

Salinity in the Sundarbans increases abnormally

Top dying disease attacks Sundari trees

ABU AHMED, *Satkhira*

Thousands of Sundari trees in the Sundarbans, the biggest mangrove forest of the world, are being destroyed due to various diseases.

This is because of the adverse effect of the Farakka barrage. The number of Sundari trees have been drastically fallen by about 50 per cent due to top dying disease which is increasing gradually. Unless immediate measures are taken to prevent the disease, it is apprehended that most valuable trees of the Sundarbans will vanish, experts said.

According to a forest official, because of adverse effect of Farakka, salinity in the Sundarbans has increased abnormally. As a result, the Sundari trees of the Sundarbans have been attacked with the top dying disease.

According to a recent report, for the normal growth of Sundari trees, water must contain 12 ppt and soil must contain between 8 to 10 ppt, but experimental study shows that at present water in the Sundarbans contain 28 ppt while the soil contains between 18 to 22 ppt an amount of salt being too high for the trees' survival. In addition to this fresh growth of Sundari trees have been greatly threatened due to this salinity, experts observed.

According to concerned sources, despite government ban on cutting of Sundari trees from 1989 with a view to keeping ecological balance, cutting of this variety of trees could not be stopped. As reported by the concerned officials, generally the Sundari trees attacked by top dying disease are being cut down and extracted.

For prevention of this injurious top dying disease, a team led by Dr Gibson conducted a research in 1985 under Forest Research Centre, Chittagong, but he could not identify the specific cause of this disease. He advised to cut off the trees which are already attacked with top-dying disease.

According to Dr Gibson, repeated natural calamities, excessive salinity and massive siltation in and around the forest could be the cause of top dying disease.

As per recommendations put forward by Dr Gibson since 1991-92 financial year, about 30 lakh cubic feet of Sundari trees affected by the disease from compartments of 20, 26, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, and 40 under 54 comps of the Sundarbans have so far been cut-off.

According to sources, 332248 pieces of Sundari trees under Compartment No 20 have been earmarked as those are attacked with top dying disease, 246742 pieces of Sundari trees under Compartment No 39, 69,570 pieces of Sundari trees under compartment No 36, 58981 pieces of Sundari trees under Compartment No 37, 70,900 pieces of Sundari trees under Compartment No 32, 1,48,400 pieces of Sundari trees under Compartment No 38, 50,700 pieces of Sundari trees under Compartment No 26, and 252000 pieces of Sundari trees under Compartment No 19, have been earmarked as those are attacked with top-dying disease. Besides, huge number of Sundari trees in Ghaghramari, Mrigemari, Changmari, Karamjal Pora Mahal, Dhansagar, Harbari and Dhan Shiddhachar areas have also been attacked with the disease. In some areas of the Sundarbans, the Sundari trees have already been vanished.

According to a survey conducted in 1956 by the Forest Department, it revealed that the Sundari trees covered 60 per cent of the total area of the Sundarbans. In 1983, the percentage of Sundari trees decreased to 53 percentage. In 1994, the percentage decreased to 50 and it further decreased to 45 percentage in 1998.

The number of Sundari trees which are being attacked with the top-dying disease is increasing day by day and it is this trend is not checked as early as possible, the traditional Sundari trees in the Sundarbans may vanish in near future, experts opined.

Textbook crisis prevails in three districts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One and a half months have gone by since the current academic session of secondary education began. But many students in Faridpur, Panchagarh and Bagerhat districts are yet to get all the textbooks.

Student attendance in schools has dropped because of non-availability of textbooks.

Our Faridpur correspondent reports: According to information gathered from different bookstalls in the district headquarters, 1.5 lakh sets of books are required for secondary level students of the district. But only the textbooks of English, Bengali and Mathematics are available now in the markets.

Guardians and students said some booksellers are selling books in black market, creating artificial crisis. Some guardians also alleged that they are being forced to purchase notebooks along with the textbooks.

When contacted, local booksellers blamed the dealers, who had

been awarded the job of distributing the books, for scarcity, saying they were not experienced in the job.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) awarded Pustaka, Shuktara and Free Press—the three concerns of Beximco group—the job of printing and distributing around 5.5 crore textbooks for secondary level and 2.5 crore for primary stage.

The companies were supposed to print and distribute the textbooks for the current academic year by November 30 last year, but they failed to do so.

UNB from Panchagarh says: Some 2.5 lakh students of primary and secondary level in Panchagarh district have been thrown into a state of uncertainty due to textbook crisis.

According to local primary education office, some 1.5 lakh sets of books are needed for the primary level students while one lakh sets more for the secondary students.

"But only few books of class I and II, excluding books of Bangla of class I, have reached here in January while students of class III,

IV and V are yet to receive any books, till the first week of this month," said an official.

The Headmistress of Balavir Goalpara Government Primary School in Boda said they have already started academic activities with the old books for the non-availability of new ones.

Another report from Bagerhat says: Many schools students in Bagerhat district have not yet received their textbooks.

Shahabuddin Ahmed, president of local Book Publishers and Sellers Association, said no bookseller here is willing to be agent of 'Pustaka' due to the organisation's financial constraint.

Meanwhile, a section of dishonest traders have started bringing books from Khulna, Dhaka and Jessore and are selling those at exorbitant prices.

Educational officials said there were 179 high schools in the district with over 50,000 students and they need some four lakh textbooks.

Border guards take Tk 350 per cow?

UNB, *Satkhira*

Authorities' failure to control the trend of bringing Indian cows through illegal points bypassing the three authorised cow corridors deprives the government of huge revenues.

A cow trader, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said they have to pay Tk 500 for passing a cow through a legal corridor but "we can buy a border guard with even lower amount." They (BDR men) take Tk 250 to Tk 350 per cow.

According to competent sources, 300 to 400 cows are taken into the country everyday bypassing the three cow corridors located at Sonabaria in Kolaroa, Satani in Sadar and Kulia in Debhata upazila of Satkhira district.

One needs to pay Tk 500 in cow corridor to bring an Indian cow into the country. But a section of dishonest cow traders in connivance with some border guards bring cows through illegal route everyday to evade tax.

When contacted commander of BDR 12 battalion Lieutenant Colonel Abidur Rahman told that a huge number of cow is brought into the country through corridors, except a few through illegal route. "As the corridors are under Customs Department, BDR cannot interfere in their business," he added.

46 unnatural deaths in a Gaibandha UZ last year

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Gaibandha*

At least 46 unnatural deaths were recorded under Sadullapur upazila in Gaibandha district during the last year.

Out of total victims, 36 committed suicide and the rest ten drowned in ponds and rivers.

According to Sadullapur police station, tendency of committing suicide is on the rise in the area.

5,060 blankets for five lakh flood victims!

UNB, *Jessore*

The government have sanctioned only 5,060 blankets for over five-lakh flood-hit cold-stricken people of Jessore district.

District administration sources said the Deputy Commissioner of Jessore in a letter to the Relief and Disaster Ministry demanded 1,30,000 blankets and 3,00,000 pieces of winter clothes for 5,58,350 flood-hit people of 1,29,679 families of the district.

The people of Jessore district lost standing crops on 115,419 acres of land and 2,65,077 dwelling houses during the 45 days long deluge.

But the Relief Ministry sanctioned only 5,060 blankets, 5,198 pieces of sarees, 4,498 pieces of lungi and 7,774 metric tons of rice for the flood victims.

Local people alleged that due to nepotism and politicisation only a few flood-hit people got the relief materials.

In another exceptional initiative, Grameen Bank distributed comforters as loan among the cold-stricken poor people of Thakurgaon district.

Officials said the bank distributed the quilts at Tk 300 per piece and the borrowers will pay the loan in easy



PHOTO: STAR

Syed Shaikhul Imam, General Manager, Bangladesh Bank, Barisal recently inaugurated the Hepatitis B virus vaccination programme in the premises of the bank.

Hepatitis-B vaccination programme in Barisal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

Bangladesh Bank, Barisal organised Hepatitis-B virus vaccination programme in its office premises recently. The programme was initiated by Dr. Mohammed Farashuddin, Governor, Bangladesh Bank. SK+F Bangladesh Ltd has been assigned to carry out the programme throughout the offices or branches of Bangladesh Bank under the financial assistance of the bank. The vaccination programme at Barisal branch of the bank was inaugurated

by Syed Shaikhul Imam, General Manager of the bank.

The inaugural function was addressed, among others, by Dr Quazi Md Hafizur Rahman, Chief Medical Officer, Bangladesh Bank, Mahibuzzaman, Marketing Manager, SK+F Bangladesh Limited. Noor Muhammad Howlader, Deputy General Manager, Bangladesh Bank, Barisal presided over the function. The function was conducted by Md. Mosaddiq Ali Biswas, Deputy Director, Bangladesh Bank, Barisal.

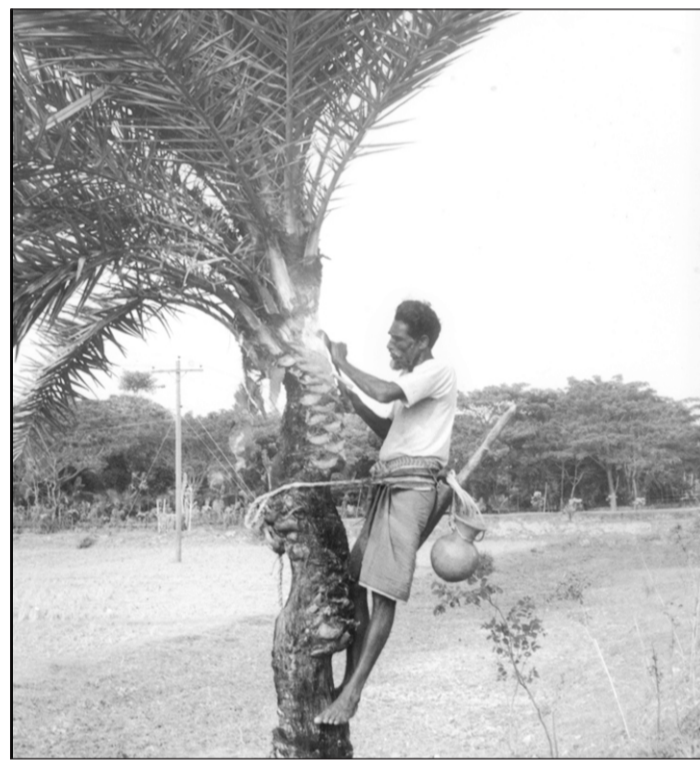


PHOTO: STAR

An old villager of Kashipur area on the outskirts of Barisal town scaling a date tree with a view to extracting its juice. Date juice is a popular in rural Bangladesh.

Extraction of date juice in full swing in S dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

Rural people in southern districts as elsewhere in the country now have been busy extracting juice from date trees. Date juice is a very popular drink in Bangladesh.

People mainly produce molasses from the juice. Besides, date juice is one of the main ingredients of pitha, the traditional winter cakes.

Every year thousands of 'maunds' of date molasses are produced in the districts, including Barisal. The molasses is in great demand in markets.

Date molasses sells between Tk 30 and Tk 32 a kg in local markets.

After continued boiling date juice, popularly called ras, turns into molasses. A man who scales a portion of the date trees to extract juice is called gachhi. The gachhi take out a portion of the bark on the top of the trunk from where juice oozes. The juice is stored in a container hanging round it. Gachhis collect juice in the morning.

Local people said the number of date trees is decreasing as a large number of trees are now used as firewood in most of brick kilns.

NEWS SNAPS

Undertrial prisoner dies of diarrhoea

UNB, *Kishoreganj*

An undertrial prisoner died of diarrhoea in Kishoreganj district jail recently. Sources said Hasu, 28, hailing from Bhatiani village in Bhoirab Upazila was taken to Sadar Hospital at midnight on Feb 8 from jail when he was attacked by the disease.

He breathed his last early Friday. Later his body was handed over to his relatives after autopsy. Relatives of the deceased alleged that Hasu died due to negligence of the jail authorities. But jail authorities and concerned physicians refusing the allegation said proper steps were taken for his treatment.

Crazy lover's revenge

UNB, *Bagerhat*

A crazy lover took revenge on rejection of his love by killing the husband of his estranged fiancée in Swarankhola upazila in Bagerhat on Monday. The victim was identified as Ismail Hossain, 25 of Salghar village of the upazila.

Police said the lover Abdul Karim and his accomplices swooped on Ismail at Chaltabunia on his way home with his newly wed wife Shefali Begum from Kutibaru village on Sunday night and stabbed him indiscriminately. He was rushed to the upazila health complex in a critical condition where he succumbed. Shefali allegedly maintained an affair with him since long. Police arrested Abdul Karim and one of his accomplices Sarwar. A case was filed.

Anti-hartal procession

UNB, *Thakurgaon*

Enraged by hartal on the Valentine's Day, some youths took out a procession in Thakurgaon town Wednesday and chanted anti-hartal slogans.

They youths, carrying placards in one hand and flowers in the other, brought out the procession from Sinua in the afternoon.

500 Jhum farmer families rehabilitated

UNB, *Bandarban*

Some 500 families of Jhum cultivators are being rehabilitated in sadar upazila of Bandarban district under the second phase of Highland Leasing Programme. Sources at the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board said each of the families would get 5.25 acres of land for homestead, vegetable and rubber gardening.

This land will be recorded in the name of the head of families and their heirs will inherit the land in future. A total of 50 families will be rehabilitated in each village with rubber gardens on 200 acres. The rehabilitated families will enjoy the benefits of the rubber garden. Arrangements have also been made for providing education and healthcare facilities to the rehabilitated Jhum families.

Training on mango cultivation

UNB, *Thakurgaon*

A daylong training course on modern techniques of mango cultivation was held at the Training Centre of Department of Agriculture Extension in Thakurgaon on Thursday. Some 30 mango cultivators and 20 employees, including 11 block supervisors and 3 officials, from Panchagarh and Thakurgaon districts took part in the training course, organised by the Mango Research Centre, Chapainawabganj.

Problems and prospects of mango cultivation in greater Dinajpur district, methods of fertiliser application and irrigation in mango fields, checking insects and pests, procurement and transportation of mango were discussed in the workshop.

Chief Scientific Officer of Mango Research Centre Dr Golam Mortuza, Principal Scientific Officer of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) Amin Ahmed Majumder, Chief Scientific Officer Manomohan Bishwas and AED Deputy Director Abdus Salam were present.

Agri fair ends

UNB, *Jhalakati*

A three-day agriculture fair organised by Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) ended at Kathalia Upazila Thursday. Some 500 high yielding varieties of agri-product were put on display in 20 stalls of the fair aimed at making the farmers familiar with new farming methods.

Fisheries and Livestock BRAC, PPC, Grameen Technology and Forest Departments also took part in the fair.

Youth complex work going on

UNB, *Bandarban*

Construction work on Youth Complex on three acres of land in Bandarban are progressing well at a cost of Tk 4 crore.

Youth and Sports Minister Obaidul Quader laid the foundation stone of the complex at Balaghata in the town on January 1, 1998.

Phensidyl recovered

UNB, *Narsingdi*

Police recovered 190 bottles of phensidyl syrup from Bhairab ferry ghat Tuesday.

On information, police raided the ghat and recovered the drug, but they could not arrest its trafficker. A case was filed.

Wheat farming hampered

UNB, *Narsingdi*

Wheat cultivation in Narsingdi district is begin hampered this season due to acute shortage of seeds and inadequacy of loan. According to local seed office, farmers in Narsingdi district have not only 10.5 metric tons of seeds against their requirement of 40 metric tons. The Department of Agriculture Extension this year brought 8,800 hectares of land under wheat farming in all six upazilas. However, farmers of Shibpur, Belabo and Rajpura alleged that they are facing crisis of seeds and financial assistance as well as power disruption.