

Shrimp lords destroy coastal mangrove

Local BNP MP's men fell trees, exposes Sonadia island to tidal wave

MORSHED ALI KHAN and DAN GREENWOOD, back from Sonadia

The ecologically critical Sonadia Island under Moheshkhali Police Station fast loses thousands of acres of state-owned natural mangroves.

Hundreds of workers engaged by the local BNP MP Alamgir Mohammad Mahfuzullah Farid are chopping down the mangroves to convert the area into shrimp cultivation compartments.

The massive deforestation of 15-kilometre-radius Sonadia Island on the Bay of Bengal, where about 100 families live, has exposed the adjacent Moheshkhali to tidal waves, cyclones and other natural calamities.

Hundreds of bird species disappeared from the area, with the start of the mangrove forest depletion. People at Ghatibhanga in Moheshkhali, near Sonadia, complained of an 'unprecedented' attack by mosquitoes and other insects.

With the 'paira bon' -- the local name for mangrove forests having bair, keora and sundari trees amid thick vegetation -- disappearing, mosquitoes and insects swarmed the entire southwestern part of Moheshkhali.

Even in daytime, people had to eat, study or sit with mosquito-nets on. When some local people sought help from the local MP to stop deforestation and insect infestation, they were asked to leave the area and find another place to live in.

When these correspondents arrived at Sonadia on Monday, most of the island's interior looked barren and

submerged in knee-deep water. A thin layer of mangroves on the edge of the island has been left untouched to screen the assaults inside.

Millions of remaining dead tree trunks, some three to four feet high, popped out of the ankle-deep water that stretched from one side to the other. It looked as if a napalm bomb had been dropped, burning down all the trees, and the fire stopped as it neared the water level.

Some men on small boats were seen busy releasing shrimp fry in the water. Some local people have said the cleared site covering hundreds of acres at a stretch belong to the local MP Alamgir Farid and his nephew Habibullah. The MP and his nephew have embarked on converting 'all similar islands' along the Bay of Bengal into shrimp compartments, they said.

The Forest Department officials in the district headquarters expressed their frustration and said that despite frantic efforts they were unable to save the mangroves on the Sonadia Island.

They said a politically influential group, in connivance with the district administration, embarked on grabbing thousands of acres of forest along the coastal line of Bangladesh to set up shrimp projects.

"This is not a new trend, but recently a group of people is fast depleting the forest to set up shrimp projects," said a forest official in Cox's Bazaar.

The official warned against more human casualties

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A partial view of the Sonadia Island shows a vast stretch of barren land with only stumps of mangrove trees left over after shrimp lords cleaned up the area. PHOTO: STAR

Local BNP leaders complain about Indian wheat

REAZ AHMAD & ANWAR ALI

Local leaders of the ruling BNP are coming up with complaints of purchasing Indian wheat instead of the homegrown variety during the 135-day government procurement drive. Intriguing moves to defend the scam are also out there.

On August 1, the Bogra district BNP joint secretary, Nur Mohammad, sent a written complaint to Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman, saying some black marketers in Bogra in connivance with some food officials supplied substandard wheat to tarnish the government's image. He also recommended an immediate investigation into the matter.

However, the food minister told The Daily Star in Dhaka last night that he did not receive any such complaint. "I didn't see Nur Mohammad in person, I just know he is a local BNP leader... I didn't get any complaint from him."

Sources said Nur also sent BNP First Joint Secretary Tarique Rahman a list of the persons involved in supplying low-quality wheat, including at least eight of the ruling party, some of the Awami League and a number of influential businessmen.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Nur, however, denied the sending of the list to Tarique as well as the allegation of any BNP worker's involvement in the scam.

But he said, "Some food officials were involved in it. I was a member of the upazila procurement committee, but was not informed about the fresh wheat purchase in late July." Nur told BBC last night that he had complained about the Indian wheat procurement.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Bogra Safiq Uddin Ahmed, also president

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Souls all hollowed up

Search for Bappi's body continues in Shitalakhya



PHOTO: STAR

Shock and fury show over the faces of the students of Armenitola Govt. High school yesterday following the killing of their schoolmate Rubaiyet Ahmed Bappi.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was a different morning for Bappi's parents yesterday. A morning that only spelled emptiness and hollowed up their souls. A morning they would love to forget but would haunt them ever after.

The mother only clutched a dress of the dead son and sniffed the still fresh body smell of the eight-year-old kid, who was kidnapped and then killed by her cousin, and tried to feel his presence even in death. But the father had even a more excruciating time. He had to shelve the sorrow and join a search party, padding around the Shitalakhya -- the river where their apple of the eye still lies dead, cold and lonely.

Rubaiyet Ahmed Bappi was kidnapped by his cousin Mohammad Shipon and killed on Monday.

Bappi's mother Rokhsana Begum is in a fit of grief at her Becharam Deuri lane residence. All she had to console herself with was the sweet memories of her dead son. She has even forgotten to shed tears and gives a vacant look.

Sometimes, she finds it difficult to believe that her son, so lively and loveable, would no more return to

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AL to defy new flag law on Aug 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) has decided to hoist the national flag at half-mast on August 15, the death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in defiance of an official ban.

To mark August 15 as the national mourning day, the AL will keep the national flag flying at half-mast at the party central office, the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum and the residence of opposition leader Sheikh Hasina in the capital.

A decision to this effect was taken yesterday at an emergency meeting of the party's presidium, the highest decision-making body, sources said.

"It's very natural to hoist the national flag at half-mast on the death anniversary of the founding father of the nation," Awami League acting President Abdus Samad Azad told newsmen after the two-hour meeting.

However, the opposition party would not lower the national flag elsewhere on the day.

The AL that used to observe August 15 calling it a national mourning day recognised the day officially when it came to power in 1996. State programmes during the 1996-2001 AL regime marked the day which was also made a public holiday. Hoisting the national flag at

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Govt to let more cell phone companies

STAR REPORT

The government has decided to allow private companies to install and run fixed phones and let more mobile phone companies in the private sector.

It has also decided to allow electronic payment, Internet services and public call office (PCO) or multi-media communications centre at every village to ensure public access to telecommunications and the Internet.

The government made the decision at the third meeting of the ICT (information and communication technology) Task Force, which was held at the International Conference Center of the Prime Minister's Office with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The meeting also decided to provide protection for locally developed software and to introduce a special scholarship titled "Prime Minister's Scholarship for ICT Education" at university level for poor meritorious students, specially girls, who possess all necessary

qualifications but cannot continue studies for lack of financial support, sources who attended meeting told The Daily Star last night.

It directed the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to take steps to issue new licences to private companies for installing fixed as well as more mobile phones and Internet services.

The meeting decided to entertain any private sector proposal for computerisation of educational institutions on a Build Operate Own (BOO) and Build Operate Transfer (BOT) basis since the government is facing resource constraints.

Fixed line operators will work independently side by side with the state-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB), the meeting decided.

The meeting instructed the BTTB to further expand the Internet services at district and upazila levels over the next one year.

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119 more in clinics as dengue runs riot in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A female doctor died of dengue haemorrhagic fever while 119 people were admitted to different hospitals and private clinics yesterday with dengue fever in the city.

The doctor who died of dengue yesterday was identified as Nabila, 27. She died in Bangladesh Medical College Hospital in Dhanmondi where she herself was a student once.

Since the onset of dengue infection this season, 17 people have died and another 1299 people have been reported with dengue infection.

Hundreds of patients with high fever are pouring into different diagnostic centres in the city to test their blood samples.

In four city diagnostic centres, a total of 41 blood samples were tested for dengue (IgM) of which 30 were found positive. The percentage of sample tested positive is 74.

At Lab Aid Diagnostic Centre, a total of 7 blood tests for dengue infection were done yesterday of which 4 were found positive.

Of the 8 tests conducted for dengue at Medinova Diagnostic, 6 of the samples were found positive while at Popular Diagnostic, 7 of the tested 10 blood samples were found positive.

At Comfort Nursing Home, 13 were tested positive of the tested 16 blood samples.

The following is a list of hospitals and clinics where 119 new patients with dengue were admitted yesterday. Dhaka Medical College Hospital-15, Red Crescent Holy Family Hospital-2, Al-Raji Hospital-3, Central Hospital-6, Dhaka Shishu Hospital-4, Rushmono-7, Samarita 10, Monowara General Hospital-5, Nibedita Children Hospital-7, Uttara Clinic-4, Suhrawardi General hospital-6, New Al-Raji Hospital-1, Mifford Hospital-10, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital-2.

Meanwhile, fifty-five bags of platelet were requisitioned by different hospitals and private clinics from the Red Crescent Blood Collection Centre in Mohammadpur.