

Trick works

FROM PAGE 1
Highways Department is widening.

It seems the country's forestry sector is facing one of the worst situations as the trend of felling trees has alarmingly increased.

The Forestry Sector Master Plan, 1993, under which the government started tree plantation programme, says the annual deforestation rate in Bangladesh is 3 percent. This poor scenario led the tree coverage in the entire country to grow not more than 7 percent.

Following newspapers reports, the government took some actions against tree felling, but the trend has not changed.

"Tree felling is not a new trend here. It has been going on since the British rule, but now the newspapers have become more aware about it which is a good thing," said State Minister for Environment and Forest Hasan Mahmud.

Praising the role of the media, Mahmud told The Daily Star the newspapers publish reports if somebody cuts even two trees. But earlier, thousands of trees were razed from the forests, and the media was not aware of it or said a thing about it.

"The forest officials too used to take part in logging earlier. But now at least they are not engaged in it," said the minister.

He assured that if the ministry comes to know about any incident, they would take measures immediately.

The incumbent government has shown keen interest to battle the climate change and save the rivers, but at the same time the forest sector has apparently not got the necessary focus.

Recent move by the government to allow setting up industries inside the Gazipur National Park and permit earth filling by pipelines through Dhaka Botanical Garden shows its neglect to the forest sector.

However, the government eventually cancelled those decisions as those drew severe flak.

In Bangladesh, the official forest coverage is around 17 percent against 25 percent, the general standard that a country should maintain.

But in reality, the coverage has gone down to 7.29 percent (1.08 million hectares) according to a joint study by Bangladesh Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (SPARSO) and the

Matia

FROM PAGE 16
employees at the ministry by surprise.

When enquired, she said she has done so as the country is reeling under severe power outage.

"I am only trying to make my contribution to the government's move to save power," said the minister.

As a citizen, she cannot afford this luxury during such crisis, she added.

She said she would continue to maintain this practice until the power situation improves.

Reckless bus

FROM PAGE 1
The Daily Star that a bus of Chalachal Paribahan hit the motorbike tossing the victims on the road.

He said the victims were on their way to a training course at Detective Training School in Rajarbagh from Uttara Police Station. The driver abandoned the bus there and fled, he added.

The body of Shahinur was sent to his village at Dhupchachia upazila in Bogra after the namaj-e-janaza at Rab headquarters, said CO Rashidul.

The victim of the Sirajganj accident was identified as Abdul Jalil (40), a constable of Raiganj Police Station and a resident of Shariakandi, Bogra.

Police said the truck ran over Jalil while he was on duty at Ghurkabeltola Bazar.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. A case was filed in this connection.

510 BDR men

FROM PAGE 1
carnage, which left 74 people including 57 army officers killed.

The authorities in a press release yesterday said the names and photographs of the dismissed members have been published at its official website on <http://www.bdr.gov.bd>.

Moreover, the names and photographs of 59 absconding BDR soldiers have also been posted on the website.

Of the 59 soldiers, 24 were absconding since the mutiny and one of them was arrested later. Thirty-six of the rest were at their workplace after the mutiny, but later they went missing.

Department of Forest in 2007. Besides, the 7.29 percent coverage includes the forest of Chittagong Hill Tracts, sal forest, mangrove forest, bamboo or mixed forest and rubber plantation.

Realising the alarming situation of low forest coverage, the government has set a goal to increase the coverage to 25 percent by 2015.

The Madhupur Sal Forest is a unique example how the government let the foresters steal trees, clear the forest to grow wood plants and let people grab forestland violating the rights of the forest inhabitants.

Over 85 percent of the natural forest from Madhupur has vanished in the last 50 years.

Since the Awami League-led government came to power, the Ministry of Environment and Forest took some careless action and showed inaction in different incidents which is totally contrary to the party's election manifesto.

The recent policy of the government about allocation of timber to ministers, lawmakers, civil and military bureaucrats and other officials also raises questions about the intention of the forest department.

The election manifesto of AL has clearly mentioned that they would take special measures to preserve the country's forests and biodiversity.

HC rejects

FROM PAGE 1
Hasan passed the judgment after holding final hearing on the petition.

Anti-Corruption Commission counsel MA Aziz Khan told The Daily Star that the HC's verdict paved the way for continuation of the case proceedings at the trial court against Shah Alam.

He said the court rejected the petition on the ground that Shah Alam is a fugitive as per the law, and he has no right to move such petition.

ACC filed the case on March 29, 2007, with Motijheel Police Station against former BNP minister Mirza Abbas and 11 others for a loss of Tk 127.64 crore to the exchequer by selling government's 18 abandoned houses at a lower price.

Later, ACC included Shah Alam's name in the charge sheet for purchasing one of the houses at a price lower than the market price.

Charges against 24 accused including Shah Alam were pressed on September 20, 2007.

The HC on September 11, 2008 stayed the proceedings against Shah Alam and also issued a rule upon ACC why the proceedings against him should not be declared illegal.

ACC lawyer Aziz said the HC also vacated its stay order yesterday.

Ghorasal Power

FROM PAGE 1
said a PDB official.

About 3,815MW power was generated in the country yesterday against a demand of 5,400MW while around 510MW power could not be generated due to poor gas supply to many power plants, sources said.

The official load shedding was 1,294MW yesterday while around 1,168MW a day before.

The situation could have been better if adequate supply of gas could be ensured to power plants, said the official hoping that the load shedding scenario would get better next week when the power plants would start getting more gas supply.

Ershad

FROM PAGE 1
Rahman argued for the petition, which challenges the legality of the seventh amendment and formation of martial law court.

He contended that the constitution never condones imposition of martial law. Ershad's military rule was illegal in that it was against the true spirit of the national charter.

Law and home secretaries, the inspector general (prisons) and deputy commissioner of Chittagong have been made respondents to the rule.

In his petition, Siddique said martial law and the rules and orders under it are illegal in view of the basic framework of the country's constitution.

He prayed for a direction upon the government to arrange for retrial of the case in which he was convicted and sentenced.

In response, the HC bench granted him a six-month bail and issued the rule on the government.

It also asked the respondents to explain within four weeks why they should not be ordered to have the case retried.

Hassan S Azim stood for the petitioner.

JS session

FROM PAGE 1
for lawmakers, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday night said, "They don't need salaries and allowances. They looted thousands of crore taka when they were in power."

After absenting themselves from 64 consecutive sittings, the opposition returned to the House on February 11 and continued their participation to parliament proceedings till their stormy walk out on Sunday night.

The opposition chief whip's office yesterday informed its lawmakers that they will not join the last sitting of the fourth session, which was prorogued yesterday, party sources said.

The opposition lawmakers walked out of parliament protesting the prime minister's remarks and the bill on salary hike for MPs, BNP lawmaker MK Anwar told The Daily Star yesterday.

Anwar said they do not want to boycott the House proceedings, but the government always creates a situation.

"The prime minister also plays a major role to drive the opposition lawmakers out of the parliament," he alleged.

BNP lawmaker Moudud Ahmed said they will decide in their party forum whether they will join the next budget session.

NOTICES REJECTED

Deputy Speaker of Parliament Col (ret'd) Shawkat Ali yesterday turned down all 99 notices from BNP-led opposition lawmakers for holding discussions on various issues adjourning other scheduled businesses of the House.

The opposition lawmakers in their notices submitted to the parliament secretariat demanded discussions on price hike of essentials, power and gas crisis, deterioration of law and order, tender manipulation by Chhatra League activists, anomalies in promotion of government officials, violation of human rights, move to allow transit to India, unrest in educational institutions.

Speaker Shawkat, who disposed of the notices on adjournment motions, said he hopes the authorities concerned will take necessary steps. He also said that some of the notices "lacked evidence" and seemed to be based on assumption.

Interestingly, the deputy speaker came up with the same old arguments for scrapping the opposition's notices that the speaker in the last parliament would use to reject the notices of the then opposition lawmakers of Awami League.

BNP lawmakers Zafrul Islam Chowdhury submitted 49 notices, Shammi Akhtar four, ABM Ashraf Uddin Nizan three, Nazim Uddin Ahmed 11, Mahbub Uddin Khokon two, Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anee three, Syeda Ashifa Ashrafi Papiya five, Nilufar Chowdhury Moni 19 and Jamaat lawmaker Hamidur Rahman Azad submitted one notice.

The speaker last year also turned down around 100 notices of opposition lawmakers who demanded holding discussions on various important national issues in parliament.

Dhaka rivers

FROM PAGE 16
human waste.

Due to the pollution and environmental degradation, the Buriganga and other rivers in and around Dhaka have become a serious threat to public health, ecosystem and the socio-economic situation, the project document said.

Due to hydrological and morphological change and continuous deposition of silt, the conveyance capacity of the Buriganga, Turag and Shitalakhyia has dropped.

The document said the rivers originated from the Jamuna. As there is silt deposit at the source of the rivers, the water flow in the rivers during dry season is poor, which is a major problem. Dredging would be one of the main aims of the project.

Planning ministry sources said different newspapers wrote extensively on illegal occupation and pollution of the rivers.

Water Development Board (WDB) has also conducted a study in this regard. The project has been taken based on the study.

Led by the prime minister a high-powered committee on water sector and dredging was formed. The first meeting of the committee was held in August last year. The meeting decided to dredge the Balu, Turag, and Buriganga and Shitalakhyia on priority basis to protect Dhaka.

They were rushed to hospital, said FSCD officials.

Dr Mohammad Kamal, owner of the diagnostic centre, told The Daily Star, "The fire originated during mixing of chemicals".

FSCD officials said 10 units of firefighters after an hour-long effort could bring the fire under control.

Rab personnel barricaded the roads in the area to help the firefighters douse the flames. It however led to traffic snarl-ups on the roads.

Aila woes worsen

FROM PAGE 16
He said the reason behind the situation is nothing but the delay in starting the repair work. "Repairing of the damaged embankments should have been completed by January. But Water Development Board could not do so for various reasons," Razaque added.

The government sent troops to Aila affected areas on March 16 this year to assist in rebuilding the embankments. They are trying to repair the embankments, but the move came too late, leading to newer breaches in the embankments causing increased flooding in the area.

"It is now impossible to repair the embankments and stop flooding, the situation is going out of control," a WDB official observed.

Contacted by The Daily Star last night, Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen could not give any clear cut answer to why the repair work had been delayed despite funding being available on time.

Cyclone Aila hit the country's coastal areas on May 25 last year claiming lives of 190 people and 150,131 livestock, and affecting 3,928,238 more people damaging 613,778 houses, destroying crops on 323,454 acres of land, and damaging 1,742.53 kilometres stretch of embankments, according to an official record of the food and disaster management ministry.

At tomorrows meeting the government will discuss technical details of how to stop the flooding, cutting the losses already incurred, if already flooded areas are beyond salvation -- as experts warn that several thousand acres of land are permanently submerged due to the breaches in the embankments.

The government is also likely to request the international community to pay special attention to Bangladesh, one of the worst victims of global warming, for helping the country in climate change adaptation.

"We are planning to urge the international community to conduct a research in the country to see how climate change and rise in water level is causing disasters in coastal areas," the food and disaster management minister told a group of reporters in his office yesterday.

In July last year food and disaster management ministry sought Tk 11,000 crore from donor countries and agencies for rehabilitation of the Aila victims, construction of embankments and cyclone centres, and to create employment opportunities in coastal areas.

"But the international response in this regard has been very disappointing so far," said an official of the food and disaster management ministry. He said only one or two European countries promised to give \$50 million. Japan in a separate arrangement already donated Tk 114 crore

Speaker ensures

FROM PAGE 16
lawmakers Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Suranjit Sengupta and Liberal Democratic Party President Oli Ahmed.

They said the constitution ensures free movement of each citizen but the practice of taking speaker's permission controls MPs rights, even as ordinary citizens.

Before issuing his ruling, the speaker sought opinion of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who also supported the lawmakers' sentiment.

The previous practice was that the lawmakers had to take permission of the speaker to go abroad anytime for any purpose, which was eased yesterday.

The speaker strongly criticised the existing practice and delivered his decision amid desk thumping by the MPs.

Pathological

FROM PAGE 16
(FSCD) also sustained injuries when the firemen were trying to put out the fire.

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for setting up water treatment plants in the Aila-hit areas, he added.

The food and disaster management minister recently expressed deep frustration over the poor response of the international community to Bangladesh's pleas for international help in climate change adaptation.

Khoka

FROM PAGE 1
freedom fighter of Madaripur Sadar Upazila, filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

Meanwhile, the BNP-backed lawyers demonstrated on the court premises protesting filing of the case.

The plaintiff alleged that on March 27, Khoka at a discussion in the city said Ziaur Rahman is the proclaimer of independence and also the first president of Bangladesh.

In the discussion, he said Zia not only declared independence of Bangladesh but also took charge of the government after the Liberation War in 1971.

Such comments had violated the higher court verdict that had declared Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as proclaimer of independence and its similar to sedition, Siddiqur said.

The plaintiff appealed the court to issue arrest warrant against Khoka for making such comments.

During the caretaker government tenure, Khoka was charged for amassing illegal wealth of Tk 9.76 crore and giving false information to the commission.

Judge Azizul Haque of the Senior Special Judge's Court had issued an arrest warrant against Khoka on July 8, 2008, after submission of the charge sheet.

But the High Court granted his ad-interim bail on the same day and also stayed the proceedings of the case.

7 boys

FROM PAGE 1
Before releasing, police took photographs of the suspects and undertakings from their parents, the DC said.

Officer-in-Charge of Lalbagh Police Station Mohammad Ali said among the seven suspects, five are students while two left school recently.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner AKM Shahidul Haque said plainclothes police had been deployed in and around girls' schools during school hours.

The DMP has launched an awareness-building programme to curb harassments of girls, he added.

The DMP commissioner also urged the parents and teachers to motivate their children and students to keep themselves from teasing girls.

ACC starts

FROM PAGE 16
for investigation before filing the case. Over 500 petitions were filed by those accused of corruption following Mollah's petition that the HC discharged later.

Soon after AL assumed power, Mollah went to the SC with the same petition in January 2009 and it took 12 months to hold a hearing on the petition while a stay on HC order remained in effect till the apex court upheld the HC verdict.

Defaulters

FROM PAGE 16
are buying excess land and properties at higher price.

"On receiving such information, Bangladesh Bank issued a circular on January 25 asking the banks to take permission from the central bank prior to purchase of land and permanent establishments or taking lease of floor space," he said.

On tax holiday facility, the minister said the provision for tax holiday in the industrial policy will end in June next year.

Extension of the tax holiday facility will be discussed during drafting of the budget for next financial year, he added.

He also said the survey activities are on to identify four lakh new taxpayers in June to widen the tax net.

In reply to a query on reducing interest rate of NGOs running micro credit, Muhith said under the supervision of micro credit regulatory authority a process is underway to determine interest rate at a reasonable level.

He said a preparatory mission from International Monetary Fund is scheduled to visit Dhaka this month.

Man attempts to kill wife

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A husband stabbed his wife at the city's Banglabazar last night for her legal action against him.

Dulu Akhtar Nupur, 22, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with serious throat injuries.

Nupur said she filed a case with Potuakhal Sadar Police Station against her husband Montu Sikdar for not looking after her.

She is the second wife of Montu, a truck driver. Montu asked Nupur over the telephone yesterday evening to come to the foot bridge at Banglabazar to resolve their family dispute, she said.

"I cried out when my husband stabbed in my throat at one stage of our conversation," she added.

Montu fled the scene when people gathered there hearing her scream.

Killing of S African supremacist tests Zuma's leadership

AFP, Johannesburg

The murder of a white supremacist leader has presented Jacob Zuma with an acute test of his bridge-building skills as he tries to stop the biggest racial storm of South Africa's post-apartheid history from raging out of control.

Since becoming South Africa's third elected black president less than a year ago, Zuma has engaged minorities, including Afrikaners, and vowed to keep the country on the path of reconciliation laid by former leader Nelson Mandela.

Speedy Trial Act

FROM PAGE 16
Awami League was against the law while it was in the opposition in 2002 terminating it "blacklaw".

About the decision, BNP standing committee member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said the trial under the act would have to be free, fair, transparent and justified.

He urged the government not to use the law against the opposition, and mentioned it was they who enacted the law while they were in power.

The BNP MP told The Daily Star, "We hope the law won't be used for political purposes".

The cabinet also approved three other bills-- The Bangabandhu Kriarisebi Welfare Foundation Bill, Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council Bill and Bangladesh Tourism Preserved Area and Special Tourism Area Bill, 2010.

BNP complains

FROM PAGE 1
Islam Khan made the complaints to the Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda at the EC secretariat yesterday afternoon.

The by-election to Bholra-3 parliament constituency is scheduled to be held on April 24.

The other members of the delegation are BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and central member Nazimuddin Alam.

Election commissioners Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain and M Sohul Hussain were present at the meeting that lasted about one and a half hours from 2:30 pm.

After the meeting, Nazrul told reporters that their complaints to the EC were very specific and they have asked the commission to take proper steps to rectify the situation after carrying out an investigation.

He said local leaders and workers of the BNP remain scared and panicked following attacks, threats, and plundering by the ruling party's goons.

The law and order situation should improve before the polls take place there, he said.

Nazrul further said that deployment of a security force few days before the polling day may ensure security in the polling centre but it would not help remove the panicky feelings of the voters.

Replying to a question, he said they want a peaceful atmosphere for holding the election.

If the local administration cannot ensure a secure environment, then the party's earlier demand for deployment of army should be considered, he added.

The BNP leader said the EC has assured them that it would take steps to investigate into their complaints and hold the by-election in a free, fair and neutral manner.

It also informed the delegation that Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Sakhawat Hossain will visit Bholra-3 constituency on April 8, and necessary steps will be taken after the visit.

Ringleader of car

FROM PAGE 16
500 private cars, Deputy Commissioner Monirul Islam of Detective Branch told reporters.

A Detective Branch team led by Senior Assistant Commissioner Mukhlesur Rahman arrested Billal around 9:30 pm.

Acting on information provided by the arrestee, the crime busters recovered the parts of three private cars from under a heap of sand pile at the house of Badal, an aide to Billal, in Narsingdi town.

Billal told reporters, he and his gang members stole those parts from cars parked at different residential buildings in the capital and Mymensingh.

Billal, who once worked in a workshop in city's Dholai Khal, used to sell stolen parts at around Tk 40 thousand to some shops in the area.

"Some of our gang mem-

bers tie up the security at garages, some others dismantle parts and flee," he said.

He added, with the money earned from the stealing, he bought three pieces of land -- in Ashulia, Shakhipur in Tangail and Mymensingh town.

Billal said, assisted by three aides -- Shafiqul, Badal and Hashem -- he used to lead a gang of around 50 car lifters. He earlier had been arrested around 15 times but obtained bail within around three months.

AC Mukhlesur Rahman said they arrested Billal's cohorts in several drives over the last one year and recovered stolen parts worth around Tk 2 crore.

Billal was accused in six cases filed with Ramna, Moulhamadpur, Pallabi, Gulshan and Sutrapur police stations, said the AC.

BNP out to destabilise

FROM PAGE 1
sent home. It is completely false as workers come home after their work is complete," she said.

She claimed that it is the opposition's plan to create unrest among Bangladeshi workers abroad through propaganda.

"It is clear from her speech that they will make workers lay siege to Bangladesh missions abroad and create incidents. They are working with this ill motive," Hasina said referring to Sunday's speech of Khaleda Zia in parliament.

Saying that the opposition was also engaged in a conspiracy to prevent completion of the trial of