

Bamboo forests withering away in Rangamati hills

Elders describe it ominous, KPM officials apprehend crisis of raw material

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

Bamboo clusters on vast areas of Rangamati are withering away after flowering and bearing fruit.

Indigenous people of different communities said this is an ominous sign in the hills. Elders said flowering and fruiting of bamboo

foretell natural calamities, crop failure and famine in hills.

The worst affected areas are Sazek union in Baghaichhari upazila and Kawkhali, Barkal, Rajasthali and Bilaichhari upazilas.

Two-thirds of the bamboo grown in Rangamati are in Sazek

union. If withering of bamboo forests continues, supplies to Karnaphuli Paper Mill (KPM) will be seriously affected, KPM sources said while talking to this correspondent.

Elders say bamboo clusters die and disappear whenever they bear flowers and fruits. This happens at an

interval of 40 to 50 years, they said.

Such phenomenon occurred in 1937 and in 1967 in the CHT region, they said.

Al Thanga Pankhua, chairman of Sazek Union Parishad, sent a written appeal to the secretary to the local government and rural

development (LGRD) ministry seeking necessary steps to protect the bamboo forests.

Steps should be taken in the interest of local people and the KMP in Chandraghona, he said. The KMP will be in crisis for raw materials because, once withered away, it takes five to six years for bamboo forests to shape up, he said in the letter.

Bamboo and various items produced from it are the main source of livelihood for most indigenous people in remote hills, Thanga said in his letter.

About 7000 families in Sazek union may also face a crisis, Thanga apprehended.

One strange thing is that a rat menace usually breaks out whenever bamboos bear fruits. Rats which eat bamboo fruits also destroys Jhum crops.

The elders claimed that numerous people died of starvation in Mizoram of India in 1959 as rat menace broke out after flowering of bamboos.

This correspondent visited Monai para, Sonaichhari in Betunia union and Kachukhali and Kalampati in Kawkhali upazila. Bamboos are dying there after flowering.

Anis Uddin, Additional Chief Manager of KPM, said, "We have heard about flowering of bamboos in Sazek and other remote areas of Rangamati. KPM may face crisis of raw materials in future as bamboo is the only raw materials for our mill".

Rajib Hossain, General Manager (Procurement) of Fibre Raw Materials (FRM) unit at KPM also apprehended a crisis of raw material if bamboos die in large scale. "We heard from elderly indigenous people that this happens after certain interval. This is a natural phenomenon". A proposal has been given to the forest department to take immediate steps to preserve the dying bamboo clusters, he said.

Md. Yunus Ali, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of CHT North Forest Department, said, "We are collecting fruits of bamboos to produce plants in future".



PHOTO: STAR

Bamboo clusters withering away in remote Sajek area in Rangamati and the plants with fruits (inset).

SYLHET BLAST

Prime accused remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Al-Amin, prime accused in May 1 bomb blast at Sylhet railway station, was placed on three days' remand yesterday.

Al-Amin, a suspect in the incident, was arrested from a slum near the railway station on May 2.

He was shown arrested in the case and was made the prime accused, police said.

However, police could not make out any clue to the incident till yesterday, six days after the blast.

"We are yet to find any significant clue to the incident", Officer-in-Charge of Sylhet GRP Shahjahan Bhuiyan, investigation officer of the case, told the Daily Star.

Al-Amin, hailing from Bade Halenga village in Kalmakanda upazila in Netrokona district, is in Sylhet for several years, police said.

He worked as a security guard at a private bank in Sylhet.

30pc FFs' quota in RU jobs

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University (RU) Syndicate, in its 411th meeting held on the campus recently, decided to preserve the existing quota of freedom fighters.

RU registrar Prof Abdu Salam issued an order to this effect yesterday saying 30 freedom fighters and dependents would be recruited during each and every recruitment in the university, campus sources said. The order was sent to the departments concerned.

Rajshahi district unit and city unit command of Bangladesh Mukti Juddha Sangsad have congratulated the decision.

Fugitive held in Jessore

A CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Benapole Port police yesterday arrested fugitive life term convict, Abdul Hamid from Raghunathpur village in Jessore district.

Police also said he often came to his house to meet his family members evading the members of law-enforcing agency.

Being tipped-off, port police arrested Hamid when he came to his house, police said.

Violence against women marks rise in SW dists

78 killed in last four months

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

At least 78 women were killed in 10 southwestern districts in last four months as violence against women increased in the area. The number was 58 in previous four months (September-December).

Death of women in violent incidents shot up to 250 last year from 196 in 2005, according to records available from police, human rights organisations and NGOs. The actual number would be much higher as all deaths are not reported to police, the sources said.

Most of the cases were recorded by police as 'unnatural death' though torture for dowry and family feuds were behind the incidents, according to investigation by human rights activists and NGOs. Most of the victims were housewives.

Husbands or their family mem-

bers were involved in most cases of torture leading to death of housewives or suicide, the investigations revealed.

In last four months, the highest number of 32 murders took place in Kushtia, followed by 12 each in Jhenidah and Chuadanga, eight in Jessore, five each in Khulna and Meherpur, four in Narail and two each in Satkhira and Magura.

Of the deaths, only 21 were recorded by police as murders and the rest 49 as 'unnatural deaths'.

Violence against women and deaths are increasing day by day, a doctor at Kushtia General Hospital said.

NGO officials working in the districts said in most cases, husbands were responsible for violence leading to deaths. Other family members were also found involved in torturing housewives.

Demand for dowry was the

main reason for torture, they said.

In a number of cases, poverty was behind family feuds leading to torture by husbands, the NGO officials said.

A large number of incidents of violence against women or suicide remained unrecorded as victims' relatives avoided filing cases, fearing retaliation by killers or alleged harassment by police, said a police official in Khulna when contacted over phone. Police have no way but to record those as unnatural deaths, he said.

"Poor families of victims also want to avoid trouble and spending money in legal fight", said Fariza Momtaz Rumi, director of Nari Mukti-O Shishu Unnayan Sangstha in Kushtia.

This correspondent also contacted several high police officials in other districts in the region, who shared similar views on the issue.



FLAMBOYANCE ... The 70 year-old rare naglingom tree in full bloom with flowers in different colours on the compound of Chandpur Deputy Commissioner's residence draws awed pedestrians. The then Sub Divisional Officer of Chandpur Salauddin Ahmed planted a sapling of the tree there, elderly people said.

Passport official arrested in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday arrested an official and two employees of Rangpur Passport Office on charge of taking bribe from four passport seekers.

The arrested are additional director (AD) Md Nurul Haque, head assistant Khairat Hossain and night guard Khaiyum. Rab also recovered Tk 2,000 from the drawer of the official.

On contact, Rab commander Major Bari said, Nurul Haque demanded Tk 500 from each of the applicants. Accordingly, they handed over him the amount which he kept in the drawer of his table, he said.

Khairat Hossain and Khaiyum were arrested on charge of helping Nurul Haque to take the bribe.

Later, Rab handed over the arrested to police.

GrameenPhone search for rock stars

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

GrameenPhone yesterday started a two-day divisional level program styled D-Rock Stars on Sunday at Barisal Club auditorium in search of band music performers.

GP sources said 24 band music groups in Barisal have registered their names to participate in the program. Three persons-- Maksud of Dhaka Band, Biplob of Prometheus and Alif of BAMBAs are judges of the selection program.

Sajedul Islam, project manager of D' Rock Star, said that on the first day, nine bands of Barisal performed yesterday.

They are Sref, Nishan, Nishachar, Orbachin, Lokaloya, Odisious, New Rainbow, Prachir and Awnish. The programme continued when the report was filed yesterday evening.

After audition on Sunday and Monday, a selection list would be prepared for the next round and their performance would be telecasted on Channel-I on May 24 and the national final round would hold on May 26 in Dhaka, he added.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

A dead deer on the bank of Monpura river in Bhola.

Scorching heat driving Monpura deer to death

AKHTER FAROQ SHAHIN, Barisal

A good number of deer died in Monpura island in Bhola due to lack of food and water in the wake of on-going heatwave.

Flocks of deer from Nijhum Dwip in Hatiya, Dhalchar, Char Zamir Shah, Char Jamsheed and Badnarchar in Monpura in Meghna estuary come close to the river water to quench thirst in the scorching heat.

At times deer jump into the water and are carried away by current and waves.

Monpura Forest Office Beat Officer Faridul Islam and Bhola District Livestock Officer Manmoh Kumar Saha said the heat wave drives deer to the Meghna as there is no sweet water in the forest. The wild deer also go into nearby human habitats for food and water, where they are caught by people or chased and killed by dogs, they said.

Immediate measures are needed to save the deer, or a large number of them will die, they said.

Forest guards in Monpura rescued about two dozen deer on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and released them again in the forest, the officials said.

Forest staff buried five dead deer in Charfaijuddin in the three days. Bodies of two deer were seen floating on canals.

Quoting locals, the officials said that a couple of days ago, scores of deer came to villages in Charfaijuddin, Sakuchia, Hazirhut, Char Goalia in Monpura along with cows and buffalos. They were chased by dogs and cowboys.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, at last 20 deer were rescued in ailing conditions from the areas. Eight of them died while the rest were released in forest by guards, other sources said.

Forest department staff recovered venison from at least seven houses in Char Faijuddin and Sakuchia and lodged cases against them for slaughtering deer.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Two of the deer rescued by Monpura forest officials.



PHOTO: STAR

JMB militants arrested from Chatal Tala village in Muktagacha upazila in Mymensingh district yesterday (story on page 16).

RU PROF YUNUS MURDER

JMB cadre Shahidullah remanded for 7 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

JMB leader Shahidullah alias Mahbub, prime accused in Rajshahi University professor Mohammad Yunus murder case, was placed on seven days' remand yesterday.

He will be sent to Dhaka today for interrogation by a Taskforce Interrogation Cell, sources said.

Investigation officer of the case, Inspector Helal Uddin of Criminal Investigation Department (CID), sought a 10-day remand for Mahbub on May 2.

Shahidullah, husband of Bangla Bhai's niece, earlier confessed to

police that he was one of the masterminds of Prof Yunus murder.

Investigation into the case took a dramatic turn in March last year when law enforcers at a press briefing in Dhaka revealed that JMB chief Shayakh Abdur Rahman confessed to involvement in Yunus's killing.

Later, JMB's Rajshahi 'zonal commander' Shafiuallah Tarik also gave judicial statement about the murder before a court in Gazipur on April 13 last year. He was produced before the court in a case filed for Joydevpur bomb blast.

Six JMB militants were so far

arrested in the case while four others are under police haunt.

The arrestees include militant kingpin Asadullah Al Galib's grandson Shafiuallah Tarik, Galib's Ahle Hadith Jubo Shangha (AHJS) adherent Golamur Rahman, Abu Isa Enamul and JMB cadre Abul Kashem Tufan.

Prof Yunus, a teacher of economics and president of RU Bangabandhu Parishad, was killed on December 24, 2004 during morning walk.

As RU register in 1998, Yunus earned Galib's wrath for revealing his (Galib) 11-day secret tour to India.