

Sundaris of Chakaria vanished

From Mostafa Kamal Majumder

COX'S BAZAR, Sept 10: Little over half a dozen Sundari trees on about an acre of land remains of what was once a dense Sundari forest in the Chakaria upazila here. The name 'Chakaria Sundarbans' still exists but without the wood.

the people learnt a costly lesson during the last cyclone about the importance of trees. But they have little control over the denudation of forests for salt production and shrimp culture.

showed that coastal embankments and semi-permanent settlements survived in those areas where there were plantations on the side facing the Bay.

The over 18,000 acre Chakaria Sundarbans had dense forests even till the late sixties. Records show rapid deforestation started from the early 1970s and by the year 1982 the forest cover came down to only about 5000 acres, according to satellite pictures. The mangrove forests of Chakaria were completely gone by the year 1988.

The irony is that the authorities concerned failed to feel the importance of the Chakaria Sundarbans even though it was reserved in 1903 only to provide protection to human settlements following damages caused by a cyclone in 1988. From that time on management practices involved restricted exploitation based on minimum diameter limits of trees of different species and limited grazing.

In the absence of a land use policy the forest land has been indiscriminately transferred to other uses over the last two decades. Now about a half (about nine thousand acres) of Chakaria Sundarbans have been leased out to private individuals for shrimp culture and salt production.

It appeared that forest lands were leased out from the relevant ministry in Dhaka, and the local administrations had no say over those. Consultation of the local people was out of question. This top-down process has been at its worst and manipulations have been such that lease deeds have been effected even without physical survey or verification of land.

Local people say a present there are many holders of lease documents without access to land in Chakaria Sundarbans. There are also many others who are occupying land illegally.

Of late about 1500 unauthorised temporary houses have been built on the Chakaria Sundarbans. There are still vacant patches of land. The Department of Forests has taken an initiative to take at least one fourth of the Chakaria Sundarbans under its possession for afforestation. Will this initiative succeed? Nobody quite sure.



The last remaining Sundari trees in the denuded 'Chakaria Sundarbans'. — Star photo by M K Majumder.

that the April 29 cyclone and tidal surge was devastating due to denudation of forests, but they can do nothing to reverse the process.

Unplanned expansion of salt production and shrimp culture has led to destruction of even the 'gaon' mangrove forests developed under the coastal afforestation programme in Cox's Bazar district in the last two and a half decades.

Raghu Moni Singh, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Chakaria told The Daily Star

mangrove forests on the eastern side of the island are now gone. Salt growers and shrimp farmers have uprooted trees which used not only to protect land from erosion but also to reduce impact of cyclone and tidal surge.

A salt producer himself Chowdhury said it was impossible to turn salt beds into forests again because the soil had, by now, become hard.

More than one survey of the coastal areas conducted following the April 29 cyclone

By-elections today

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the count in Rangpur. BNP is doing the same thing by mobilising all its strength in at least eight constituencies. Jaamat is fighting for a seat in Rangpur. Smaller parties stand almost no chance to win the election in any of the constituencies, according to political observers.

Counting will begin at 8 am and continue till 5 pm without break.

Meanwhile, the authorities have taken adequate measures to maintain order during voting at 909 polling stations in 11 constituencies.

The Election Commission Tuesday issued a stern warning against rigging, irregularities or violence and said legal measures will be taken against the responsible persons or quarters.

In a press release the EC appealed to the candidates, supporters, political parties and people as well to help the election conducting authorities ensure free, fair and neutral election.

Votes collected by applying force, intimidation, capturing booths or any illegal influence will not be of any use for any candidate, the EC said.

The EC will be compelled not only to take legal actions against the concerned candidate but also declare his election void if he is found involved in illegal activities.

The government has already declared Wednesday a holiday in Dhaka city and those areas where by-elections will be held.

Following are the number of candidates fielded by different political parties in by-election:

Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal (BNP)	11
Awami League	11
Jatiya Party	10
Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh	4
Jatiyatabadi Ganatantrik Chashi Dal	2
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu)	1
Bangladesh Janata Party	1
Bangladesh Janaganatantrik Dal	1
Jatiya Ganatantrik Dal	1
Muslim Peoples Party	1
Independent	8
Total	49

Our Staff Correspondent from Chittagong reports: The

district authority here has clamped 144 in Chittagong-8 constituency for 24 hours beginning from 6 am today morning assembly of people and movement of private vehicles within 400 yards of polling centres to ensure peaceful polling.

Measures have also been taken to thwart any attempts of violence in the polls. Candidates went door to door, Monday to mobilise last minute support before the midnight ban went into effect. Posters and banners were put up earlier.

The Chittagong-8 constituency was vacated by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. Political observers said Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury of BNP and MA Mannan of Awami League will be locked in a neck to neck polls battle. They organised a series of campaign rallies and processions to win over the confidence of voters.

Observers felt that electioneering in the area actually had picked up after the visits of the two party chiefs Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina who addressed three and eleven by-election rallies respectively in this constituency.

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Left front

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Hasanul Haq Inu, Kazi Aref Ahmed, Sharif Nurul Ambia and Maimuddin Khan Badal of JSD (Inu), Khalequzzaman Bhuiyan of BSD (Khaleq), Mahbubul Alam of BSD (Mahbub), Nirmal sen of Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal and Nayeem Jahangir of Oikya Prokria attended the meeting. The sources said the leaders would sit formally with the leaders of CPB and NAP shortly to discuss and finalise the launching of the front.

Although the front will mainly be a platform of communists and left oriented forces, it might not be called a 'left' front in view of the changed political scenario at home and abroad. It might be styled democratic progressive front or morcha.

They said the proposed front would emerge as the third political force to lead the country towards democratisation and self-reliant economy.

Editor: S. M. Ali

Main accused in Akbar Shet murder case held

By Staff Correspondent

Police on Tuesday arrested the main accused, Bilal Shah, in the recent sensational murder of Akbar Shet from his house in Islampur in a drunken condition.

Bilal Shah (40) remained absconding after Akbar Shet a reputed old-town businessman, was gunned down last month.

He came back to his residence at 59/1(a), Islampur Monday night and one of his relative informed police about his arrival.

The Officer in Charge of Kotwali police station, Hamidul Huq, went to the spot to arrest him and found the house surrounded by people of the locality. More than a hundred people gheraoed the house and were shouting slogans demanding the accused to come out of the house.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner Detective Branch, Abdul Quayyum, reached the spot along with a special force and managed to calm the angry crowd and arrest the accused in a drunken condition. He was later taken to the detective branch office after medical examinations.

Bilal Shah was taken into police remand for five days for interrogations.

Lok Sabha passes places of worship bill

NEW DELHI, Sept 10: The Lok Sabha today passed a crucial bill on the maintenance of status quo of places of worship after a heated debate and repeated clashes between the Congress-I, National Front-left party combine and the BJP members who walked out before it was put to vote, reports PTI.

The bill seeking to maintain status quo of places of worship as on August 15m 1947, barring the Ayodhya temple was approved by a vote after rejecting the amendments moved by the BJP, the Janata Dal and the IUML (Indian Union Muslim League).



Supporters of Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia shout slogans during a rally in the centre of Tbilisi on Monday. Gamsakhurdia ordered his troops back to their barracks claiming they were plotting a coup. — AFP photo

Lenin's body

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moment, when most of the people loved this man infinitely," Gubenko said. "This was the man who gave hope to destitute, illiterate, hungry people — a hope that their lot might improve. It's not his fault that his followers have distorted his theoretical beliefs and hopes."

Leningrad Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, a radical member of the Soviet Parliament, suggested last week that Lenin's body be removed. He said that it was Lenin's wish to be buried next to his mother in Leningrad's Volkovskoye Cemetery.

President Mikhail Gorbachev said the subject should be dealt with by the new Supreme Soviet legislature.

"I would keep the mausoleum as an historical monument of our peoples," said Gubenko. "I don't agree with Sobchak here. Maybe I still have some spiritual conservatism left, but in general I'm conservative by nature."

Since his death in 1924, Lenin's embalmed body been on display in a glass case inside the marble mausoleum. It is one of the most sacred Soviet shrines and still draws thousands of Soviet and foreign tourists.

Asked whether all the thousands of Lenin monuments across the country should be preserved, Gubenko said a special committee addressed the issue several years ago.

"We have spoken about removing these monsters, those cliché lilychis (Lenins) standing there with pointing hands. We spoke of a maximum restriction of the number of Lenin monuments on the basis of their artistic value."

Five more roads

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and gas supply and other civic amenities in the areas which had been released of government lease.

The Prime Minister also asked the Rajuk authorities to handover without any delay the lands to the allottees in Uttara in the second phase of allotment.

She told the authorities to start development work there including the land development. She said all civic amenities should be ensured in the areas.

Begum Zia asked the Education Ministry to establish a primary school in the Uttara extension areas and a school from class six to 12 in Uttara. Begum Zia directed the concerned authorities to take initiatives to solve water-logging and other problems faced by the inhabitants of Uttara.

The Prime Minister asked for preparation of a list of damaged roads across the country which needed repair and renovation. She told the authorities to make the priority list of the cracked roads for their reconstruction and repair. She had earlier directed the city mayor to prepare a similar list for Dhaka City areas.

The Prime Minister said a primary school would be opened at Hazaribagh where the children of workers would get education.

She recalled her recent visit to the northern areas of the country and said many roads and structures including schools, madrasas and mosques needed renovation and repair in the areas. In this context, she paid the guidelines of her government's all

development policy would be to ensure welfare of the common people.

She said the dilapidated roads and other structures would be repaired and reconstructed on priority basis.

Begum Zia advised the city mayor to take all necessary initiative to solve water-logging problems and ensure proper garbage disposal system in the capital.

She underscored the need for cleaning the derelict ponds and ditches of the city on regular basis.

The Prime Minister asked the concerned authorities to carry out the maintenance work of the roads properly after construction.

She directed to start construction and repair work in full swing immediately after the rainy season all over the country.

The meeting was held as a follow-up of the Prime Minister's visit to different areas of the capital Monday. She had visited the places to see the condition of the roads and water-logging problems. She was concerned to see the plight of the general people in these areas.

The meeting was informed that Taka 11 crore had been sanctioned for the rehabilitation, reconstruction and repair of educational institutions affected in the recent cyclone and flood in Chittagong and Khulna divisions. Taka four crore had been sanctioned for similar work for the rest of the country.

The Prime Minister directed the concerned authorities to expedite the educational institutions development programme all over the country.

Ganges basin flood

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disrupted. Our Thakurgaon Correspondent Reports: Low-lying area of the Thakurgaon town have been inundated due to incessant rainfall of seven days. In Ranishankal and Pirganj upazila, standing crops on 20 thousand acres of land have been submerged. Two thousand kutcha houses were totally destroyed by flood.

Railway line between Parbatipur and Panchagarh have been submerged in flood water causing suspension of train services.

The overall flood situation in Chapainawabganj deteriorated further Tuesday. 40 unions are now under flood waters from the swelling Mahananda, flowing 93 cm above danger level. Road link between Dhaka and Chapainawabganj has been snapped. Three more persons were drowned in flood waters which so far affected nearly one lakh people and damaged over two thousand houses totally and another four thousand partly, district control room said.

Eight camps were opened Tuesday in Sadar and Sibganj

upazilas where about five thousand affected people have taken shelter.

UNB adds: Low-lying areas of Rajshahi city went under knee-deep water while about 2 lakh people remained marooned as the late-monsoon flood took an alarming turn in the district.

The mighty river Padma, fed with rains and onrush of waters from across the border through the Farakka Barrage on the Ganges, swelled further by 13 cm during last 24 hours and was flowing 43 cm above danger level here. Water Board and local sources said.

A minor boy was drowned Tuesday at Matikata village in Godagarj upazila.

One more relief centre was opened in the upazila Tuesday bringing the total to 4 to shelter increasing number of homeless people.

Death toll in the flood-hit areas of Sirajganj district rose to seven with the drowning of a seven-year old boy in Kashrabari village of Kazipur Upazila Tuesday.

Flood situation in the district continued to deteriorate as the tributaries of the river Jamuna started to swell and

submerge new areas during the last couple of days.

About 20,000 people in 150 villages of the five worst affected upazilas of Kazipur, Chowdhali, Belkuchi, Shahjadpur and Raiganj have been marooned.

Four more people died while some 50,000 villagers remained marooned in the worst hit Sujannagar, Iswardi, Sathia, Faridpur, Bhangua, Bera and the Sadar upazilas of Pabna.

With Tuesday official report of four deaths, one from drowning and three from diarrhoeal outbreak, the death toll was 27.

Sources at the Civil Surgeon office said a medical team had been sent to the affected area.

In Manikganj about 25 thousand people have been marooned in char areas of Harirampur, Daulatpur and Shibabaya upazilas leaving as many homeless.

The overflowing Padma and the Jamuna swelled further Tuesday amid incessant rains.

BIWTA sources said number-1 ghat at Aricha was declared closed to ferry services Tuesday noon due to rough weather.

Committee for railway uplift formed

The government has constituted a 14-member committee headed by the Communications Minister to render advice to various programmes of the Bangladesh Railway for giving further momentum to its overall activities and making it a public welfare organisation in real terms free from losses, reports BSS.

The committee will evaluate the present rail communication and management system and put forward recommendations to the government with necessary changes and additions in public interest, according to a press release issued by the Railway Division of the Communications Ministry.

The meeting of the committee will be held once in every three months.

Hunger strike for reopening JN College

By Staff Correspondent

Progotishel Chhatra Otkya a local alliance of nine students organisations of Jagannath University College excluding JCD and BCL(S-A), organised a token hunger strike on Tuesday in front of the National Press Club demanding reopening of the college and other educational institutes.

They also demanded arrest of armed hooligans to ensure peaceful academic atmosphere at the countries educational institutes.

A total of 45 workers of the nine organisations participated in the token hunger strike from 10 am to 5 pm.

The college was closed on June 15 following a bloody clash between the workers of JCD and BCL (S-A).

Jiang calls for improved ties with Washington

BEIJING, Sept 10: China's Communist Party chief called today for improved ties with Washington during a meeting with former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, architect of normalisation of Sino-US ties 20 years ago, reports Reuter.

Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin urged a resumption of normal ties, suspended by Washington after China's hardline leaders ordered troops and tanks to crush student-led protests for democracy centred in Beijing's Tianamen Square in June 1989.

"We have every reason to normalise our relations," Jiang was quoted by national television as telling Kissinger.

"We have no difficulty in resuming high-level contacts with the United States."

The Midnight File

Iraqi troops cross into Kuwait

KUWAIT, Sept 10: Iraqi troops crossed the border into northern Kuwait today and killed a security forces officer. A Kuwaiti security officer was killed in a clash with Iraqis who infiltrated Kuwait's northern border. Two Iraqis were wounded in the fighting and a third was captured, Cabinet Affairs Minister Dhari Abdullah Al-Othman told Kuwaiti News Agency (KUNA), reports Reuter.

Nawaz Sharif shuffles cabinet

ISLAMABAD, Sept 10: Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appointed nine new ministers and 18 new ministers of state today in his first cabinet shuffle since coming to power 10 months ago. For the first time in the country's history, two members of the cabinet — Ghulam Ahmed Bolkar and Mohammad Azam Khan — were chosen from the ranks of the leftist Awami Party, which has long favoured better relations with the Soviet Union and India, reports AFP.

Storming of Hazratbal shrine protested

SRINAGAR, Sept 10: Muslim militants enforced a general strike today to protest the storming of the Hazratbal shrine, where a sacred lock of hair of Prophet Mohammad (Pbuh) is reportedly kept, by Indian troops as six more people died overnight in Kashmir. Thousands of people came out of their homes into the streets of Srinagar. To back the militant-enforced strike in the valley's 28 towns and cities, report AFP.

Drug menace

From Page 1 Col. 7
motivate the members of the public against drug addiction. Meanwhile, a report of the US State Department circulated among the participants of the workshop totally blacked out Bangladesh from the list of victims. When asked, the US officials too expressed their surprise. They assured this correspondent they would look into it. The International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, as it is called, gives a picture of global drug situation and will act as a policy guideline for American assistance to countries with drug abuse problem.

The two week workshop, organised by the Voice of America (VOA) in cooperation with the United States Information Agency, is being participated by Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, the USSR and Venezuela.

Weather conditions in Southeast Asia have caused an important drop in opium production in the region. Except for Burma, opium poppy cultivation was down in the Golden Triangle countries. Poppy fields under cultivation in Laos fell from 42,000 hectares in 1989 to 30,500 hectares in 1990. In Thailand, the 4,000 hectares found in 1989 dropped to 3,500 hectares last year, the officials estimated.

Hasina

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villages under Kotlailpara upazila following a killing, she said it was very much unfortunate and called upon all patriotic and conscious people to guard against such incidents in future. She demanded investigator and punishment of the culprits involved in the incident and compensation of the victims. She donated one maund of rice on behalf of AL for the affected people. She urged the people to cast 'yes' vote in the ensuing referendum to revert back to the parliamentary form of government.

Chakma refugees

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facing many problems because of their presence. According to the Indian newspaper report, the Tripura Chief Minister is trying to exert pressure on the central government of India to settle the issue during the next high-level talks with Bangladesh. Majumder said when the refugees first arrived in 1986 it was expected that they would return with the improvement of the situation in Chittagong Hill Tracts. But now it appears they have almost settled in the state. The refugees have foiled all efforts to send them back. This cannot be tolerated for long, Majumder added, according to the Ananda Bazar Patrika of Calcutta.

Ershad: Gold smuggling

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Haque saying, "at last I have been put in the dock along with these persons (others accused in this case)". However, Ershad was given his arm chair just outside the 'accused box' while the other five accused were standing in the dock.

During the court proceedings Ershad was seen always talking with the lawyer of Moqsudur Rahman who was sitting just beside the dock. At the beginning of the case, Maqsub's lawyer Advocate Sharfuddin Mukul stood up and submitted to the court that they did not get the copy of the statement of the accused Under Section 164 before the police. He was followed by Advocate Altaf, lawyer of Ashrafuddin Ahmed Sikander and Advocate Nazrul Islam, Defence Counsel of Abu Taher.

Advocate Rukonudding who is defending the two foreigners did not attend the court. British national Anthony Chalkar who was looking a bit aggressive, abused the police just after his entering the 'accused box saying, "I do not trust police." He submitted to the judge that he wanted to talk to his lawyer for at least two hours.

Judge A T M Fazle Kabir then asked Chief Prosecution Counsel of this case Public Prosecutor Abdur Razzak Khan about the statement under Section 164.

The Public Prosecutor replied that the certified copies of the case documents were available now and those could be obtained by the defence at any time.

P P Khan also assured the two foreigners that they would be given the opportunity to talk to their lawyers. Chalkar and Rudigar were arrested on July 16 last year by the Airport Customs with 3000 tolas of gold worth Taka 2.4 crore.

Later, Ershad's Chief Defence Counsel Advocate Sirajul Haque submitted to the court, "We really still do not know what is the case against Ershad." He said that another seven days' time would be needed to obtain the certified copies of the case and other documents.

He also drew the attention of the court and the concerned authorities to the accommodation problem of the Court. He

Gold seized

From Page 1 Col. 2
Singapore by Bangladesh Biman flight at about 1.38am Monday night and entered into terminal building of the airport. Later, he proceeded toward transit lounge and ran toward outgoing lounge through stairs leaving his briefcase in the crowded transit lounge.

The trial of the smuggling case had begun on February 2, 1991 which was suspended on May 12, 1991 for further investigation. The CID investigation team submitted the supplementary chargesheet after necessary investigation on August 31 implicating deposed President Ershad.

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It was apprehended that the passenger was quickly moved towards outgoing lounge to handover the gold to some other people or he himself tried to go out with the gold.