

Salinity threatens Royal Bengal tigers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Environmental degradation in the Sundarbans has been affecting adversely the health of Royal Bengal tigers.

Royal Bengal tigers need adequate sweet water to satisfy their thirst. In the Sundarbans there are no sufficient number of tanks or sources of sweet water for Royal Bengal tigers. They, however, drink water from deep forest.

But in absence of sweet water in some areas, the tigers of the Sundarbans are compelled to drink saline water just for survival. As a result they fall sick frequently. Because of health hazards, growth of their next generation is being threatened.

According to sources of the concerned forest office, there are about 450 Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans.

They have been living in comparatively high land surrounded by dense wood to save from cyclone, storms and tidal waves.

But it has not been possible to create a sanctuary for tiger habitation in the Sundarbans as yet. Besides, due to expansion of visiting areas in the forest by human beings like Mowals, Bawals and fishermen, the tigers are retreating deep inside the dense forest, where living condition for them is unhealthy, said a forest official.

When this correspondent contacted with the concerned official of the Forest Department he told that they were pondering over the matter, "We have already submitted a project proforma consisting Taka nine crore as estimated cost to the Ministry of Forest and Environment a few years ago."

The official still hopes that the proposed project is likely to be okayed in due time. The project proposes expansion of new areas for Royal Bengal tigers by creating a healthy atmosphere and environment in the Sundarbans congenial to their survival.

As estimated in the plan, the number of tigers would increase sharply

from 450 to five thousand, if the plan is properly implemented.

UNB from Bagerhat reports: Kidnapping for ransom has become the order of the day in Nandabala area of Chandpai range of the Sundarbans with 25 woodcutters being the latest victims.

Locals said pirates kidnapped 85 woodcutters from the Sundarbans on January 26 and later set 60 of them free.

They kept hostage the remaining 25 and were demanding a ransom of Tk 1.25 lakh.

UNB from Panchagarh adds: Trees of vast tracts of forestlands known as Shawbans in Panchagarh district are on the wane due to lack of proper care and maintenance.

A section of people are engaged in cutting shawl trees from different forests including Bhitahar, Shawlabahan, Shawlbari, Debiganj, Shawlshiri, Kamalapur, Marea, Shawldanga, Badeshawari and Mondalhat for burning or making furniture everyday.

The officials or watchmen are hardly available in the beat range offices specially in Debiganj and Bodeswari ranges. They allegedly come to office only a day in a week.

Besides, a huge quantum of shawl and other trees are being felled everyday in connivance with some dishonest officials and guards of the department and these are mainly sold to the wood traders of Marea, Debiganj and Boda areas.

Meanwhile, some influential people of the area are grabbing the khas forestland by showing false documents and selling huge trees claiming the ownership, local people said.

Official sources said local Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) issued notices to the said owners asking them to submit their documents to Additional Commissioner (Land) for scrutiny.

4 RCC employees hurt in blast while dumping waste

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Four employees of the Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) were injured, three of them seriously, when a crude bomb exploded at a waste dumping site in Nawdapara area under Shah Mukhdum police station in the city on Sunday morning.

The injured were identified as Talebur, 30, Kalu, 26, Chhoton, 29, and Shagir, 32. They were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH).

RCC sources said the bomb exploded when they were dumping the wastes collected from different city dustbins.

Mayor Mijanur Rahman Minu visited the injured.

Unhygienic food on sale in Faridpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Unhygienic and adulterated food in restaurants and sweetmeats in shops in Faridpur district are posing threat to public health.

Most of the restaurants and food stalls have no valid licence. In the shops in Mairapoti area in the town, sweetmeats and food are prepared without maintaining hygiene. Food items in the stalls are exposed to flies and dusts, contaminating them.

Moreover, the water supplied to the customers from the stalls is not pure.

1,570 committed suicide in 11 yrs in Netrakona

OURCORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

At least 1,570 people committed suicide in the last eleven years from 1990 to 2000 in Netrakona district, official sources said.

According to police, family feuds, failure in love or examination and poverty are the main causes of suicides in the district.

119 people committed suicide in 1990, 113 in 1991, 136 in 1992, 141 in 1993, 125 in 1994, 122 in 1995, 136 in 1996, 162 in 1997, 187 in 1998, 169 in 1999 and 160 in 2000.



PHOTO: STAR

The River Surma which flows through Sylhet town has now been turned into a dead river. Previously Sylhet was a pollution-free town due to smooth flow of this river, but now the town has become a polluted one because of gradual drying up of the river.

Some phone subscribers receive suspicious slim bills in Magura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Some telephone subscribers in Magura town have been getting very suspicious slim bills, thanks to their under-the-table dealings with some unscrupulous staff of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB). Most of these subscribers run pay phone and fax business.

Under a verbal contract, the staff receive Taka 3,000 per month and issue a bill of Tk 500 to Tk 700 to the subscribers. According to an unofficial estimate, the government has been incurring a loss of about Taka 43 lakh in revenue every year.

On the other hand, subscribers allege that those who do not entertain the staff invariably get 'ghost-bill'.

Many subscribers say they hardly make any NWD calls, but their monthly bills read that they do it regularly.

Previously, the billings ranged between Tk 300 and Tk 400 per month, but it went up to Tk 2000 on

one occasion", complained a subscriber who was not willing to be named.

According to the BTTB rules, one needs to deposit Tk 50,000 as security money to run a legal phone and fax business. But in reality none of the shop owners deposits the security money as they can obtain 'personal security' from a few corrupt BTTB employees in exchange for monthly allowance.

Besides, many telephone lines remain out of order for most of the time, causing sufferings to the subscribers.

Dial tones come and go frequently. Cross-connection, wrong number, feeble sound and ghost bills are constant troubles faced by the subscribers.

Subscribers say that whenever a complaint is lodged they authorities turn a blind eye to it.

When contacted, Sayedur Rahman Murad, sub-assistant engineer of Magura Telegraph and Telephone, admitted a faulty telecommunication system does exist.

But when asked about the illegal telephone and fax business, he told this correspondent "I have joined here only one month back. If anything happens like this it is beyond my knowledge and I have no support in this connection."

Pay phone and fax shop owners are doing brisk business in Sayed Ator Ali Road, MR Road, Notun Bazaar, Dhaka Bus Stand and Bhaina Square areas in the town.

"I think digital system is the only solution to our problems. The system only can reduce the ongoing corruption, cross-connection and other problems we are facing" said Khondokar Tariqul Islam, a subscriber in Magura town.

Magura Exchange was established in 1964 with 25 lines under Magneto Board system. The number of lines was increased up to 100 in 1970 under Central Battery system. In 1985, an automatic exchange with 400 lines was installed.

Diesel shortage hits Boro cultivation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Acute crisis of diesel has hit the on going Boro paddy farming during the current season in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur districts.

Farmers say the scarcity has pushed the prices of the fuel up. The growers add they cannot irrigate croplands because of the fuel crisis.

Diesel now sells at Tk 20 per litre in the urban areas while farmers are paying Tk 22 per litre in the rural areas. Before the start of the farming season it was available between Tk 15 and Tk 16 in the region.

However, there is allegation that diesel is being smuggled to neighbouring India through different border points in Bhurungamari, Fulbari, Nageshwari, Patgram, Hatibandha, Aditmari, Kaliganj, Rajivpur, Rowmari and Chilmari upazilas.

According to sources with Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation's second biggest railway overhead oil depot at Parbatipur, floating oil depots at Chilmari in Kurigram district and at Balashi in Gaibandha district have already suspended the supply of fuel because their stocks came down.

Authorities are now supplying the fuel from Bagabari Barge Depot. But the price has increased because of rising transport costs.

Many areas in Rangpur,

Kurigram, Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts remain uncultivated. Gangachhara, Pargachha, Kaunia, Chilmari, Rowmari, Rajivpur, Ulipur, Dimla, Domar, Patgram, Hatibandha, Rajarhat, Fulbari, Sundarganj, Shaghatta and Fulchari are worst-hit areas where croplands are being dried up for want of irrigation water.

The Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) has taken up a programme to bring at least 12 lakh hectares of land under Boro farming in the northern districts. But so far around 80 per cent targeted lands have been brought under the cultivation.

In 1999, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) established railway overhead oil depot at Parbatipur with a view to supplying fuel smoothly to remote areas in the northern districts. Besides, Padma Oil Company, Jamuna Oil Company and Meghna Petroleum Company also have six big and three small overhead oil tanks in the region.

In the face of high demand authorities have failed to supply required fuel to farmers. An official of a petroleum company said the demand of fuel during the current season enhanced almost three times compared to previous years.

Primary school students face textbook crisis

UNB, Pirojpur

A large number of primary school students of Pirojpur district are facing problems, as textbooks are yet to reach them.

Many schools of six upazilas could not start their academic activities till this month due to non-supply of textbooks. Although some schools began academic activities, but they are facing problems for the non-availability of books on various subjects.

Local primary education office said out of the total requirement of 6 lakh textbooks the authorities supplied only 1.20 lakh books so far. Books of Class II are yet to reach the students throwing about 30,000 students into uncertainty.

Students of class I only received books on Arithmetic so far.

Subjects like Arithmetic, English, Social Science, Hindu Religion of Class III did not arrive and Bangla, English, Islamiat, Social Science, Arithmetic and Science for Class IV and V are also not available.

Some 1.50 lakh students of 922 primary schools are facing hardships to prosecute their studies because of the existing book crisis.

The guardians expressing grave concern over the situation blamed the government for the problem.

A local primary education official said that they have failed to supply books timely because of irregularities in supplying books from Dhaka.

Local elite apprehended that the rate of dropouts in the primary schools would be higher this year due to the problem.

A report from Thakurgaon says: Some school textbooks have reached Thakurgaon district but none of Class III although three and half months of the academic year elapsed.

Teachers say hundreds of students are not coming to school in absence of textbooks.

The District Primary Education office said more than 5,88,000 sets of textbooks are required for 960 schools here. Some books of different classes were available, but none for Class III till (March 14).

A number of headmasters of primary schools in rural areas told that most children coming to schools are from poor families. They can hardly afford to buy khata or pencil. The students come to school with textbooks supplied to them. Many are not attending school in absence of books. They are rather engaged in other activities.

Headmaster of Thakurgaon Riverview High School said the first quarterly examination in his school was uncertain as the students are yet to be fully equipped with textbooks.

Weeks ago guardians and students had brought out procession demanding textbooks.

Mass grave discovered in Thakurgaon

BSS, Thakurgaon

After long 29 years of independence a mass grave of 1971, where 27 persons were killed and buried, was discovered on the Ranisankail Model Primary School campus situated at Ranisankail upazila headquarters of Thakurgaon district.

The headmaster of Ranisankail Model Primary School Bijoy Kumar Pal told this correspondent that a few days ago he employed some labourers to dig a well for the construction of a soak well of the latrine of the school. The labourers while digging the well found some skulls and bones of human beings and abandoned digging out of fear.

The labourers informed the matter to the headmaster. The headmaster later informed the matter to the UNO, local political leaders and some elite of Ranisankail.

Abdul Quddus, president, CPB, Ranisankail upazila committee and some other elite of the area informed that during the Liberation War the occupation Pakistan army conducted mass killings at different places of the upazila.

Abdul Quddus also said that at that time he was a student of inter-

mediate class and taking preparation to join the Liberation War and went underground in Ranisankail.

Recalling the horrified memory of the Liberation War he said in the month of April of May in 1971 Pakistani Army personnel brought with them some tribal people from different parts of the upazila and brutally killed them in premises of the school.

The occupation army at that time also held another tribal man from Ranisankail and publicly hanged him from a tree at the same place. All victims were buried in one grave, he said.

Later, it was known that 27 people most of them belonging from Sautal and Uras communities fell victim to the Pakistani army.

Abdul Quddus further said that in 1972 in presence of some foreign journalists and the then MP late Ali Akbar the place was dug and some skulls and bones were found. But no initiative was taken to preserve the place as a mass grave.

On contact with the UNO of Ranisankail upazila, he said that he had visited the place and took measures to protect the place. He also said that he had informed the matter to the Deputy Commissioner, Thakurgaon.

NEWS SNAPS

Nine Pakistani intruders in Bandarban

BSS, Bandarban

Nine mysterious persons including two women and three children were found in the remote area of Jhanchi upazila under Bandarban Hill District in the second week of this month, police sources said. They said, the mysterious persons are found of fox meat and they are possessing several fox traps. They speak in Bangla mixed Urdu.

They told police that they are Pakistani citizens and entered into Bangladesh through Akhaura border from Agartala of India last year. They came to Jhanchi upazila from Alikadam upazila of the district. The chairman of Gallangya Union Parishad under Ruma upazila, Aung Lai Mro, said the mysterious intruders, now staying in union in Watch of Security personnel, may be foreign informers. Police said that about 10 foreign intruders were arrested in Bandarban Hill District recently and sent to jail.

Boy killed in Rajbari road mishap

UNB, Rajbari

A little boy was killed when a tempo knocked him down in front of Kalyanpur BRAC office on Rajbari-Doulatdia Road Monday afternoon. The dead was identified as Tuhin, aged about 6 years.

After the accident, angry locals put barricade on Rajbari-Doulatdia and Rajbari-Faridpur regional roads stopping vehicular movement for about three hours. Police seized the tempo but could not arrest its driver. A case was filed.

Boy languishing in jail

UNB, Khulna

A young boy arrested nine months ago without warrant or case against him has been languishing in jail without trial. Noor Hossain, son of Ishaq Ali of Jabdipur under Khanjahan Ali upazila, was a small roadside trader at Phulbari Gate in the divisional town.

Police picked him up from home at Jabdipur on June 1 last year for reason unknown to him or his parents. Since then he is in jail without any trial. When contacted, officer-in-charge of Khanjahan Ali upazila pleaded ignorance about the arrest and imprisonment of Noor Hossain.

Invigilator manhandled

UNB, Patuakhali

A member of a vigilance team in the ongoing SSC examination was assaulted by an expelled examinee on Subidkhal College road in Mirzapur upazila of Patuakhali district on Monday. Local administration sources said the examinee, Rafiquzzaman, waylaid the rickshaw of Subject Matter Officer of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Ziaul Islam on the road and beat him mercilessly.

Earlier on the day, Islam expelled Rafiq from Darus Sunnat Senior Madrasa Centre for cheating in the examination. Local UNO Syed Sabbir Ahmed visited the spot. A case was filed with the police in this regard. A total of 11 students were expelled from the centre on Monday for adopting unfair means in the examination.

Abducted youth rescued

UNB, Laxmipur

The relatives of an abducted youth secured his release from the clutches of kidnappers in Ramganj upazila of Laxmipur district by paying ransom Tk 1.05 lakh.

Locals said Anwar, 20, was abducted by his fellow terrorist gang from the upazila headquarters on March 8. His family members paying the money rescued him on Friday morning. No case was filed with the police.

Price-hike of construction materials

UNB, Bagerhat

Implementation of a number of government projects, involving about Tk 100 crore, is being hampered due to sudden price-hike of construction materials. Official sources said concerned construction firms were showing unwillingness in completing the projects because of soaring prices of construction materials like rod, cement and bitumen.

Price of cement marked a rise by Tk 40 to Tk 50 per bag while that of rod by Tk 10,000 to Tk 12,000 per ton and that of bitumen by Tk 1,000 per drum. Public Works, LGED, Facilities, R&H and Health Departments, District Council and Water Development Board are implementing the projects. The projects include Doratana Bridge, involving Tk 36 crore, new district jail, involving Tk 13 crore, construction of many schools, colleges and madrasas at a cost of Tk 20 crore and other development works of LGED.

Construction work of bridge opens

UNB, Gazipur

Construction work of a bridge over the River Paruli at Dumni in Sreepur upazila of Gazipur district has been inaugurated.

State Minister for Rural Development and Cooperatives Adv Rahmat Ali inaugurated the work on March 8. He also inaugurated the re-excavation work of the river on the same day. Speaking on the occasion the State Minister said the lot of the rural people could be changed through successful implementation of 'one house one farm' programme of the government.



PHOTO: STAR

A three-day agriculture fair arranged by the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) concluded in Jhenidah recently. At least 200 agriculture items were on display. A full bloom mini mango tree of 38 inches height (top left), a 6 feet 4 inches high stalk of amaranth (top right), 20 kg arum (bottom left) and 51 kg pumpkin (bottom right) attracted the visitors.