

Mindless afforestation by removing native trees from natural forest

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

Around 70 hectares of hill area of Madhabchhara are being brought under social afforestation programme by removing native eco-friendly trees from the natural forest.

Sources said the forest department has leased out the land where beneficiaries have planted different alien species of trees like acacia, mahogany and epil epil.

Locals and environmentalists have expressed their concerns at the programme and questioned the necessity of a man-made forest by clearing the existing natural forest.

Sources at the forest department in Srimongal said, there is a plan to bring over 1,000 hectares of forestlands under the social afforestation programme in the district. The planned programme will be implemented gradually in Madhabchhara forest beat, Juri forest beat, Puthichhara forest beat, Adampur forest beat, Kamarchhara forest beat, Satgaon forest beat and Bhatera forest beat.

Forest department's Baralekha office sources said the afforestation programme started first on 30 hectares of land of Madhabchhara hill in 2005-06. Different kinds of vegetables, fruits, timber and herbal trees have been planted on 20 out of 30 hectares of land. A total of 60 beneficiaries have been looking after the land.

In June this year, the forest department leased out another 70 hectares for a highest period of 40 years to



Alien trees replace eco-friendly native varieties in the hill area at Madhabchhara of Moulvibazar district as forest department, ignoring the negative impact on environment and ecology, is leasing out a huge portion of the area for afforestation by influential locals.

160 beneficiaries under the programme.

A forest department official wishing anonymity however said the department is not using the leased out hilly land and there is no plan to use it in near future. The area has been brought under the

programme for benefit of common people, the official added.

Talking to The Daily Star, eminent nature lover Dwijen Sharma said the meaning of social afforestation in the natural forest is nothing but destruction of the environ-

ment. "Steps should be taken for regeneration of the natural forest. Otherwise, the ecosystem of the forest will be destroyed inviting natural disaster," said Sharma.

Alien trees are responsible for decrease in land fertility, he said, adding that artificial

forest is not helpful for ensuring a sound environment.

Abdus Shahid, a beneficiary of the afforestation programme in Madhabchhara hill, said wild animals look for safe shelter when anyone enters the forest. "But there is not a single place now

where wild animals can hide themselves. It has made the life of wild animals difficult," said Shahid.

"They have destroyed the nature in the name of social afforestation," he said adding he has taken one hectare of land for 40 years lease at Madhabchhara hill and planted saplings of acacia and other trees.

During a recent visit to Madhabchhara forest, this correspondent witnessed that afforestation is going on in hill area. Vegetables are also being cultivated on the high land. Snakes, spiders and wild animals have become rare in Madhabchhara hill, which was once rich in wildlife.

"In our early life, tigers and bears roamed in the jungle. Locals never entered there, fearing attacks by the wild animals. Only a small number of wild fowls and monkeys are there now," said Abu Taher, 50, of village Ghamagar near the forest.

Taher also planted around 5,000 trees on a half hectare of land in the forest under the social afforestation programme 3-4 years ago.

According to environmentalists, proper training on ecosystem is a must for those involved in the afforestation programme. But no such initiative has yet been taken, they said.

They said experts opinion should also be followed before deciding to create artificial forest in natural forestland.

Villagers hand over four fake NGO men to police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kustia

Local people caught four fake NGO officials at Darshana in Chuadanga and handed them to police on Tuesday afternoon.

A group of people recently opened an office at Darshana and introduced themselves as officials of SF Bangladesh, an NGO with head office in Chittagong, said villagers and police.

They started collecting members assuring them of providing loan on nominal interest.

In last two months they collected around 300 members taking Tk 500 from each, sources said.

But instead of providing loan in due time, the so-called NGO men started dilly-dallying and playing tricks, said several members.

When a few members went to the NGO office on Tuesday and asked for giving them loan, the officials engaged in an altercation with them.

At one stage, people from nearby areas rushed to the spot and asked the officials to show legal documentation of the NGO.

As they failed to show any documents, people confined them into the office and informed police.

Later police arrested NGO men -- Liton Ali, 23, of Ballabdi, Zakir Hossain, 30, of Gobindapur, Abul Hossain, 35, of Anganda and Alam Hossain, 40, of Jourab in Faridpur Sadar upazila.

"The arrestees could not show any legal documents. We are trying to find out whether any NGO named SF Bangladesh exists in Chittagong," an official of Chuadanga police told this correspondent over phone yesterday.

SNAPS AND SNIPPETS

College debate champions

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Magura Government Technical School and College team emerged champion while Magura Hossain Shahid Suhrawardy Government College became runner up in of the five-day-long inter-college debate contest that concluded at the Asaduzzaman auditorium in Magura yesterday. The debate contest was organised by BRAC advocacy and human rights unit. Deputy Commissioner in Magura Mohammad Dilwar Bakht attended the programme as the chief guest and gave away the prizes among the winners. Earlier, a colourful procession paraded the main roads of the town. Sixteen teams from different colleges in four upazilas of the district participated in the competition.



PHOTO: STAR

Mymensingh Press Club members bring out a colourful procession in the town yesterday marking golden jubilee of the club.

Golden Jubilee celebration

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A three-day programme marking the celebration of golden jubilee of Mymensingh Press Club began yesterday. The press club was established in 1959. The programmes included a colourful procession, seminar, discussions and cultural events. Md Montaz Uddin, founder member of the club inaugurated the programmes in the morning. The procession brought out from the club premises paraded the main thoroughfares of the town. Journalists from different upazilas of the district also joined the colourful event.

Bus helper murdered

UNB, Bogra

A bus helper was hacked to death in the district town on Tuesday night. The victim was identified as Sanglap, 28, son of Abdur Rahman in Naruli area of the town. Family sources said, some youths called Sanglap out of his house at about 8:00pm. Later locals found Sanglap lying at a secluded place in Dhawapara area with stab in his head, neck and other parts of body. The criminals also cut off tendons of both hands and legs of Sanglap. He was rushed to Bogra Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College and Hospital in a critical condition. Sanglap succumbed to his injuries at 12:00 midnight on way to the capital.

Polythene bags seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Law enforcers in a drive yesterday seized a huge quantity of banned polythene bags from two stores at Pabna municipality market. Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Emam Uddin Kabir led the drive aided by the members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab). Sources said, acting on a tip-off, the team raided the stores of Manik and Moksad at Daibazar intersection in the municipality market area at noon and seized the banned polythene bags worth about Tk 2 lakh. The mobile court also fined each Tk 10 thousand, said Akhtarul Alam, assistant superintendent of police (ASP) of Rab adding the two were selling banned polythene bags in the district since long.



PHOTO: STAR

Rajshahi City Protection Action Committee forms a human chain at Naohata Bazar in Poba upazila of the district yesterday demanding implementation of proposed North Rajshahi Irrigation Project to save Barind region from the adverse effect of climate change.

2 girls abducted from two dists rescued, 2 held

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Two girls were rescued by police on Tuesday and Saturday after four and 15 days of their abduction in two districts.

Two young men were arrested in connection with the incidents.

Our Correspondent in Chapainawabganj reports: Police rescued a teenage girl from Harinagar village under Shibganj upazila after four days of her abduction from Natun Barorosa village of the upazila and arrested one person in this connection on Tuesday night.

Fourteen-year-old Sagori Khatun is daughter of Mosharraf Hossain of the village. Fazlur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Shibganj police station said, Sagori was abducted from Natun Barorosa village on December 19.

Selim Reza, 22, son of Kayes Uddin of Diar Dhainagar village under Sadar upazila in Chapainawabganj abducted her and confined her to a house at Horinagar village.

Victim's father Mosharraf Hossain lodged a case against Selim the same day in this connection.

According to the victim's family members, police on Tuesday night raided Horinagar village and rescued Sagori and arrested Selim.

Police said, Selim confessed to his involvement in the abduction during interrogation.

Our Correspondent in Patuakhali reports: A female student of a madrasa under Dashmina upazila was rescued on Saturday in Dhaka after 15 days of abduction.

Police arrested a young man on charge of his involvement in the abduction.

The teenage girl was rescued from Buriganga bridge and brought to Dashmina police station at about 12:00 noon on Monday with help of Dhaka police.

The alleged kidnapper, Samir Kumar, 25, is son of Ram Chandra Shil of Baharampur village under Dashmina upazila and victim Morium is a first year student of Charhosnabad Alim Madrasa.

Police and the victim's relatives said, Samir and two others kidnapped Morium at about 10:00 am on December 6 from Banglabazar area while she was going to madrasa from her residence.

The kidnappers first took her to Patuakhali by motor-bike and then to Narayanganj by launch.

They kept her in a house in Bhuigar under Narayanganj district and later shifted to a house in Jurain area in Dhaka.

On December, the criminals took her to the Buriganga Bridge for a visit but police arrested them from the spot.

Criminals in Chuadanga, Meherpur blast bombs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kustia

Criminals exploded four bombs in Chuadanga and Meherpur districts on Tuesday night.

According to Chuadanga police, two bombs were blasted in Karpasdanga bazaar area in Damurhuda upazila.

Masked gang men came to the bazaar at about 10:30 pm, exploded the bombs and left the place, witnesses said.

In Meherpur, another gang blasted two bombs at Bamundi village in Gangni upazila.

Sources said, a group of about eight came to the village at about 9:00 pm and exploded the bombs.

Top outlaw shot dead

UNB, Bagerhat

Police recovered the bullet-hit body of a top leader of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party from Mongla Port area yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Shahidul Islam Shahid, 38, leader of the party's Janajuddha faction and son of Abdul Mannan of Kumarkhali village in Mongla upazila.

Police said, Shahid was wanted in 16 cases for crimes like murder, robbery and extortion. He was involved in the killing of former Mongla municipality chairman MA Baten, commissioner Salam and BNP leader Halim, they said.

Kuet students demand ban on politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

General students of Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (Kuet) have placed the administrative building under siege to press their demand for ban on student political on the campus, entrance of outsiders and security of life.

They made the demands in a memorandum submitted to Vice Chancellor Prof Mohammad Nausher Ali yesterday. Over 600 students of all disciplines joined the siege programme that began at 8:30am and was going on as of filing of this report at 5:30pm.

The agitating students said the siege programme will continue until their demands are met.

They said politics of two rival students organisations and political rivalries are not only vitiating academic atmosphere but also hampering administrative work of the university and creating sense of insecurity among general students.

Entrance of outsiders sometimes with arms and lethal weapons in response to call by two rival student organisations during any clash hampers peaceful academic atmosphere and poses threat to our security, they stated in the memorandum.

When contacted, Director of Student Affairs Prof Shibendu Shekhar said the demands of general students are quite logical. "We will sit with the vice-chancellor to discuss the demands and take measures to ensure a peaceful academic atmosphere on the campus," he said.

Fire in Chittagong, Chandpur Woman burnt alive; houses, shops gutted

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Seventeen houses and four shops were gutted in two fire incidents in Chittagong yesterday while in a separate incident in Chandpur on Sunday an elderly woman was burnt alive in her house and five shops were damaged.

Our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong reports: Seventeen houses and four shops were gutted and property worth over Tk 26 lakh was damaged in two separate fire incidents yesterday in the port city and Satkania upazila.

In the first incident, at least 13 thatched houses were gutted in Satkania upazila. The fire broke out at the

house of one Abdul Molla in Chowdhuryhat area of Nalua union under the upazila at around 1:15am.

Meanwhile, another fire broke out at a semi-pucca house at Mayor Goli in Chasma Hill area under Panchlaish police station at around 6:50am.

Three adjoining tin-shed semi-pucca houses and four shops were also gutted in the fire that originated from an electric short circuit, said the fire service men.

In Chandpur, a 70-year-old woman, Kulsuma Begum, was burnt alive in a fire at Purnabazar Daspara in the town at around 11:30pm Sunday.

A dwelling house of Lokman

Kabiraj, five shops and two goats were also gutted.

Fire service officials estimated the extent of loss at Tk 4.5 lakh. However, the affected people claimed the loss would stand at Tk 10 lakh.

Locals said, the fire originated from the dwelling house of Lokman Kabiraj behind the grocery shop of Nazrul. The exact cause of the fire could not be known.

Lokman said his mother-in-law Kulsuma Begum, wife Ekti Begum, his daughter, son and a grandson were sleeping in the room. Seeing the fire, his wife, children and grandson managed to come out of the room but elderly Kulsuma remained inside.



PHOTO: STAR

Speedboats lie idle at Kawrakandi Ghat in Madaripur district as owners and operators started indefinite strike on Kawrakandi-Maoa route yesterday demanding rise in fare. They said the fare should be increased to Tk 130 from existing Tk 110 as they have to cover four kilometres more waterway due to poor navigability following siltation in the Padma River.