

# Where protector is predator

## 87 century-old timber trees sold to Meherpur BNP leader at throwaway prices

AMAMUR AMAN, back from Chuadanga

**KUSHTIA:** Eighty-seven century old timber trees valued at about Tk five crore on the Chuadanga-Meherpur highway have been sold out to a local BNP leader at only Tk 51 lakh.

The buyer is now felling the trees ignoring protests by local people and leaders of political parties including Awami League, Jamaat-e-Islami, and, also BNP. The political leaders have demanded probe into the matter.

This correspondent during a visit to the area on Saturday saw

about 100 labourers felling the trees with electric saws and taking away the logs by about 20 trucks.

The Meherpur Zila Parishad sold the trees to Meherpur Sadar BNP General Secretary Saiful Islam. To give the process a legal cover, bidding was done, albeit with alleged irregularities, sources

claimed.

A ruling party lawmaker from Meherpur was also allegedly involved in the process by getting it approved by the ministry concerned, highly placed sources in the district administration told this correspondent.

The 87 trees are among 170 on the 128 kilometers Meherpur-Chuadanga highway. The trees are looked after by the Roads and Highway Department (RHD). Meherpur district administration took decision to sell 87 of the trees and wrote to the Zila Parishad to arrange a bidding.

But RHD claimed ownership of the trees and wrote to the district administration not to sell those without its consent.

On the other hand, the Zila Parishad also claimed ownership of the trees.

To resolve the dispute between RHD and Zila Parishad, district administration called a meeting of District Development Committee on May 11.

The meeting vested ownership of the trees to the Zila Parishad and approved sale of 87 trees out of 170. The meeting was presided over by Meherpur Deputy Commissioner (DC) Nurunnabi Talukdar.

No representative of RHD attended the meeting following alleged threats from local ruling party men, the sources said.

On the following day, the Zila Parishad gave an advertisement in two Dhaka-based dailies, seeking for bids for purchase of the trees. The advertisement was published in city editions of the dailies. So, only the people involved in the process knew it, keeping other prospective buyers in the district in the dark, the sources claimed.

Only three tenders were dropped, one by Saiful and two others by 'his men', the sources claimed. The Zila Parishad on June 5 accepted Saiful's bid which quoted the price of 87 trees at Tk 51 lakh. The two other bids quoted the prices at Tk 48.20 lakh and Tk 47 lakh.

Immediately after acceptance of his bid, Saiful engaged a large number of labourers to fell the trees.

The sources claimed that over 14, 83,800 cubic feet of valuable timber would be available from the 87 trees, market price of which is

about Tk five crore.

When contacted on Sunday, Saiful denied any wrongdoing in the process.

"They floated tender and I submitted a bid. My bid was accepted and I bought the trees", he said.

The bids were opened at the District Council office in presence of officials and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel, he said.

"I may have to incur loss in selling the timber as many of the trees have deep holes because those are very old", he further claimed.

Capt. Arif of Kushtia Rab said a team headed by him was present when the bids were opened.

When contacted over cell phone, Meherpur Nurunnabi Talukdar told this correspondent, "We informed the matter to the Local Government Ministry and it allowed the Zila Parishad to sell the trees".

The committee then approved the sale, he said. R&H Sub-assistant engineer Liaquat ali filed a case with Meherpur Sadar thana against the sale but police did not take any action. When contacted, ruling party lawmaker Masud Arun said, "Those trees are very old. We want to plant saplings and bring about a green revolution in the area".

Some Kushtia-based newspapers also published reports on the matter, which drew the attention of political leaders.

Protesting the sale, former lawmaker from the area Prof Abdul Mannan held a rally in the area on July 1. Jatiya Party leader and Meherpur Municipal Chairman Motasim Billa talking on the issue said, "What can we do if the protector becomes the predator. BNP leaders are supposed to protect the trees but they are destroying those".

Meherpur BNP Vice-president Alamgir Alam Chhatu said, "BNP will have to bear the burden of what the party lawmaker has done".

Amjhupi Union Parishad Chairman and BNP leader Borhan Uddin Chunu also protested the sale of the big old trees. They have demanded proper into the matter.

A top Jamaat leader in the district said over cell phone, "I strongly protest the incident".



A large portion of the Gaibandha town protection embankment at David Company Para point has eroded into the Ghagat river, threatening the dike.

PHOTO: STAR

## HR team visits Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A six-member team from the South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), a regional human rights watchdog, is now on a three-day visit to Rangamati to assess the human rights situation, particularly with the indigenous people.

The team came here on Saturday and will leave tomorrow. Team comprise members from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

They are Prof Mehedi Hassan of Pakistan; Teesta Setalvad and Marrie Ruvini Shiranthi Jayatilaka of Sri Lanka, Chitra Lekha Yadev and Ahmad Javid Yusuf of India and Meghna Guhathakurata of Bangladesh.

In Rangamati, they talked to some chiefs of Chakma Circle, Headman, indigenous leaders, members of civil society and NGO officials on human rights, development and other issues yesterday and the day before, sources said. They will submit a report to the SAHR, the sources said.

When contacted yesterday, the Rangamati Deputy Commissioner said he got a terse message from them that they are coming, but no details on their programme.

Sources in intelligence agencies said they were informed of the team's visit by their Dhaka offices.

## Face-off between BNP, Jamaat over Plabon murder

### Sec 144 clamped on Palashbari Shaheed Minar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The district administration yesterday impose Section 144 in and around Plashbari Shaheed Minar as BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami called public meetings there at the same time today to drum up support for their conflicting claims on Plabon murder issue.

Rejbul Huq Plabon, a student of S M Pilot High School, who got GPA-5 in this year's SSC examination was severely beaten allegedly by some BNP activists on July 13. Died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital next day.

Palashbari BNP and its front organisations called a public meeting at the Shaheed Minar at 3 pm on July 26 to press for dropping party activists' names from the murder case, terming it 'false'.

On the other hand, Jamaat-e-

Islami also called a public meeting at the same venue at the same time to demand arrest and punishment of the persons accused in the case.

Both the parties continued to blare their programmes on loud speakers in the small town from Friday evening, creating a tense situation.

On Saturday, palashbari upazila BNP secretary Ziaul Huq Jewel and Jamaat Amir Ruhul Amin Sarker submitted separate applications to the UNO for permission to hold their party programmes, sources in the administration said.

Plashbari UNO said he has asked the Officer-in-Charge of Palashbari thana to take all possible measures to avert any conflict.

Meanwhile, the persons accused in the case obtained interim bail from High Court, sources said.



PHOTO: STAR

Century old tress on the Meherpur-Chuadanga highway being felled after those were sold to a local BNP leader.

## 5 held for arson in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Five persons have been arrested in connection with the arson in Ichhakati area in the city in which five shops were gutted in the early hours of Sunday.

The arrested persons are Sumon, Shahin, Mojibor Rahman, JCD leader Monir Hossain and Bivash Roy, father of accused Sabuj. Police have been deployed in the area.

The trouble ensued from eve teasing, police and local people said. Two separate cases have been lodged.

Quoting local people, police said Apu, 17, son of Ramesh Halder,

### Sequel to eve teasing

often teased Mithun Mitra Tumpa, 13, daughter of Dipak Mitra of that Palli.

Tumpa's father Dipak Mitra and her maternal uncle Probhudan Dewri complained to Apu's father Ramesh Halder and his sister-in-law Sajal. At this, agitated associates of Apu and Sajal beat Probhudan when he was returning home Saturday evening.

Probhudan Dewri complained to local Ward Commissioner Razzak Khan and City Corporation Mayor

Majibur Rahman Sarwar MP Saturday evening and then lodged a case with Barisal Kotwali thana, accusing JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal) leader Monir Hossain for alleged complicity in the matter. Police arrested Monir Hossain the same night.

Following this, four shops in the Palli were set afire in the early hours of Sunday, allegedly by Apu and his associates, police and locals said. Apu could not be arrested as he is absconding, police said.

Fire Brigade men extinguished the fire. Papri Derwri, wife of Badal Dewri, lodged a case in connection with the arson.

## 'Strengthen monitoring of pry schools for quality education'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The speakers at a seminar held here on Sunday stressed on increased people's participation to help proper functioning of primary schools.

Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), a major NGO organised the seminar titled, 'Quality Education: Rights of Children' at its auditorium. It was held under a project, 'Exploring Civic Engagement at Grassroots Level for Ensuring Children Rights to Quality Education in Northwest Bangladesh'.

Presided over by Liaquat Ali Khan, social empowerment coordinator of RDRS, Nilphamari, the seminar was attended by Nilphamari deputy commissioner (DC) Robindra Nath Roy Chowdhury as chief guest.

The speakers said the children of the region are being deprived of quality education due to various drawbacks in the primary education system. They also pointed out different drawbacks.

The key-note paper was read out by the project coordinator, Sabina Yasmin. In her paper, she said the project has been aimed at enhancing the standard of primary education by organising the representatives of local government and non-government institutions, civil society members, conscious section of

society and NGOs.

While addressing as chief, the DC said the objectives of primary education would be fulfilled by turning schools into a source of joy. He stressed on strengthening the monitoring system in primary schools by involving the district and upazila level administration officials.

Other speakers said the government thinks that the well-being of primary schools should be looked after by local people whereas people think the reverse. The situation should be changed, they said.

People of all sections of people involved in primary education participated in the seminar spontaneously.

Guardians, managing committee members, school and college teachers, local government representatives, journalists, thana education officers, NGO activists, lawyers and district administration officials took part in the seminar.

The project is functioning in 81 schools in three districts of Nilphamari, Kurigram and Panchagarh. Twenty-seven schools in three out of 6 upazilas in Nilphamari are functioning under the project. The project is funded by CARE (UK), BLAST, LEC (UK) which jointly formed the Manusher Jonno consortium. It started functioning from August last year and would continue till July, 2007.



A seminar titled, 'Quality Education: Rights of Children' was held at the RDRS auditorium in Nilphamari on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

7x3

## 8 hurt as JCD, BCL clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Eight persons were injured in a clash between activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at Srimangal on Sunday.

The JCD supporters damaged the local Awami League office and attacked houses of several BCL leaders, they alleged.

BCL leaders claimed that the clash ensued when JCD attacked their procession brought out in the town ahead of the upazila Awami Juba League conference scheduled for Monday (yesterday).

After the clashes, JCD supporters attacked and ransacked Srimangal upazila AL office at Habiganj Road, they said.

The Additional Police Superintendent of Moulvibazar when contacted over telephone said the clashes began as BCL activists attacked JCD men.

Chief Whip of Opposition in Parliament and local MP Md Abdus Shahid said JCD men attacked the BCL procession, and swooped on residences of BCL leaders and the AL office to spoil the Juba League conference.

The conference was going on peacefully amid police guard when the report was filed yesterday afternoon.

### 2 shot by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

The Indian Border Security force (BSF) yesterday shot two Bangladeshis at Panch Bhulot border in Sarsha upazila in the district.

Amimur Rahman, 15, and Alamgir Hossain, 16, both of Panch Bhulot village, were shot when they were crossing the border with cows purchased from across the border, BDR sources said.

6x3