

Prospective rubber sector is now sick

Yield in BFIDC's four gardens in Sylhet drops to 2000 tonnes from 3000 tonnes in a year: Mismanagement, bureaucratic tangles alleged

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

The prospective rubber sector under Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation (BFIDC) is now sick allegedly due to mismanagement by garden authorities and bureaucratic tangles.

Production in the four gardens in Sylhet region is decreasing. The gardens produced around 2000 tonnes of raw rubber in the last financial year against a target of 3000 tonnes.

In the previous year, the production was around 3000 tonnes against a target of 4000 tonnes.

The target of 3000 tonnes for the current financial year will also not be fulfilled. Production will remain 25 to

30 percent short of the target, said a official.

The production is decreasing due to lack of use of fertiliser in gardens and care, the sources claimed.

Surprisingly, fertiliser was not applied to any of the gardens in last eight years, they claimed. Production has decreased as most of the plants are now suffering badly from nutrient deficiency, they said.

An official at a garden seeking anonymity said, normally chemical fertilizer is to be applied twice a year - in April and October. But this is stopped since 1997.

Rubber plantation started in the region in 1965 when the Bhatera Rubber garden was raised.

After independence, BFIDC raised the Satgaon garden in 1971, Rupaichhara garden in 1977 and Shahjibazar garden in 1978. In phases, over 9 lakh rubber plants were planted in these gardens.

The garden authorities and BFIDC officials here blamed each other for the sorry state of gardens.

The BFIDC officials said the gardens should be maintained from their own income while the garden officials said BFIDC does not provide them with resources and logistics.

As per BFIDC arrangement, the gardens are to meet expenses from their own income.

But, due to recurring losses by the four gardens in last eight years, none of these could manage funds for

buying fertiliser. A garden needs about 500 tonnes of fertiliser in a year. BFIDC did not take any initiative to supply the fertiliser.

There are 85,00 acres of land under the four rubber gardens. Of the area, 7600 acres are under plantation. Though the gardens had minimised their losses in fiscal 2001-2002 by raising production and cutting costs, this could not be sustained, the sources said.

Earlier, the gardens in Sylhet accounted for over 50 per cent of the country's rubber production. But it declined allegedly due to mismanagement, corruption, and undue influence of labour unions, the sources said.

WB, IMF and WTO are 'tools for exploitation'

German communist leader tells Satkhira Workers Party rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) are three "weapons of imperialist countries" by which they are "exploiting the toiling masses throughout the world".

This was stated by Klaus Wallen Stinehas, a central leader of the German Marxist and Leninist Party organised by Satkhira district unit of Workers Party (WP). It was held on Saturday on the ground of Madra High School at a remote village in Tala upazila.

He said "imperialist countries and multinational companies" can never be friends of people in developing countries.

WP Politbureau members Haidar Akbar Khan Rono and Azizur Rahman were special guests at the rally, presided over by Advocate Mustafa Lutfullah.

It was also addressed by, among others, local Union Parishad Chairman Prof Sabbir Hossain, Prof Sarder Rafiqul Islam, Prof Mainul Hassan, Swapan Kumar Shil, Pranab Ghosh Bablu, Sumati Rani Mondal, Al Mahmud Palash, Prof Mahibullah Moral, Krishna Pada Mondal, Mafizul Haq Jahangir and Ajay Kumar Mondal.

The communist leader said, it is the best time now for the toiling masses to unite and fight imperialism.

"United strength of the world's toiling masses is mightier than that of imperialist United States of America. Its fall is imminent", he said.

Haidar Akbar Khan Rono said religious fanatics and exploitation by imperialist countries are the two problems facing Bangladesh now.

He called upon the people to unite to resist religious fanatics who are organising themselves under government's protection.

The time has come for the nation to think about banning Jamat-e-Islami for its politics in the name of religion and alleged links with Islamist militants at home and abroad.

Azizur Rahman called upon the people to make the Kabodak-Betna Bachao Andolon a success.

6th year of Udichi tragedy passes off, none convicted

Programmes in Jessore, Rajshahi demand speedy trial of the killers

ABU BAKR SIDDIQUEE, Jessore

The sixth year of Udichi tragedy passed off yesterday with the victims languishing in misery and none of the killers convicted yet.

Ten people were killed and 150 injured as several powerful bombs tore through a Udichi cultural function on the night of March 6, 1999 at Jessore Town Hall ground.

The day is being observed here as a "Culture Protection Day."

The programme began last night with lighting of candles at the blast site, joined by political leaders and cultural activists.

It will be followed today by a blood donation programme and formation of a human chain on the Bar Library premises, a candle light procession and a cultural programme in the city, all arranged to press the demand for punishment of the killers.

The case is under trial in the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge-4. April 14 in the next date of hearing.

Out of 24 chargesheeted, three are in jail hajat, one is absconding and 19 are on bail. Those on bail include former Jessore Poursabha commissioners Nurunnabi and Mohiuddin.

At least 12 of the injured have become disabled.

Award winning guitarist Sukanto Das, son of Gopinath Das of Tantipara area, was a first year honours student at that time. A bomb tore away his right hand and critically injured his right leg. The leg was amputated. He is now a disabled person and can no longer play guitar.

Nahid, another victim, lost both his legs. He now runs a small tea stall to earn two meals a day.

Badal Das lost one of his legs. There are many other victims like them who are dragging a miserable existence and have become burdens on others.

RU Correspondent reports: Rajshahi University unit of 'Udichi' yesterday formed a human

chain in front of the Central Library demanding punishment of culprits behind the bomb attacks on the Udichi Nation Council in Jessore on March 6, 1999.

Several thousand students sporting black badges and carrying placards took part in the programme. They included activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League, Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Bangladesh Chhatra Federation, Sammilito Sangskritik Jote, Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote, Anushilon Drama Group, Nattya Dure, Thirthok Drama Group and Gono Shilphy Sangstha.

Speaking on the occasion, Udichi RU President Prof Bidhan Chandra Shaha bitterly criticised the government for its failure to try the killers.

Udichi also held a discussion meeting at Momtaj Uddin Arts Building, where the speakers said prominent intellectuals, journalists and political leaders are being killed under the rule of the BNP-led government. Killings are rising because the killers are not punished.

The speakers included Prof Anando Kumar Shaha, Moloy Kumar, Abu Bakkar Siddik, BCL President Ibrahim Hossain Moon,

BCU General Secretary Anwar Ujjal and BCF leader Murad. Prof Bidhan Chandra Shaha presided over the meeting.

They alleged that the BNP-Jamaat alliance government is 'patronising' fundamentalist forces. They also urged all progressive organisations to unite against fundamentalist forces.

Woman police officer closed for 'moral turpitude'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A woman police officer of Dumuria Police Station (PS) has been closed to police line on Friday.

The action was taken against Sub-inspector (SI) of police Tahura Akhter, 28, for her immoral character.

She was caught red-handed from a hotel at Dumuria while having sex with sweetmeat trader Asit Das on Thursday night.

According to Dumuria police station Officer-in-Charge (OC), Tahura fell in love with Asit a year ago. They started living together like a couple.

The Superintendent of Police (SP) of Khulna stand released her. Tahura will face a departmental inquiry, the OC added.

Asit has been absconding.

Timber traders demand state minister's removal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Timber traders from eight districts in the southeastern region on Saturday brought out a joint procession here demanding immediate removal of State Minister for Forest and Environment Jafrul Islam Chowdhury for 'creating stalemate in timber business' and implementation of their seven other demands.

Timber traders of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban threatened a tougher agitation including hartal and road blockade if their demands are not met by March 7.

They also submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister through the Deputy minister for CHT Affairs Moniswapon Dewan.

After the procession, they held a meeting in front of Rangamati Poursabha. The speakers alleged that the Forest Department has stopped issuing TP (Transit Pass), an official approval for transportation of timber to other parts of the country, following an order from the state minister.



PHOTO: STAR

Timber traders from eight southeastern districts brought out a procession in Rangamati town on Saturday demanding resignation of State Minister for Forest and Environment Jafrul Islam Chowdhury.

Road mishaps kill 5 in B'baria, Barisal

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Five persons were killed in road accidents in Brahmanbaria and Barisal on Saturday and the day before.

Our B'baria Correspondent reports: Three persons including were killed and at least six injured when a bus hit an autotempo on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway at Sunarampur in Ashugonj upazila Saturday. The dead are autotempo driver Dadon Mia, 27, of Malihata village, Md Babul Mia, 31, of Kalekatcha. The other body could not be identified. All the dead and the injured were passengers of the autotempo.

The injured persons have been admitted to Ashugonj Hospital. Two persons were killed and another one was injured critically in two separate road accidents here in two days.

The first accident occurred when a betel-leaf trader, Jonab Ali Sardar, 60, was crushed under the wheels of an oil tanker at Joyoshri on the Barisal-Dhaka highway on Friday afternoon.

The second accident occurred when a passenger bus dashed a bicycle from behind near Saheber Hut on the Barisal-Bhola road killing one of its riders on the spot on Saturday morning, according to hospital and police sources.

The dead victim is, Firoz, 28, while his co-rider Hanif, 26, sustained serious injuries. He was immediately rushed to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (BSMCH).

After the accident, agitated people blocked the road for seven hours. As a result, transport vehicles remained off the road for the period.

Police seized both the killer vehicles, but failed to arrest the drivers.

Two separate cases were lodged with Barisal Kotwali police and Wazirpur police.

Teachers demand apology from Milon

Comments at Friday's teachers' meet protested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The Kushtia District Teachers Association Coordination Committee (DTAC) yesterday protested the statements made by State Minister for Education Ehasnul Haq Milon at a teachers' gathering on Friday and demanded apology from him.

Otherwise, they will launch an agitation, a statement issued by the DTAC said.

The statement claimed that the state minister told the gathering that teachers who help students in cheating in examinations should be put on 'crossfire' like criminals and terrorists. Such comments by the state minister is "objectionable", it said.

The statement was issued after a DTCA meeting, presided over by its president Kazi Abdur Razzak. It was addressed by, among others, Mirpur Mahmuda College Principal Rezaul Karim, Jamaat-e-Islami leader Prof Forhad Hossain, Sirajul Haq, Aktaru-zzaman, Moieen Uddin of Islamia College, and school-

teachers Enamul Haq, Sahidul Haq and Jakaria.

The DTCA also sent memorandum to the Prime Minister, Education Minister and the Local Government Minister.

Before sending the memorandum, DTCA leaders told newsmen that they would launch a movement if the state minister does not apologise for his comments.

On Friday at the Lalon Academy here, Milon addressed a big meeting of high school teachers and education department officials from Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur, arranged to discuss ways to stop cheating in the upcoming HSC examination and improve the standard of education.

Talking to the Daily Star, Kazi Abdur Razzak said that at Friday's meeting, several teachers stood up and protested while the state minister was making such comments, but he did not care and continued his speech.

On the run for life

BNP activists torched his house

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Fazlul Karim is on the run for life as some ruling party men burnt his house and allegedly threatened him and his family with death.

The farmer left his Balli village home in Khalajuri upazila and has taken shelter at his brother-in-law's house in Netrakona town.

He had gone to Khalajuri thana to record a case but was refused. He even met State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babor and submitted a written complaint naming the ruling party men, but to no effect.

Fazlul Karim met this correspondent recently and narrated his sad story.

He claimed that, in a sequel to previous enmity, some ruling party men sprinkled petrol on his house and torched it on the night of November 30.

He and his family ran away and escaped death. The miscreants looted valuables.

On information, police from Khalajuri thana visited the burnt homestead on the next morning.

Fazlul karim had gone to the police station to file a case against ruling BNP activists Ujjaj Mia, Jweel

Mia, Mamun Mia, Sazal Mia, Akter Hossen, Kajal, Shaha Alam, Mohammad Moashin, Burhanuddin, Matiur Rahaman, And Asaduji-man. But police refused to record it, he alleged.

He then met State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babor and submitted a written complaint naming the ruling party men. The State Minister assured him of action. But nothing happened in about two months, he claimed.

Khalajuri upazila is Babor's constituency. Finally, on February 10, Fazlul Karim filed a case with the court of a First Class Magistrate in Netrakona. The court on the same day ordered the Officer-in-Charge of Khalajuri thana to recorded a case.

When contacted on Friday, Khalajuri thana OC Shafiqul Islam Majumder said the court order reached the thana on February 26.

"I must obey the court order and record a case", the OC said. But he did not record the case till Friday.

The OC said he knows everything about the matter but admitted that he is facing pressure from local ruling party leaders.

60 out of 65 AL men quit party in a Jessore union

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Sixty out of 65 leaders and activists of Ramnagar union Awami League resigned from the party on Saturday in protest against non-inclusion of local Union Parishad chairman and prominent party leader Advocate Afzal Hossain in its newly formed district committee.

In a written joint resignation letter addressed to the secretary of Jessore Sadar upazila Awami League, they said they have resigned from the party protesting formation of a "biased committee".

Those who signed include the union committee's vice-presidents Sri Gobinda Sarker, Md Nesar Ali, Md Nesar Ali and Md Mosharaf Hossain, joint secretary Md Abdur Rashid and organising secretary Atiar Rahman.

Cancellation of BCS exam demanded

RU CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Rajshahi University (RU) unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) yesterday demanded immediate cancellation of the 25th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination.

The demand came from a protest meeting held on the campus where the speakers alleged leakage in BCS question papers.

They also demanded resignation of the Public Service Commission (PSC) Chairman and Education Minister Osman Faruk.

They threatened a tougher agitation against the government if the BCS examination is not postponed immediately.

The meeting was addressed, among others, by Chhatra League leaders Rashdul Islam, Gazi Mojammel Haque, Tapas Kumar and Ripon.

Earlier, they brought out a procession and paraded the campus streets.

IRRI-Boro setback in Nilphamari

Farmers get one fourth of power needed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

IRRI-Boro is facing a setback in the district as farmers are getting one fourth of the electricity they need for irrigation. On the other hand many of the irrigation machines go out of order frequently as they trip due to frequent load-shedding, which continues for about nine hours a day, many farmers claimed while talking to this correspondent.

IRRI-Boro have been cultivated on 75,672 acres of land in the district this year.

A total of 6,306 irrigation machines are in operation, 2,306 of them with power from Power Development Board (PDB). The rest 4000 get electricity from Palli Bidyut Samity (Rural Electrification Board).

The machines which run with PDB power need about 20 MW a day.

But PDB in its six feeder lines

gets only 2.45 MW from its Syedpur grid, sources there said. As a result it has go for nine hours' load-shedding in its six feeder lines, they said.

PBS needs 12 MW a day to feed the irrigation machines connected with but it gets only 1.5 MW, sources said.

Farmers Mohsin Ali, Fazlar Rahman and Muku Mia of Harwa village and Afsar Ali and Abdur Zabbar of Kundu Pukur village in the Sadar upazila said they can run their machines hardly for 5-6 hours a day against at least 18 hours needed. Many IRRI-Boro lands have dried up in the peak season now, they claimed.

When contacted, a PDB engineer in Nilphamari admitted the power deficit and said he placed a demand to the authorities for adequate power supply during the IRRI-Boro season, but to no effect.

SNAPS

Tribal boy beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

An indigenous boy succumbed to his injuries after being beaten by the players of his rival club during a cricket match at Karnaphuli College ground in Kaptai upazila on Friday, according to police.

Anu Pru Marna, 15, son of Ashree Pru Marna of Chitmorom village died at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) after being shifted from Kaptai Upazila Health Complex with critical injuries. The victim's father lodged a case accusing seven persons. However, none was arrested.