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'Improper water management quickens desertification'

About 90 per cent of the dry lands of the world are susceptible to desertification, reports UNB.

An expert from Geneva-based UN Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) Masanori Kobayashi disclosed this at a seminar in the city yesterday.

Nearly 47 per cent of the land surface on this planet is arid and 20 per cent has already been experiencing land degradation, he said in his paper presented at the seminar.

Land area equivalent to Ireland turns into arid land every year, said the CCD expert and added that nearly 1.2 billion people are drawn into a 'vicious cycle' of environmental degradation, deepening poverty and deteriorating health.

Many developing countries, particularly the least developed

ones, significantly lack the capacity to tackle these issues, he observed.

This 'vicious cycle,' caused by desertification, exemplifies its multiple impacts on the global environment which has not been paid due attention, Kobayashi said.

Giving a brief overview of multiple impacts of desertification, he said, when dry lands are disturbed by fire, pest outbreaks, storm and floods, their huge carbon reserves release into the atmosphere, increasing the greenhouse impacts. The carbon emission from dry land into atmosphere is greater than that of grass lands or cropped dry lands.

An appropriate dry land management is needed to enhance carbon sinks and reduce greenhouse gases emissions, he added.

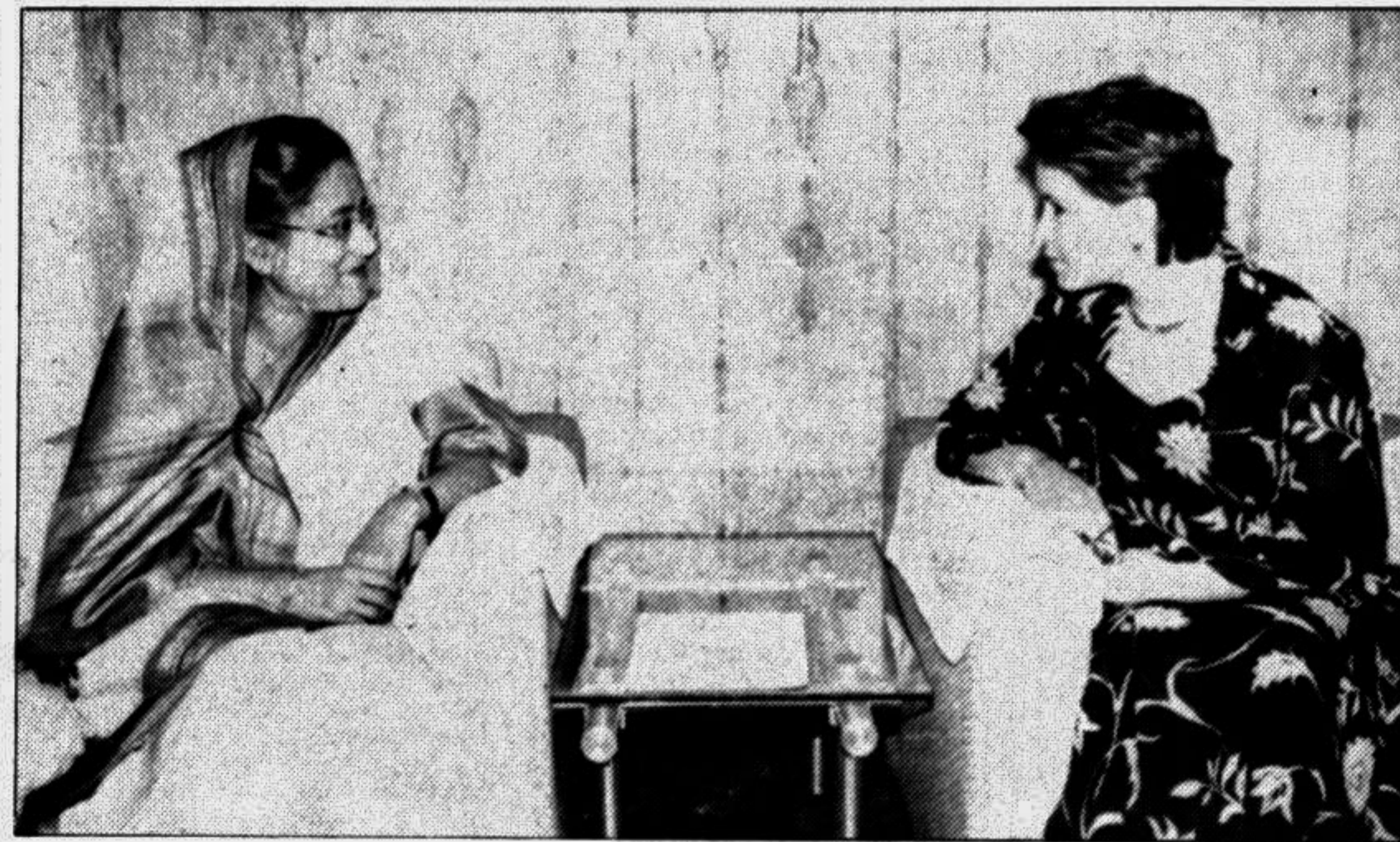
Kobayashi said an appropriate

dry land management will not only help tackle climate change or global warming, it is also essential for preserving biological diversity, maintaining sustainable food production and alleviating poverty.

Rapid growth in water demand, stemmed from the increasing reliance on irrigation to achieve food security, has led to shortage of fresh water—a critical component of global environment.

Wastage of fresh water in developing countries due to improper management policies and practices accelerates land degradation and enhances desertification, he said.

Appropriate water supply policies and water management practices, aimed at increasing efficiency of water use, need to be implemented to combat desertification.



UNESCO goodwill Ambassador Maria Teresa called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Sangsad Bhaban office in the city yesterday. —PID photo

SSC: New questions

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thana on charges of possessing the copies of 'leaked' question paper.

They were identified as Shahadat Hossain, son of Shamsul Haq of village Isanagar, and Mohammad Saiful Islam, son of Aminur Rahman of village Imampur, in Mirsarai thana. Both of them were taken on police remand.

The three-member probe body, formed by the Chittagong Education Board, also interrogated the two arrested examinees today.

Indicating that some information could be gathered from them, the probe body suspected a BG Press employee, but did not disclose his name for the sake of investigation.

The probe body also visited the village home of the suspect in Mirsarai. He was not available there, nor he reported for duty at the BG press, according to a probe body source.

The district administration also formed a separate inquiry committee to investigate the incident.

A Special Branch team of

Dhaka Metropolitan Police, led by senior Police Super Golam Kibria Bhuiyan, reached here today. The team visited the areas in Mirsarai and Sitakunda where question papers were leaked out.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Board sources said that a good number of students were expelled today from different schools under the district for adopting unfair means.

They said eight students were expelled from Gazipur centre, six from Narayanganj, nine from Munshiganj, two from Manikganj, sixteen from Myensingh, seven from Jamalpur, 17 from Sherpur, 56 from Netrokona, five from Gopalganj, three from Rajbari, 15 from Madaripur, 10 from Shariatpur and one from Dhaka metropolitan area.

Sources at Jessore Board said a total of 49 examinees were expelled from different centres today.

Under the Rajshahi Board, ten examinees were expelled from Natore, 22 from Pabna, 25 from Rajshahi, 32 from Gaibandha, 37 from Kurigram, 105 from Dinajpur and five from Joypurhat.

Methanol

From Page 1

medicines like cough syrup and sleeping pills. Officials alleged that rectified spirit was illegally sold from homeopathic shops.

Four distilleries in Darshana, Natore, Rangpur and Panchagarh produce rectified spirit in the country. The chemical is used in homeopathic pharmacies and in various industries.

Methanol, which is imported, is one of the main raw materials used for varnishing and as a solvent for paints.

The DNC officials said the department had written a letter early this year to the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to increase tariff on methanol as it was being abused due to its cheap price.

NBR officials, when contacted, said that the chemical was used in bulk quantities in various industries and that the tariff rate was fixed in annual budget.

The DNC officials also said that the department was unable to keep tight vigilance on the illegal liquor traders across the country for lack of adequate manpower. Twenty-one posts of assistant director are vacant now, they said, adding, police department also had to check illegal trading on sedative drugs.

After every incident of death from liquor poisoning, the DNC authorities suspended field level officers or staff concerned.

About 12 people died from liquor poisoning in the city's Rampura area in 1996 while 14 died in Tangail and 15 in the city's Tejgaon areas last year.

Besides, at least 65 people died in a similar incident at Gaibandha town last week, according to reports.

Meanwhile, following the Gaibandha incident, the DNC authorities have slashed allocation of rectified spirit for the licensed traders by 25 per cent, sources said.

Nutrition Week begins from today '600 children die due to malnutrition every day'

Some 600 children die every day in the country due to malnutrition while 94 per cent suffer from various complications resulting from malnutrition, reports UNB.

Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf disclosed this at a press briefing at his office yesterday on the eve of the National Nutrition Week.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the chairperson of National Nutrition Council, will inaugurate the week at the Osmani Auditorium at 4 pm today.

The theme of the week, being observed for the first time in the country, is 'Improved Nutrition: Healthy Nation.'

To mark the day, the Health Ministry has drawn up various programmes, including rally, seminar, symposium, workshop, essay and art competitions, folk songs and concerts. The programmes will also be held at district and thana levels.

Radio and television will put up special programmes during the week, highlighting the role of nutrition.

The Health Minister said

PCJSS team could not leave city

By Special Correspondent

Chairman of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) Joytrindriyo Bodhipriyo Larma alias Shantu Larma and his entourage could not leave the city for Khagrachhari yesterday due to bad weather.

They were scheduled to leave for Khagrachhari at 3 pm. But they returned to the state guest house Padma at 4 pm as the helicopter which was to take them to Khagrachhari could not take off because of bad weather.

They are scheduled to leave this morning, officials said.

Abul Hasnat Abdullah, Chief Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad and Chairman of the Committee to Implement the CHT Agreement, visited Larma at the guest house yesterday morning.

Shantu Larma came to the city on Saturday for talks with government leaders to remove, what he said, incongruities in the four bills placed before parliament on April 12 for implementation of the CHT accord.

Roads and Highways

From Page 1

quicker implementation of infrastructure development projects resulting in a substantial reduction of financial and administrative pressure on the government," the official hoped.

The ministry has already organised a seminar on its BOT guidelines on March 23 last. The seminar was attended by 39 participants including eight retired chief engineers of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) besides officials of ministry of communications, planning commission, World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

A six-member core committee formed during the seminar is now working to finalise the BOT guideline incorporating suggestions and recommendations passed in the seminar. The final draft guideline is expected to be sent to the cabinet shortly.

"Certain administrative amendments have been suggested to allow entry of big investors in highway projects exempting the sector from the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act," said Karar Mahmudul Hasan, joint secretary of the ministry, who prepared the BOT guideline for the government.

"The BOT model of Bangladesh replicated the concept already put into operation in other countries," he said, adding that "problems found in other versions were addressed to reduce the time factor, once the model is put into operation."

He added, "One window system will be introduced for BOT projects which will be approved in one single stroke by a high-level body to be chaired by the communications minister."

The joint secretary said, "To evaluate the BOT projects a Road Privatisation Cell (RPC) has been proposed to be set up in the Roads and Highways Department."

The high-level body would also have representations from the ministries of finance, commerce, law, land and planning, the NBR, ERD and IMED, he said, adding that the body will have the power to co-opt any member as and when necessary.

PM: Corruption

From Page 1

In this context, she requested all to let the relevant authorities know about whatever information they had about misuse of the relief fund.

Power situation

UNB adds: Prime Minister yesterday said 85 per cent people of the country have no access to electricity.

Replying to a supplementary question by Mohibur Rahman Manik (AL) she said although the electricity cannot be ensured overnight to all, the government is trying to overcome the problem at the earliest possible time through participation of the private sector investment.

Referring to the BNP claim of Tk 6,000 or 7,000 crore investment in the power sector during its rule, she said, "We are yet to get the actual account of the expenditure."

Regarding the alleged corruption during the BNP regime, Sheikh Hasina said the Bureau of Anti-corruption has filed case against the former Energy Minister.

Replying to another question, the Prime Minister said at least two barge-mounted power plants will come into operation by August this year.

Replying to a supplementary question, she said the government has no plan to allow the power plants to be installed by private sector to sell power directly to the consumers, but to PDB. However, the government will consider the matter in future.

3 arrested with heroin in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Apr 21: Three persons were arrested today with 120 grams of heroin from a slum near Maderbari railgate under Doublemooring thana, reports BSS.

According to Narcotics Control Department (NCD) and police, plainclothes officials, acting on a tip off, raided two houses of the slum and arrested the persons with the heroin.

Following the arrest, a group of agitating people of the slum threw stones at the NCD officials injuring one Meer Amir Hossain, a sepooy of the NCD.

Later Doublemooring police rushed to the spot and tamed the angry people.

Dick Cheney to visit Sangu gasfield today

Former US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney arrived in the capital yesterday evening, reports UNB.

Cheney, who is now the Chairman and CEO of Halliburton Company, will visit Sangu Gasfield today.

Sangu Gas is a joint venture project between state-owned Petrobangla and three international companies — Cairn Energy PLC, Halliburton Company and Shell.

BNP: Ruling

From Page 1

makers representing BNP.

Quoting Article 66(4) of the Constitution and Article 178(1) of the Sangsad Rules of Procedure, the Deputy Leader of Opposition said, "as a dispute has arisen over the membership of those two MPs the Speaker has got nothing to do with it but refer the issue to the Election Commission and the EC's decision is final."

By giving the ruling under the government's influence, Chowdhury said the Speaker deviated from his oath, which provided no scope for falling prey to pressure or influence.

He recalled cases of Ebadur Rahman and Mahmudul Hasan, who had joined BNP during the Fifth Parliament and said, "the then Speaker had referred their cases directly to the Election Commission."

Responding to a question on whether BNP would go to court to challenge the Speaker's ruling, Badruddoza Chowdhury said, "We'll decide our next move after discussion in our parliamentary party meeting."

Meanwhile, a BNP leader and former energy minister Dr Khandakar Mosharrar Hossain, who was also present at the briefing, refuted a statement made by Minister without portfolio Nouruddin Khan on April 20 and claimed that during BNP's rule some 561 MW power was added to the national grid and work was initiated for generation of 800 MW.

Abducted boy

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pant asked him to find the way of the bus stoppage from Khilgaon crossing to Mirpur.

As they proceeded some way, the old man waved his hand and a white microbus with black screen in its windows came beside them.

Salahuddin said within a moment and before he understood anything, he was taken to the vehicle. The white dressed man then put something on his mouth and he lost his sense.

When he got his sense, Salahuddin found himself lying on a floor of an unknown house in the evening.

The boy said the house where he was confined was surrounded by trees in a solitary area.

Some 8 to 10 boys and girls of 7 to 12 years were in the house. They lived like family members with four middle aged men and women as their guardians.

He said they were kept under tight security and were not even allowed to talk to each other. Anybody trying to cry was beaten up.

Some times, the children were taken to different places by microbus, he said. He sometimes heard them saying "Today's mission was not successful."

At dawn on April 16, he came to the rooftop of the house and quickly came out of it by climbing an adjacent banyan tree.

He then hired a rickshaw to take him to the bus stand for Dhaka.

305 Hajis return by direct flight

CHITTAGONG, Apr 21: Some 305 pilgrims of the district, who performed the holy Hajj this year, arrived here today in a direct Hajj flight from Jeddah, reports UNB.

This is the first-ever direct Hajj flight from Jeddah to the Chittagong MA Hannan International Airport.

Speaker's ruling

From Page 1

lawmakers Hafizuddin Ahmed and KM Obaidur Rahman who accused Swapan and Alauddin for "violating" Article 70 of the Constitution about floor-crossing and demanded the Chair's decision on the matter.

It also quoted from two letters from BNP to the Speaker which claimed that the two lawmakers' joining the government amounted to their resignation from the party they were elected from and that their seats fell vacant for 'crossing the floor'. Both the letters with similar contents had also requested the Speaker to publish gazette notifications on "vacation" of the two seats.

In this regard, the Speaker noted that none of the letters had mentioned anything about the two BNP lawmakers' resignation from their own party or about their voting against that party. The Speaker further said that he also did not have any such information.

The Speaker said that as Hasibur Rahman Swapan and Dr Alauddin did not violate Article 70(1) by joining the government, they were not disqualified as per Article 66(2) and Article 66(4) and so these were not applicable to them.

Quoting from Article 70(1), the Speaker said an issue can be referred to the Election Commission only when dispute arises if an MP is disqualified as per Article 66(2). "So, there is no scope to consider the issues of Hasibur Rahman Swapan and Dr Alauddin as disputes over vacation of seats and hence there is no chance to refer the matters to the EC," he said.

Replying to BNP's demand for publication of gazette notification on "vacation" of the two JS seats, the Speaker said there was "no scope for such an action".

Nor'westers

From Page 1

In the morning, another nor'wester accompanied by hailstorm lashed the city and its adjoining areas. But no casualty or damage was reported.

However, two fishing boats sank in the sea during the 50-minute storm that began at 8 in the morning. The fishermen managed to swim ashore.

UNB Tangail correspondent said: A violent storm hit Nagarpur thana of the district early yesterday, leaving a man dead and damaging about 300 thatched houses.

Identity of the dead could not be known immediately.

The storm also damaged standing crops on a vast tract of land and uprooted a large number of trees.

In Narsingdi, three people were injured in a nor'wester that swept over Sadar, Monohardi and Shibpur thanas in the afternoon.

The storm damaged dwelling houses, standing crops and uprooted trees.

BSS adds: Five persons were killed and more than 100 injured when a severe storm lashed Valuka in the Myensingh district.

The storm also caused colossal damage to the property in the area.

Ctg businessmen

From Page 1

The Chamber President, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, informed the meeting that in the past 8 months from September 97, at least 10 businessmen and industrialists were killed, 35 persons including 16 businessmen abducted and 65 incidents of mugging and attack on 60 shops took place in the Port city.

Among others, Matuur Rahman, M A Latif, Mahub Ali, Salauddin and Abdul Mabud addressed the meeting.

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Gaibandha: Medicare facilities

From Page 1

hospital late. "We could have saved some patients had they been brought in time."

Ranjit, son of sweeper Kedar narrated how his father, uncle, grand-mother and paternal cousin died after taking the adulterated liquor on the Bangla New Year Day. "My father was sleeping. Suddenly he started vomiting. We became worried. My father started complaining of unbearable chest burn. We immediately took him to the Gaibandha Sadar Hospital (GSH)."

"It was 4 am. A doctor, already looking very worried, received my father at the hospital corridor. We saw few more patients nearby but could not ascertain their condition. Relatives accompanying the other patients looked depressed."

"The lone doctor, grappling with the problem, told me after a few minutes that my father was dead."

"The doctor and nurses also told us, if there was anyone else in the family suffering from similar symptoms, he should be brought to the hospital immediately."

"We came back and found my uncle, grand-mother and a cousin suffering from similar pain. They also had taken the liquor."

"They were taken to the hospital. Unable to control the rush of patients, the hospital authorities instantly directed that the new arrivals be taken to Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) in ambulances."

"We were told next day that my grand-mother had died on way while my cousin and uncle died soon after they were taken to the RMCH."

Nani Gopal, a survivor, now at the GSH told this correspondent Sunday. "I had taken two ounces of the drink each costing Tk 5 at Dariarpur with some friends on the night of the Bangla New Year." Dariarpur is about ten kilometres from Gaibandha town.

"I accompanied by my wife came to the town the next day and went to the GSH. Doctors said, had I arrived any later, I could have been in trouble."

Among the victims of the tragic incident were a pourashava commissioner, five freedom fighters, a school teacher, two businessmen, rickshaw-pullers and sweepers.

When contacted Chairman of Gaibandha Pourashava Md Wahiduzzaman Khan Titu said, "Until Tuesday's incident, we did not know that so many people including some well-to-do ones were addicted to rectified spirit."

"In our recent monthly review meeting on law and order we passed a resolution for police action against such illegal sale of spirit. But police ignored our call. It is police who are to be blamed for the tragic incident. Police knew about the unlawful activities. They had even arrested the main accused, Rabi Saankar, but later released him."

When contacted, SP Waliar Rahman admitted that there should have been tighter vigilance on the illegal sale of liquor. "The issue was overlooked. May be, my officers had links with the illegal traders, but final investigation will show who was responsible," he said.

According to official estimate, 49 people died from the liquor poisoning incident so far.

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