



Hill cutting rampant defying ban, danger of disaster

Over 3 lakh exposed to serious threat in CHT

JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

Hill cutting in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari continues unabated despite mudslides every so often during the monsoon in a chilling reminder of the disastrous consequences that it could leave.

Forest office sources said the senseless act disregarding the government's prohibition poses serious threat to over three lakh human lives, ecology and biodiversity of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The department of environment banned levelling hills in 2005.

Mudslides triggered by monsoons killed at least two people and injured 20 others at sadar and Lama upazilas of Bandarban district in the last three days. Besides, mudflows have caused extensive damage to many houses in the CHT.

Earlier on Monday, a series of landslides across the port city left at least 123 killed and scores injured.

Illegal hill clearing is common in almost all the 28 upazilas of Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban, the forest office sources said.

Local influentials teamed up with a section of crooked government officials have levelled off a vast expanse of hilly areas to build houses, business centres and other structures, they added.

In Khagrachhari district, Shalban, Comilla Tilla, T&T Building area, Sabujbagh, New Police Lines, Panchmille, DC Hills, jail Hills, Roads and Highway Resthouse Hills, Khagrachhari College Para, Tetulia and No-1 Kadamtali are the areas where denuding and razing of hills are rampant.

Besides, Barkal, Subalong, and

Rajashali in Rangamati and Balagata, Alikhong, Ruma, Dabrukhong, Bus Stand area, Alikadam, Kalaghata and Betchchari areas in Bandarban have long been subjected to the illegal practice.

Some government establishments on the hillsides are dangerously exposed to rain-induced cave-ins.

A bulldozer is shown operating on a hillside, clearing land. The hillside is steep and appears to be under construction or clearing. The bulldozer is in the center of the frame, with trees and other vegetation visible in the background.

People wade in a flooded area of Halishahar in Chittagong as yesterday's downpour submerged many low-lying areas of the port city.

Environment activists and journalists have filed several general diaries with the local police stations against hill cutting. But the administration has yet to take measures to protect the high lands from depletion.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) last year issued legal notice to secretaries of the environment and forest

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land and public works ministries, calling on them to act immediately against hill cutting but to no effect.

The same year it also issued notice to divisional commissioner of Chittagong, deputy commissioner of Khagrachhari, environment department offices in Dhaka and Chittagong, superintendent of police and Dighinala upazila

900 Biman staff resign so far under VRS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines got 'satisfactory' response from its officials and employees on the second week of its three-week time limit as some 900 Biman staffs have so far resigned voluntarily.

As part of the government plan to turn the national flag carrier into a public limited company (PLC) and make it a healthy and profitable commercial venture, Biman Bangladesh Airlines on June 5 offered the VRS aiming at trimming its staff to 3,400 from around 4,800 working at the organisation.

The Biman's present organogram approves a 6,800-strong manpower.

Expressing satisfaction over the number of respondents to the VRS so far, Managing Director (MD) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Dr MA Momen said, "We think the number of respondents would exceed our expectation."

Many Biman officials and staff said that they will take some more days to decide about responding to the VRS.

The VRS offer ends on June 20.

Biman sought about Tk 300 crore from the government to implement the VRS programme.

Some 100 Biman officials and employees have been either axed or given forced retirement in last six months, Biman sources said.

Top outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A top leader of the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) was killed in "crossfire" during a "shootout" between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his cohorts at Parkasunda of Atrai upazila in Naogaon early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Dulal alias Kalam, 28, of Sadupur in the upazila. He was a PBCP operations commander of Naogaon zone. He was wanted in six murder cases filed with Atrai and Raninagar police stations in Naogaon, Rab in a press release claimed.

On secret information, Rab personnel went to a mango orchard in Parkasunda around 4:00am and saw around 10 people holding a secret meeting there.

Sensing the law enforcers' presence, the gang opened fire on the Rab team that triggered a 10-minute gun battle.

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Top level changes in foreign ministry soon

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Some changes are on the anvil in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic sources said.

Acting Secretary to the Foreign Ministry Touhid Hossain, who holds the rank of an additional secretary, is due to be posted as the country's high commissioner to Australia.

The position became vacant after Humayun Kabir, who used to be the high commissioner to Australia had been appointed as the ambassador to the United States.

Meanwhile, the government is seriously considering appointing a senior diplomat with international exposure as the new foreign

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Artists perform at a function on the premises of the Institute of Fine Arts to celebrate the first day of Ashar, heralding the rains in Bengal yesterday. Udichi Shilpi Gosthi arranged the function.

Hasina not allowed to leave country

Govt trying to push me out of politics, alleges AL chief

HASAN JAHID TUSHAR

The army-backed caretaker government yesterday did not let Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina leave the country for the USA. The former prime minister termed the government move "inhuman" and a "mistake".

"I wanted to go to the US to assist my pregnant daughter. But the government did not allow me to go... This is undemocratic and absolutely inhuman. I think good sense will prevail soon upon the government," Hasina said in her immediate reaction.

However, expressing her firm desire to go to the US any day, she said, "I must go to the US to assist my daughter."

Sources said when contacted on behalf of the party the government informed the AL of its decision that Hasina would not be allowed to leave the country. The immigration authorities also told the AL leaders that they have government orders not to let Hasina go abroad.

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Govt to jeopardise its legitimacy if polls not held at earliest

Butenis tells The Daily Star

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

Outgoing US Ambassador in Dhaka Patricia A Butenis said on Thursday that she would like to see Bangladeshi democracy return to its "full fold" at the earliest, otherwise the legitimacy and legacy of the government will be jeopardised.

In a parting interview, Butenis reiterated her support for the caretaker government but said she will continue to speak out against human rights violations and that the ban on politics should be lifted to allow political parties to engage in electoral reforms.

Recounting her experience during the political turmoil leading up to the declaration of state of emergency on January 11, Butenis said she "begged" the Tajuddin Ahmed-led caretaker government not to hold a one-sided election, and pleaded, in vain, with the major political parties to reach a compromise.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star at its office, Butenis said they had instructions to prevent Hasina from going to the airport.

A Dhaka court on Thursday asked the police to take necessary



Patricia A Butenis

Butenis was appointed the US ambassador to Bangladesh 14 months ago and is leaving prematurely for a high-level post in Baghdad.

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rehabilitate corrupt party leaders like her son Tarique Rahman in future if she continues to head the party.

"Party leaders and workers will not allow her to head the party unless corruption allegations against her and her family members are proved false in court," a senior BNP leader told The Daily Star.

But Goyeswar Chandra Ray, joint secretary general of the BNP recently met party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and urged him to resolve the reform issues through discussion with Khaleda. "Leaders and activists of the party will decide through election during the party council whether Khaleda will continue as

Party chairperson or not," he told reporters yesterday.

Referring to reported split in the BNP, Goyeswar said, "We are now hearing about BNP (Zia)... In the past we saw BNP (Huda), BNP (Matin) but all these initiatives proved fruitless."

Former BNP lawmaker Sardar Shakhsat Hossain Bakul, known as a pro-reform party leader, yesterday told this correspondent,

"Top leader of any political party should leave the party as well as politics if there are allegations of corruption against him/her".

Party leaders will sit shortly for announcement of reforms, he added.

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to ten is now going on and the printing and binding of the new books will be complete by the end of the current month.

NCTB Chairman Prof Yusuf Farooq, who attributed the unusual delay mainly to correction of huge errors, rewriting and translation of a number of books, said, "We had to translate anew 23 books which ate up a lot of time. Besides, we have to check and recheck the earlier editions which are full of errors and with missing chapters."

"At the eleventh hour we had to rewrite the history of the Liberation War for different books including Bengali, social science and civics as the education ministry directed us

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Khaleda also wants reform but won't quit post

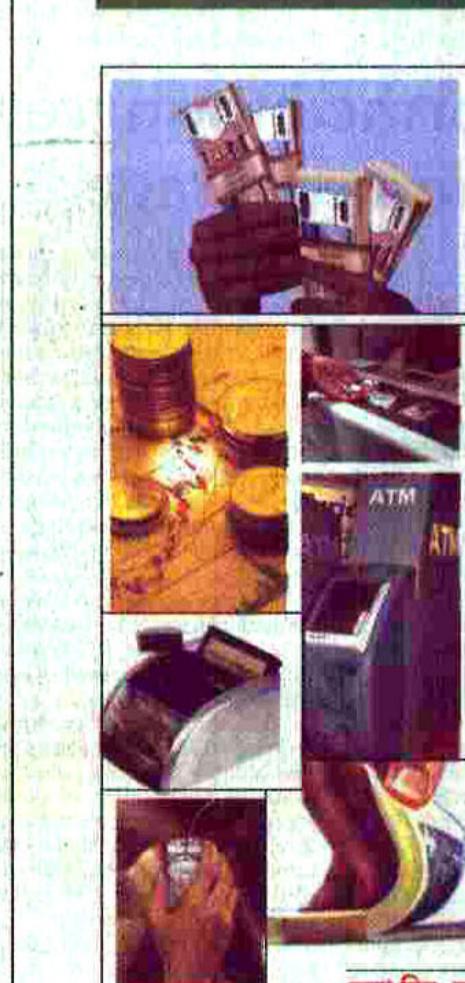
Reformists say she must disprove corruption charges

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Differences between BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and other party leaders over the much-talked-about intra-party reforms have now turned into a serious conflict, sources said.

Khaleda is worried over the activities of party leaders working for reforms while the reformists expect her to quit the top party post as, they think, she has failed to run the party in an acceptable manner. They might make a formal announcement on reforms soon.

Party insiders said Khaleda also wants some reforms in the party but refuses to leave the post of chairperson under pressure. But pro-reform leaders believe she will



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