

Trees dying in N districts

'Cold burn', fog responsible, experts say

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The just concluded winter has claimed thousands of mature timber trees in northern districts.

The trees have died from 'cold burn' caused by severe cold and days of dense fog which prevented adequate sunlight from reaching them. Inadequate sunlight obstructs photosynthesis process in trees and plants by which they produce their food and emit oxygen. Trees then gradually wither away, according to Nazrul Islam, Plant Protection Specialist of Nilphamari Agriculture Extension Department (AED).

Obstruction in the photosynthesis process also makes trees vulnerable to diseases, he said.

This correspondent counted at least 3000 dead Shishu and other trees on both sides of Nilphamari Syedpur highway and the roads connecting upazila headquarters with the district town. Scores of trees have also died in other districts of greater Rangpur districts, according to reports gathered by this correspondent.

Scores more are withering away with their branches drying up.

"Coconut trees, nut trees, Shishu trees and raintrees are the worst victims of the situation," Nazrul said.

"Spaying Potash and Sulphur is very useful in such a situation", he added.

Md. Abdul Latif, Botany teacher at Nilphamari University College, when contacted, said different kinds of bacteria and virus develop on

trees due to severer cold and fog. These create diseases in trees", he said. One such disease --Ehlorosis-- makes leaves yellow and to fall off. Once the leaves fall, trees can not suck nutrients and organic substances from sunlight and soil and their respiration is also disturbed. They then die gradually. 'Cold burn' is directly responsible for this, he said.

But both Nazrul Islam and Prof Abdul Latif said most of affected trees are of foreign origin. These trees might have also faced adaptation problem here.

"It is also important to see whether the trees now dying had been planted scientifically or not", said Prof Latif.

Weather and soil suitability is also very important. A particular area may be suitable for one variety of trees, not for some others, he said.

When contacted, forester Mahbubur Rahman at the Social Forestry Nursery and Training Centre at Nilphamari said they have no statistics on how many trees died and how many are affected.

He however claimed that Shishu trees could be dying from root-rotting disease.

He said the Ministry of Forestry and Environment has been informed of the situation but no step taken yet. The matter was also discussed at a recent meeting of the district law and order coordination committee, he said.



PHOTO: STAR
A century-old rain tree near the district Ansar-VDP office in Nilphamari died of cold burn disease. Hundreds of trees on both sides of different roads died in the winter season.

Only for lack of a pillar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Believe it or not, about 500 families at two villages in Dumki upazila are deprived of power supply as REB could not erect a pillar in two years.

The Rural Electrification Board (REB) has completed their work stretching five and a half-kilometre area at Rajakhali and Shreerampur villages two years back. But the REB authorities are yet to supply electricity to the area although villagers bought electronic gadgets like televisions (TVs), refrigerators and fans. They cannot use these due to lack of electricity connection.

Authorities of four mosques, two primary schools, a high school, a women's college and a rice mill also applied for power connection, but in vain.

REB sources told this correspondent that the Board would supply power to villagers as soon as possible after erecting the last pillar.

Two 'outlaws' arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two alleged outlaws were arrested with arms at Khalfalia village in Jhenidah Sunday night. They are Dashrat of Lakmipur and Dabir Uddin of Rupdah in Saikupa.

Police recovered a Shutter Gun, two pipe guns and five bullets from their possession.

Notorious outlaw Tushar tells interrogators PBCP (J) is financed by leaders of a party to create anarchy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Self-styled commander of Janajuddha faction of outlawed PBCP Abdul Gaffar alias Tushar was taken to KMP headquarters Saturday night from Satkhira and quizzed by senior officials including DC (South) Ali Akbar in connection with seven sensational murders committed in the city since August last year.

Tushar who claimed responsibilities for many murders by fax message on behalf of his party was arrested by joint forces on February 18 from the house of BNP leader and chairman of Jugikhali Union Parishad under Kalaroa upazilla of Satkhira.

The BNP leader wanted for allegedly harbouring the most notorious outlaw could not be caught.

Till Monday, Tushar was questioned in Sonadanga thana where he has been lodged in tight security. A special team of KMP officials are

also interrogating him to know the real motives for murders and the masterminds.

Meanwhile, all police stations of city and other districts of South-Western Zone have been put on high alert following arrest of Tushar who is wanted in 22 murder cases including those of Khulna City AL President Manjurul Imam, journalist Manik Saha, Tala thana JP leader Sirajul Islam, BNP leader and UP Chairman Amir Azam Khan, Sonadanga thana AL Secretary Manjur Morshed Labu, Advocate Bijon Bihari Mondol and AL leader Kamrul Islam Kutu.

"We can tell you that he has given very important information about motives and masterminds of all the murders, confessing his involvement. But still he seems to be a hard nut to crack so far as his arsenal is concerned", said a senior officer of KMP.

According to a highly placed source of an agency, Tushar has

admitted that his outlawed party has link with a political party and financed by its godfathers to carryout subversive activities and create anarchy.

His party had a network of 200 armed cadres, the agency source said quoting from Tushar's statement.

Tushar told police that he joined Janajuddha faction of PBCP after coming out of Satkhira jail.

According to a source of KMP, he will be shown arrested in all the seven sensational murders committed in city since the murder of city AL President Advocate Manjurul Imam on August 25 last year. Necessary formalities are already under process to take him on remand.

A special operation is being planned to arrest activists and armed cadres of PBCP (J), hiding in Khulna city, said Additional Police Commissioner Sajjad Hossain who is holding temporary charge as police commissioner.

Rift in Rajshahi AL widens

Dist, city unit leaders blame each other for Feb 20 attack on leaders at Bagha council

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The rift between Rajshahi district and city units of Awami League has widened after the district unit suggested to the central AL expulsion of eight local leaders for what it called 'masterminding' the February 20 attack on some senior leaders at Bagha during a party council.

District AL General Secretary Tajul Islam Md Faruk and central AL Organising Secretary Akhtaruzzaman were injured in the attack that spoiled the Bagha upazila AL council.

The suggestion sparked protests from city unit leaders.

On February 21, the district AL also urged the party high command

in Dhaka to expel city unit General Secretary Khairuzzaman Liton, and seven others.

The others include district AL Joint Secretary Amanul Hasan Dudu, former MP candidate from Tanore-Godagari constituency Omar Faruk Chowdhury, Bausha union AL President Tagar, General Secretary Zahid, Pakuria AL President Akbar and General Secretary Bhabu Chowdhury.

The suggestion was made at a meeting with district unit acting president Meraj Uddin Mollah in the chair, held at the house of Tajul Islam Md Faruk on February 21 night.

Protesting the decision, Rajshahi city AL at a press conference held at its office here on Sunday blamed the

district unit leaders for tarnishing the image of the party.

City AL General Secretary Khairuzzaman Liton read out a written statement at the press conference and refuted the allegation that he masterminded the February 20 attack.

Liton termed the attack as a 'conspiracy against him' as well as the party and said there is no reason for his enmity with district unit leaders.

"I was also with the party leaders when the attack was made" he said and demanded probe into the incident.

Liton said the district committee has no right to decide about city unit leaders.

SNAPS

2 schoolboys rescued from captors

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Meherpur Police on Sunday rescued two schoolboys abducted for ransom from Adabari High School in Daulatpur upazila in the district on the previous day.

Police raided a house in Kazipur village in Gangni in Meherpur and rescued Piyar Ali, 15, and Iyar Ali. The abductors escaped.

Kushtia police said some masked men had abducted them from in front of the Shahid Minar at the school at about 9 am. The abductors demanded Tk two lakh ransom.

Student killed in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A school student was slaughtered by unidentified killers at Gandhapara village under Chakmaia Union Parishad of Kalapara thana in Patuakhali on Saturday.

Mashur Rahman Sikder alias Badal Sikder, 17, a student of class ten was killed in the early hours of the day due to a love affair with Salma, 20, wife of his cousin Kalam, local people told this correspondent.

The dead body was found in a marshy land of the neighboring Nawapara village in the morning.

Police arrested Sakhina Khatun, 55, Moktar Ali Sikder, 75, and Alamgir, 20.

Ill-fated Badal did not come back home from a VCD show. Wahab, Kalam and another unidentified person invited him to enjoy the show that night.

No alternative to Jatiya Party, says Ershad

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

"People want a change in the government and there is no alternative to Jatiya Party to run the country smoothly, said Hussain Muhammad Ershad.

The Jatiya Party chief told this while addressing a public meeting at Gaibandha Islamia High School ground on Sunday.

"If voted to power I shall make Rangpur a province which will immensely benefit you all" said Ershad.

The ruling BNP and the Opposition Awami League (AL) are in confrontation. Both the parties failed miserably to run the administration. Leaders of both the parties have proved that they are autocrats.

Ershad made commitments to wipe out Tk 5,000 agricultural credit and interest upto Tk 10,000 for farmers' welfare, if voted in power. He also vowed to wipe out terrorism from the country within three months.

He further told that the presidential system of government is suitable for the country.

Gaibandha Jatiya Party convener Abdur Rashid Sarker presided over the meeting while it was addressed, among others, by Secretary General A B M Ruhul Amin Talukder, Dr T I M Fazley Rabbi Chowdhury, member of parliament (MP), central leaders Shaheq Alam Proshan, Emdadul Haq and Waheduzzaman Badsha.

Govt lost right to stay in power: Menon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon has said the BNP-led Four-party Alliance government lost the right to stay in power as life of people has become 'unbearable' under its rule.

"People are annoyed and they will dislodge it (this government). The people are fed up as the government has failed to

ensure law and order while prices of essentials are rising. Ministers are telling lies over price spiral".

Menon was addressing a public meeting at Shahab Bazar in the city on Sunday, organised by Jatiya Krishak Samity (JKS).

Rajshahi JKS Vice-president Matiur Rahman Tapan presided over the meeting. Workers Party Politbureau member Fazle Hossain Badsha,

its Rajshahi city unit leader Liaquat Ali, among others, addressed the meeting.

"Prices of diesel and fertilizer have also increased, making farmers hostage, but the agriculture minister is denying the crisis", Menon said.

"There is no initiative by the government to solve the problems. Ruling party leaders are

engaged in corruption".

So many industries were closed down after the government came to power, he said.

He called upon people to be aware of the country's "real enemy" and find out those who are "looting" public property.



Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon addressing a public meeting at Saheb Bazar in Rajshahi city on Sunday



PHOTO: STAR

Two killed in Sitakunda road mishap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, City

Two persons were killed and three others injured in a road accident in Sitakunda upazila on Saturday.

The dead were identified as Palash Jaladas, 24, and Kalu Meah, 28. Both of them hailed from Sonachhari in the upazila.

Police said the accident occurred at around 4 in the afternoon when a Dhaka-bound container mover smashed an auto-rickshaw coming from the opposite direction injuring all its four passengers.

One of the injured Kalu Meah died on the way while being rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) while another injured Palash died at CMCH.

Four jailed for possessing illegal arms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A court here on Sunday awarded four persons different jail terms for possessing illegal arms.

The convicts, Golap, 32, and Rafiqul, both hailing from Gafargaon upazila were sentenced to 17 years rigorous imprisonment (RI) while Badsha, 26, and Salam, 30, both hailing from Trishal were awarded seven years RI.

Police arrested the four convicts with two pipe guns and eight rounds of bullets while preparing to commit an armed robbery at a house at Dakshin Balipara village in Trishal on March 29 in 2003.

Additional District and Sessions Judge of Fourth Court and Judge of Special Tribunal-5 Begum Jesmin Anwar handed down the verdict.

Kerosene One-third of demand supplied in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Kerosene price has increased in Barisal due to less supply by the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).

Kerosene sells at between Tk 22 and 24 per litre in Barisal city and at Tk 28 to Tk 30 in remote areas like Kalapar, Galachipa, Monpura, Baulal, Matbaria, Hizla and Kathalia, according to reports.

Sources at Padma, Meghna and Jamuna oil depots said, as per orders from higher authorities, they are now supplying around 50,000 liters per day to dealers under quota system against the official demand of 1.5 lakh liters.

Amir Hossain Talukder, secretary of the Barisal Petroleum Dealers Association said 40,000 to 50,000 liters are supplied from the depots to 32 dealers against a demand for

over 1.75 lakh liters.

He said dealers are selling the fuel at fixed price but retailers are charging higher prices.

Morshed Alam, in-charge at Padma Oil depot and its marketing officer Shahidul Islam denied any irregularities in supply.

The BPC depots in the region have a total capacity to stock 17 lakh liters of kerosene. The depots of Meghna are exhausted and there are eight lakhs liters in depots of the two other companies, sources said yesterday.

Some retailers said Kerosene price has increased as its price is now equal to that of diesel.

Meanwhile Deputy Commissioner Sheikh Abul Kalam at a meeting with BPC officials and dealers on Sunday urged them to supply the fuel at fixed price and warned of action for any wrongdoing.

Deploy army 7 days ahead of Kushtia-1 by-polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

M Korban Ali, an independent candidate in Kushtia-1 parliamentary by-polls, has demanded deployment of army and BDR in the constituency seven days ahead of the polls.

The by-election will be held on February 29. A "powerful" candidate is "mobilising armed cadres" in the area, who are moving door to door and threatening voters to cast vote in his favor, he alleged at a press conference held at his Kushtia town residence Sunday evening.

He declined to name the "powerful" candidate but gave to understand that he was from the ruling coalition.

Korban is in the polls race as an independent candidate though he is a member of Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP).

He said the polls will not be fair if law enforcers are not deployed much ahead of polls.

Korban Ali urged the administration to take immediate steps to nab the musklemen to make the by-polls free and fair.

No progress in Pangsha thana OC murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

There has been no major breakthrough in investigation of Pangsha thana Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mizanur Rahman murder case.

OC Mizanur Rahman was gunned down on January 31 by extremists at Jagirkoya village of Patte union.

The IO of the case told this correspondent that they are trying their best to arrest the killers.

Shah Jalal shrine blast No probe report though time extended thrice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Will probe into the bomb blast at Hazrat Shah Jalal's shrine be shelved? Many in the city say so as the probe body failed to submit its report even after time extension thrice.

The latest time limit was February 17 but the report was not submitted, police sources said. However probe committee says it will submit the report within "a few days".

"The major work in the probe has been done. We could not submit the report as we are awaiting army explosive experts' report", one member of the four-member body said.

Five people were killed and 50 injured in the blast on the night of January 12.

But other sources claimed that the probe body, formed on the following day, could not yet make any breakthrough. The six arrested in connection with the incident were remanded but interrogators could not get any clue from them, they claimed.

The probe body headed by the Sylhet Police superintendent includes the ASP (Sadar), ASP (Special Branch) and ASP (CID).

'They will torch our houses to grab khas land'

50 families on Boral river bank in Natore face eviction by land grabbers

ABDUL KADER, back from Natore

Widowed and landless Rahima, 35, will have to wind up her 15 years' of residence from the government land along Boral river as land grabbers are threatening her.

She is among about 50 landless families living for long on the bank of dead Boral at Agran village in Boraigram upazila.

The land grabbers, who are influential in the area, will torch our houses if we do not leave", she told some newsmen during a recent visit organised by Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), a local NGO.

Most of the government lands along the riverbank and parts of the river bed have been occupied by the influential, it was gathered. They are now trying to evict the 50 landless families.

"One Motalab and Union Parishad (JP) member M Solim say they will torch our houses if we do not leave," Rahima said.

Eleven houses were demolished by Solim, claiming ownership of the land, she alleged.

Solim denied this. "It is not at all government land. I am the owner and I have documents," Solim said.

But freedom fighter Farid Ahmed of the area said the bank or parts of the dead river can not be owned by any individual. Landless families have been living there for long.

On the other side of the riverbank, Julekha Begum said one Joddar Motalab is threatening to torch her thatched house if she does not leave. Jelekha said he has been living there for over 12 years.

Same is the situation in 12 others areas of the districts. Land grabbers are threatening landless people living on government lands, ALRD officials, said.

Filing of cases and counter cases are going on for long.

The landless people at Agran village are organised under the banner of Agran Bhumihin Samity, supported by ALRD.

The administration keeps mum in such a conflicting situation.

When asked Additional Deputy Commissioner (revenue) M Iftekharul Islam Khan, "Somebody can cultivate state owned land but they can not be the owner."

He said rules are followed in distributing khas (government) land to the landless.

Natore Police Superintendent M Nazrul Islam said this is district administration's concern. "From my part, I will take it seriously when police help is needed," he said.

Obituary

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Sharifa Begum, mother of The Daily Star journalist Ziaul Haq Swapnan breathed her last at her own residence here at 5:45 in the morning on Sunday. She was 71.

Wife of M Matlub Hossain, a retired railway staffer and a resident of Ukil Para in the district town, Sharifa Begum was suffering from prolonged heart ailment and diabetes. She left behind five sons and four daughters besides a host of well-wishers and admirers.

District BNP general secretary Anisul Arefin Chowdhury, district Awami League joint convener Jonab Ali, Nilphamari municipality chairman Dewan Kamal Ahmed and Nilphamari Press Club condoled the death and expressed their heart-felt sympathy to the bereaved family members.



PHOTO: STAR
One of the landless families facing eviction from Boral river bank at Agran village in Natore.



Australian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Lorraine Barker and Captain of the Australian Under-19 World Cup cricket team Tim Paine donating cricket equipment to the officials at Palpur Primary and Government School in Rajshahi recently.