



PHOTO: STAR

A large area of cultivable land at Manikchalk village in Bogra Sadar upazila has turned into a water body as indiscriminate sand lifting by digging continues unabated in the area for the last three and a half years.

Indiscriminate sand lifting on despite land subsidence

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

Indiscriminate sand lifting from underground is wreaking havoc to land and environment in vast areas of Bogra Sadar upazila.

At least 18 square kilometre areas of croplands and habitations in Rajapur and Sakaria unions have been affected while over a hundred acres of land subsided due to unplanned sand lifting with the help of shallow machines during the last three and a half years, local sources said.

About 90 hectares of lands at several villages in Bogra Sadar upazila subsided during the period, upazila administration sources said.

Locals, however, said the area of subsided lands would be much more.

At least 8,000 people have been seriously affected for

illegal sand business in different villages of Bogra Sadar upazila, said locals and district administration sources.

Croplands and habitations in a number of villages are threatened due to the illegal sand business, said chairmen of Rajapur, Sakaria and Gokul union parishads in Bogra Sadar upazila.

"Unplanned sand lifting by digging ground is very harmful for land and environment. In this regard, the Department of Environment sent letters to local administration but no step has been taken to stop the illegal practice," Md Nazmul Haque, director, Department of Environment, Rajshahi Division, told local journalists.

Residents of the affected areas on different occasions formed human chains and brought out protest processions in Bogra town demanding stopping of illegal sand

lifting but local administration failed to take any action due to political pressure, sources said.

Government employee Pronob Kumar lodged a case on February 19 this year against sand traders Mostofa, Hassan and Tarique of Rajapur area but the situation has remained unchanged.

At least 12 sand traders are lifting sand day and night using shallow machines at Manik Chalk village in Rajapur union, said Bablu Mia, an employee of a sand trader.

Bogra Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge AKM Khalequzzaman said they seized a large number of shallow machines along with pipes from Manikchalk and other villages during the last few months to stop illegal sand lifting.

Agitations bring Ctg vet university to standstill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Academic and administrative activities at Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) came to a halt yesterday, a day after reopening the university, as the officers' association and employees' union observed work abstention while Chhatra League (BCL) continued their agitation.

The officers' association started their two-hour work abstention programme from 10.00am and staged a sit-in in front of the administrative building protesting alleged manhandling of Research and Training Institute staff Chamak Chandra and administrative officer Ajit Kumar on Saturday and Thursday by the agitators.

The employees union of the university also expressed solidarity with the association and participated in the work abstention demanding security of the officers and employees on the university campus.

The BCL men brought out a procession on the campus at around 11.00am and held a rally to press home their demand for removal of the VC.

On the other hand, the university teachers' association yesterday gave a seven-day ultimatum to the university

authorities demanding punishment to the agitating students who allegedly manhandled teachers, misbehaved with them and gave threat over phone.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the teachers' association held at the university conference room in the afternoon with convenor Prof Goutam Buddha Das in the chair.

Prof Goutam told this correspondent that the agitating students are often and again insulting the teachers over phone and physically.

"If the students are not punished within seven days we will stop taking classes and examinations," he warned.

"In the meeting, we expressed solidarity with the protest programme by the officers' association and employees' union and will join them tomorrow by abstaining from work from 10.00am to 12.00noon," he said.

We would also send a memorandum to the prime minister informing her all about the university situation soon, he added.

Meanwhile, as a consequence to the situation, session jam is feared to hamper study of around 400 students of the university while around 50 students will not be able to take part in the upcoming BCS examination.

The admission test for the session 2009-2010 will also remain pending causing fresh session jam, sources said.

Contacted, vice chancellor Dr Nitish Chandra Devnath said he was still confined to his residence.

Seeking help from the government he said: "I was appointed by the government for four years and only six months of my term are left. I have done nothing beyond the rules. If the government wants I will leave the post," he said.

The authorities closed the university sine die on December 14 last year following an indefinite strike enforced by General Students Forum and BCL demanding resignation of the VC on charge of corruption and nepotism.

The authorities in an emergency syndicate meeting on Wednesday last decided to reopen the halls on Saturday to resume classes on Sunday. But the BCL leaders staying in the hall defying syndicate orders demanded removal of the VC and decided to bar him from all administrative activities. They put the VC office under lock and key confining him (VC) to the residence.

Rail block at Khanabari for Titas Express stoppage

Passengers suffer for over five hours

STAR REPORT

Train services on Dhaka-Chittagong-Sylhet and Dhaka-Dhaka-Sylhet routes remained suspended for over five hours from 7:00am yesterday as locals put up barricades on railway track at Khanabari Station in Narsingdi demanding a stoppage of Titas Express at the station.

The agitators, however, withdrew the barricades after railway authorities assured them of fulfilling their demand.

During the five-hour blockade, at least 11 trains, including five intercity express trains, got stranded at Khanabari, Amirganj, Jhinardi, Methikanda, Narsingdi and Bhairab rail stations, causing untold sufferings to several thousand passengers.

Belayet Hossain, director general of Bangladesh Railway, told The Daily Star that the demonstrators withdrew the blockade after the railway authorities assured them of meeting their demand. He said the commuter train, Titas, will have a stoppage at Khanabari Station from Thursday.

The BR DG said the blockade resulted in sufferings to the passengers as well as the BR authorities who had to reschedule the train timings.

BR officials said trains of



PHOTO: STAR

Passengers suffer as trains lie stranded at Narsingdi Railway Station while passengers yesterday at Khanabari station demanding stoppage of Titas Commuter train there.

different routes remained stranded on tracks at different places for five hours from 7:00am due to the blockade, causing immense sufferings to around 5,000 passengers, mostly women, children and elderly people.

According to a correspondent from Narsingdi, Several

hundred demonstrators put up barricades at Khanabari Rail Station by felling trees on rail tracks to press their demand for a stoppage of Titas Express at the station.

Sylhet-bound Parabat Express, Noakhali-bound Upakul Express, Chittagong-bound Mahanagar Provati

Express, Kishoreganj-bound Egarosindur were among the trains stranded by the blockade.

On information, Deputy Commissioner Amrita Borai and Police Superintendent M Akkas Uddin Bhuiyan rushed to Khanabari rail station apparently in a bid to bring the situation under control.



PHOTO: STAR

Chhatra League activists bring out a procession on the campus of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University yesterday while officials and staff of the institution stage a sit-in during their work abstention protesting alleged assault of two officials by agitating students.

BDR MUTINY CASE IN PANCHAGARH

29 more give depositions

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Twenty-nine more witnesses yesterday gave depositions before the Special Court-2 of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in connection with the mutiny at 25 Rifles Battalion in Panchagarh.

The three-member special court headed by BDR Director General Maj Gen M Mainul Islam recorded their statements

and adjourned the trial proceedings until 8:30am today. The other members of the court are Lt Col Mahfuzur Rahman and Maj Didar Al Latif.

The accused were allowed to ask questions to the witnesses while giving depositions. A total of 31 witnesses gave their statements before the court in the last two days, court sources said.

Argument between the

accused and plaintiff of the case will be held today.

After framing charges against the 29 accused on Sunday, two witnesses and the complainant, Subedar Major Aminul Haque Sheikh, of 25 Rifles Battalion gave their statements before the court.

Seven of the 29 accused yesterday confessed to their involvement in the mutiny and sought mercy from the court.

Trial of the 29 mutineers began on February 3 after complainant Aminul Haque Sheikh read out the allegations brought against them before the court.

Deputy Attorney General Biswajit Roy was present in the court as a representative of the Attorney General's Office. Mosharaf Hossain Kajol and Monjurul Alam were present as public prosecutors.

Students agitate for power

A CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

The students of Noakhali University of Science and Technology (NUST) put up a barricade on Sonapur-Akter Miar Hat road in front of the institution for two hours yesterday demanding uninterrupted power supply.

Traffic movement on the road came to a halt due to the blockade, causing a lot of sufferings to passengers.

On information, Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Rezaur Rahman and officer-in-charge of Sudharam police station Mosharrif Hossain Tarafdar rushed to the spot where the agitating students who withdrew the road blockade at about 12:00pm.

The students alleged that continuous loadshedding on the university campus has been hampering their study for over a month.

They also gave a seven-day ultimatum to the authorities concerned to meet their demand. Rural Electrification Board (REB) supplies power to the university campus.

Contacted, REB General Manager Sabuj Kanti admitted 16 to 17 hours load shedding in the area every day.

He said the authorities are trying to bring the load shedding to tolerable level on the NUST campus.

Roadside trees felled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

A gang of four felled ten mango trees worth Tk one lakh on both sides of a road at Dhulihar under Sathkira Sadar upazila on Sunday.

Being informed by the villagers, staff of the local land office rushed to the spot and seized the felled trees. They kept the trees under the care of union parishad member Ashraf Hossain and informed the district administrations of the matter.

Locals alleged that Shahadat Hossain Gazi, Moktar Ali Gazi, Sayeed Gazi and Abdur Rashid of Dhulihar village felled the mango trees on the road near their houses, claiming the ownership of the trees.

They demanded immediate arrest of and punishment to the tree plunderers. A villager

seeking anonymity said the plunderers went to a local leader of the ruling Awami League and urged him to save them from punishment for their illegal act.

Local land official Tarak Chandra said he will file a case against the four for cutting down the government trees. But no case was filed with Sadar Police Station as of filing of this report at 5:00pm yesterday.

Contacted, Shahadat, Moktar, Sayeed and Rashid said as they planted the mango trees on both sides of the road, they are the real owners.

Sathkira DC office sources said the district administration is investigating the matter and will take stern action against the persons responsible for felling roadside trees.



PHOTO: STAR

Logs from illegally felled roadside mango trees at Dhulihar in Sathkira Sadar upazila lie on the road.