he enjoyed the blessing of Vice-chancellor Prof Altaf Hossain".

The decision was a 'gross violation' of Rajshahi University Act, 1973. By allowing Salehi with so poor class attendance, the university administration has pushed the university to a situation of anarchy and lawlessness, they said.

Illegal extraction of sand, stone destroying Sherpur forests

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Government forests are being destroyed and the ecology threatened as some local influential are illegally lifting sand and stone indiscriminately from Jhenaigati forest areas in Sherpur.

Local forest officials said they are threatened by the hired goons. The plunderers claim that they have leased the areas from where sand and stone are being lifted, they told this correspondent.

The plunderers dig big ditches covering large areas in forests and often use drilling machines to extract stones, which is destroying timber trees. They also take away trees, the officials said.

The 'illegal' activity is going on in Rangtalia, Gajne and Tawakucha government forests because of lack of coordination between the forest and environment ministry and the mineral resources ministry, they

said. The influential take a 'token lease' of small portions of the forest land at nominal rates for sand lifting but later extract stone from areas much more than specified in the papers, the officials said.

Unscrupulous employees of forest department and mineral resource ministry are also involved in the process, locals alleged.

The influential are allegedly blessed by a section of local ruling party leaders. They even take away trees planted by shareholders under government's social afforestation project, which result in untoward incidents between lessees and plunderers.

Officials said the forest and environment ministry earlier last month passed an order to stop lifting of sand and stone, but the forest department does not have adequate manpower and logistics to enforce it.

The order angered the plunderers and they are now threatening forest officials and guards.

An official said the matter was brought to the notice of police but they remained 'indifferent' to it.

Besides plunder of the forest, the government is also being deprived of a huge amount of revenue every year because of this illegal extraction of sand and stone, he said.

When contacted, Divisional Forest officer (DFO) in Mymensingh Md Akbar Hossain said illegal lifting of sand and stone from Jhenaigati forests has created a lot of problems for the forest department. This will create an ecological problem in the hilly area but the forest department can not do anything as the plunderers show lease documents of the mineral resources division, he said.

"Besides, we have shortage manpower and logistics to protect forests".

He said there should be proper coordination between the forest and environment ministry and the mineral resources ministry to stop the 'illegal' activity.

Mymensingh divisional forest office wrote to Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF) Md. Osman Ghani about the latest developments. The forest and environment ministry then informed the energy and mineral resource ministry about the matter. But the matter ended there.

Former divisional forest officer (DFO) Md. Abdul Latif had also written to the authorities concerned several times for necessary action. Sources at the DFO office said several meetings were held between officials of the two ministries (forest and environment ministry and energy and mineral resources ministry) but there was no fruitful result.



Dredging of Patria-Daulatdia channel in the Padma continues to make it navigable as the water level has fallen drastically in the monsoon (left) and a snarl-up of vehicles at Paturia ferry terminal.



PHOTO: FOCUSBANGLA



PHOTO: FOCUSBANGLA
Days are gone when vendors used to sing songs and attract children to see 'bioscope'. But Jalil of Bagmara in Rajshahi still entertains poor children for Tk one or a handful of rice.

Bouncing back to 'poison-free' cuisine

Yield of crops and fish increases in Atia union as farmers stop using insecticides, chemical fertiliser

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Farmers in Atia union in Delduar upazila are reaping double benefits by avoiding chemical fertiliser and insecticides.

Following use of compost and natural methods to control pest attack, farmers are getting better crops in fields and also producing fishes in larger quantities in low-lying areas and water bodies. Chemical fertiliser and insecticides in fields earlier destroyed fish fries in flood plains, they said.

Now, nobody buys insecticides for their crop fields in Atia union. Chemical fertiliser is not used in 16,000 acres out of total 27,000 and the rest 11,000 acres will be freed from use of fertiliser soon, sources at the upazila agriculture department said.

The union was declared "poison free" on April 8, 2005.

Compost (made with cow dung, left over of banana plants, shrubs, creepers and herbs) is being used in croplands. The process was started five years ago.

Atia union is around 15 kilome-

ters from Tangail district headquarters. About 28,000 people live in 27 villages in the union and agriculture is the main occupation of most of them.

Some farmers in the union have also taken another new initiative—to revive old indigenous local varieties of paddy which are near-extinct now. During a visit they said they have started cultivating Chamara, Dima, Patjag, Shail and Katakara, which their fathers and grandfathers used to grow. But they face problem in collecting seeds. It will take time to re-introduce them in large scale as most of the varieties were abandoned after introduction of IRR1 paddy in the union in 1975.

Ziad Ali, a farmer of Kandapara village, said excessive use of chemical fertiliser for cultivating IRR1 over the years has reduced land fertility. Agriculture officials came to their village and urged them to use compost. Now, he realise that use of compost is better than chemical fertiliser, he said.

Like Ziad, farmers Zalat Fakir, Chand Miah and Abdul Halim said due to indiscriminate use of chemi-

cal fertiliser and insecticide in croplands, production of different varieties of local fishes had declined in floodplains, which remain under water for about six months a year.

Unnayan Bicolper Neeti Nirdharanee Gobeshana Kendra (Ubining), a local NGO, started motivating the farmers in 1992 to discard chemical fertiliser and insecticide.

Fisherman Lal Miah said natural production of different varieties of local fishes has considerably increased in the area in the last 3-4 years.

"Fishes are being supplied to Dulla, Nanduria, Silimpur, Rupshee, Nallapara including Delduar upazila headquarters from Atia union", he added.

Atia was formally declared a "poison free union" at a function on April 8 last year. High officials of the district administration and agriculture department attended the function organised by local the Union Parishad.



PHOTO: STAR
Farmer Abdul Gafur working in his field in Atia union in Delduar upazila.