

# Severe power outages hit Sylhet tea industry

## 5-6 hours loadshedding a day affects processing, quality of the 'sensitive' crop, say garden owners

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Severe power outage is badly affecting the country's tea production this year, industry sources said.

It is causing production loss to gardens and affecting quality of the sensitive crop, which may tell upon export of the major foreign exchange earner, they said.

Out of total 160 tea gardens in the country, 140 are in Sylhet region, which produce the major portion of quality tea. Most of the gardens are in Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts.

The Habiganj Palli Bidyut Samity and the Moulvibazar Palli Bidyut Samity supply power to tea gardens in the two districts.

On an average, power outage in the gardens continues five to six hours a day, and up to 10 hours at times.

The condition in gardens under Habiganj Palli Bidyut Samity is worse as supply is interrupted twice or thrice a day.

Processing tea leaves in factories is seriously affected due to repeated power outage. Low voltage is another problem, which damages machinery, garden owners said while talking to this correspondent on Tuesday.

After plucking, processing of tea leaves involves withering, cutting, fermenting, drying and sorting to make it ready for packing and export. Accurate timing has to be maintained at each stage.

If power goes without any prior notice, it creates a total dislocation in the whole system.

In Madhobpur in Habiganj district, processing plants in five gardens are being run with generators as power outage continues up to 10

hours a day. This involved a huge expenditure but still, the quality of processed tea can not be maintained, some of the garden owners said.

Several rallies were held at Madhobpur upazila headquarter in the last fortnight and memoranda handed over to the local administration, warning of tougher agitation programmes.

Sources said tea gardens in the region need about 20 Megawatt power but only eight Megawatt is supplied on an average.

Sources in Habiganj Palli Bidyut Samity and Moulvibazar Palli Bidyut Samity said they need 55 Megawatt for the region but get only 19 Megawatt.

The government had taken up programmes several times in last ten years to set up small power plants to ensure uninterrupted

power supply to tea gardens, but to no effect yet.

In 1997, a decision was taken at ministry level to supply additional 10 MW power to tea gardens. But it is yet to be implemented.

On the other hand, the Rural Electrification Board (REB) in 2000 cancelled setting up of a 10 Megawatt power plant at private initiative for tea gardens after selection of site at Shaistaganj in Habiganj district.

They did it on the ground that such a plant at Shaistaganj would not be commercially viable, sources said.

Besides, a plan for setting up two 35 MW plants in Moulvibazar and Habiganj, taken up in 2002 by the government in 2002, is gathering dust, they said.



Banik Patti road in Patuakhali town went under knee-deep water on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

## High tide still haunts Patuakhali town

### Town protection project okayed in 2001 gathering dust

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The Tk 17.27 crore Patuakhali town protection embankment project has become uncertain due to alleged bureaucratic tangles.

The project is awaiting approval for eight years. The project includes construction of 4.20 KM flood control embankment, eight sluice gates for drainage of water, 38 outlets, construction of one kilometre wall and installation of four power pumps.

The project was designed to protect the town from flash flood and erosion and remove stagnant water. The project was taken up after the visit of the then agriculture minister Majid-ul-Haque and Water Development Board (WDB) secretary to Patuakhali in 1997.

The water resources ministry okayed the project in 2001 but it is awaiting

approval by the ECNEC (Executive Committee of National Economic Council), WDB sources here said.

Most of the town is inundated even after a shower or a normal rise in water level of Patuakhali and Lohalia rivers during high tide.

The most vulnerable areas in the town are Pura Bazar, Katpatti, Nabab Para, Shimulbagh, Muslimpara, Adalatpara, College Road area, Sabujbagh, Kalikapur and Jaikali, where boats ply alongside rickshaws during after high tide or rain, causing sufferings to about 50,000 people in these areas.

The town is surrounded by Patuakhali river on the north and Lohalia river on the east. Waters from the rivers surge into the town whenever they rise.

"I cook (food) during low tide and feed my children and husband during high tide", housewife Putul of Nabab Para joked while taking to this correspondent.

She said their house including the kitchen is inundated during high tides.



The open drain of Moktob Para road in Pabna town has become a breeding ground for mosquitoes and germs, posing a health hazard. Dug by the municipal authorities to keep the area clean, it also has become a source of trouble for pedestrians.

PHOTO: STAR

## Municipal chairman faces action for corruption

### 200 MT foodgrains for Bandarban projects 'stolen', probe says

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Bandarban Municipality Chairman Mizanur Rahman Biplob has been suspended for corruption, misuse of government resources and neglect to duty.

A letter from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) to this effect, issued on July 28, reached the municipal office recently, official sources said yesterday. The action was taken as allegations against him were proved, they said.

The official letter said that a probe body investigated the charges and found that the allegations were based on fact.

Earlier, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Affairs Ministry, after investigation, sent a letter to the LGRD minis-

try recommending action against him for the irregularity.

When contacted, Mizanur Rahman Biplob claimed that the action against him was politically motivated and that he would go to court.

The CHT Affairs Ministry, following allegations by Bandarban municipal commissioners, had ordered the probe. During investigation, it found that the municipal chairman misappropriated 200 tonnes of food grains allotted for development works.

The CHT ministry in a letter (No 1/03/2002/501(3) issued on May 6 this year also asked him to refund Tk 23 lakh, equivalent to the price of the misappropriated food grains. But he neither refunded the money nor replied to the letter, the sources said.

The Local Government Division had also issued a showcause notice

on the Municipal chairman. The suspension order was issued as he did not reply to the showcause notice, the sources said.

They said the food grains were allotted against 48 development projects in the municipal area.

Investigation by a team led by a Joint Secretary level official detected that the projects were not implemented and the food grains were misappropriated, the sources said.

Mizanur Rahman Biplob was elected chairman of Bandarban municipality last year with Awami League support.

Bandarban district Awami League (AL) earlier sent a proposal to the party high command for action against Biplob for his alleged involvement in corrupt practices, AL sources said.

## 3 to die for killing in Satkhira

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Three killers were sentenced to death in Satkhira while four rapists got life term rigorous imprisonment (RI) in Netrakona.

Our Satkhira Correspondent reports: The Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court No 3 here on Monday condemned three persons to death for killing a Union Parishad (UP) member.

The convicts are Alhaj Nesaruddin Gazi, son of Ferazatullah, Akshed Ali, son of Yar Ali and Kuran Gazi, son of Pachu Gazi of Baikari village in Sadar upazila. Of them Kuran Gazi is absconding.

Union Parishad member Abu Salek, son of Azhar Rahman of Baikari village in Sadar upazila was chopped to death by Nesaruddin, Akshed and Kuran Gazi on August 23, 1994.

Our Netrakona Correspondent reports: The District and Sessions Judge Court and Women and Children Repression Special Tribunal here sentenced four persons to life term RI for raping a minor girl after abduction.

The convicts are Babul Mia, Abul Hashem, Abdus Sattar and Haresuddin, all of Madni Purbapara village in Netrakona Sadar upazila.

Each of them was fined Tk 1,000, in default, to suffer three months more imprisonment.

The four abducted a minor girl named Farida Akter, daughter of Ahimuddin at the same village on May 28 night in 1999. They took her to different places and raped her. After four months, the victim managed to flee and came back home.

## Fake magistrate caught while running fake mobile court

A CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police arrested a fake magistrate and four others for running a so-called mobile court against sale of adulterated food and realising money from traders in Bhuapur in Tangail district.

According to Tangail police, five persons went to Bhuapur police station in a microbus on Monday at around 11:00 am.

One of them introduced himself as a 'magistrate' and four others personified officials of Bangladesh Paribesh Sangrakhkhan and Manobadhikar Foundation.

They asked Bhuapur thana officer-in-charge (OC) to provide police for a 'mobile court' to launch a drive against sale of adulterated food and polythene in different markets in the upazila.

The OC asked one ASI and three constables to accompany them.

The so-called mobile court first went to Nikrail and Gobindashic markets and 'arrested' some traders for selling adulterated food and polythene bags but released them after realising Tk 16,800 as 'fine'.

Later, they went to Foida Bazar, did the same thing and realised Tk 60,000.

The policemen with them became suspicious and informed the OC. The OC asked his men to arrest and bring them to the thana.

Brought to the thana, the cheats confessed to the wrongdoing.

Being informed, Tangail Police Superintendent Mirza Abdullah-hel-Baki rushed to Bhuapur thana and arrested the five.

He also closed Bhuapur thana

OC Ismail Hossen for sending police with the so-called mobile court.

The cheats are Mohammad Shahjahan, 40, of Sariatpur district, Kazi Mohammad Solaiman, 50, of Comilla, Farid Uddin, 40, of Barisal, Abdul Awal, 30 and Mahmud Alam, 28, of Dhaka and Dulal, 30, of Munshiganj district.

The cheats admitted to police that they did the mischief earlier Dhaka, Tangail and Mymensingh and took money from traders.

Police also seized fake letters of some police officials including an AIG from their possession.

A case was filed under Speedy Trial Act with Bhuapur police station.

## 'Mastermind' of Belal murder freed on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Jamaat leader Shahabuddin Lashkar alias Dhira, the said mastermind of murdering Khulna Bureau chief of Dainik Sangram Shaikh Belaluddin was released on bail from Khulna District Jail on Tuesday.

The High Court (HC) granted his bail prayer in outlaw Tarikul Islam Shipu murder case.

Dhira was arrested on July 5 from a place near to Malibagh CID office in Dhaka. But he was not shown arrested in Belal murder case because the High Court had granted him *ad interim* bail on May 2.

Many Jamaat-Shibir activists received Dhira at the jail gate.

Belal was severely injured in bomb attack at Khulna Press Club on February 5 and succumbed to his injuries on February 11 while he was under treatment at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka.



PHOTO: STAR

A partial view of the human chain formed by Awami Sechchasebak League in Brahmanbaria town yesterday to press its demand for execution of Bangabandhu murder verdict.

## 6 'listed criminals' held in Chuadanga, Dohar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kusthia

Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) and police in separate raids in Chuadanga and Kusthia arrested six alleged criminals and recovered a revolver Tuesday night.

Rab sources in Chuadanga said they arrested Humayun and Mustafizur Rahman when the youths went to a doctor in the town to realise toll.

They had earlier demanded Tk two lakh from Dr Nurul Islam of Chuadanga Sadar Hospital. The doctor informed Rab.

Rab men were waiting nearby and nabbed the youths when they entering Dr. Nurul's house at about 11pm on Tuesday.

Alamdanga police arrested 'listed criminal' Khosa alias Pilu from a tea

stall at Kathuli Bazar in the upazila. Kusthia police with the help of Savar police arrested a 'listed criminal' and his two accomplices from Dohar upazila in Dhaka early yesterday. They are Iulal alias Iru Dakat, 35, Sadrul alias Sodu Dakat 38 and Raju, 30.

The joint police team raided Asgarpur village in Dohar upazila at about 2:am and arrested Iru, accused in 10 cases.

Acting on his confession, police raided some areas in Savar and arrested Sadrul and Raju, both accused in several murder cases.

They were brought to Kusthia yesterday. They were being interrogated when the report was filed yesterday afternoon. The three hail from Mashaura village in Daulatpur upazila in Kusthia.