

Orchard death for Sal forest

Plunderers with AL links replaced the ones with BNP connections to destroy 250 acres of forest in last one year

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Plunderers are clearing the last patch of Sal forest in Aronkhola union of Madhupur upazila and turning it into commercial orchards. Blessed with ruling party connections, they have felled several hundred Sal trees on about 250 acres of forest in last one year, said sources in the forest department. Locals say influential individuals linked to BNP had hundreds of acres of forests denuded and converted into pineapple and banana orchards during the party's rule in 2001-06. Now those having connections with the ruling Awami League are doing the same. The locals allege the plunderers operate in league with some crooked forest staff. Forest officials however deny the allegations. They say they cannot do much to stop the logging since the plunderers have the backing of some local AL leaders.

In recent months, the forest department has conducted several drives against illegal logging and filed 58 cases with district courts, but things remain the same. Visiting Magontinagar-Jangalia in Aronkhola on April 26, this correspondent found around three square-mile Sal forest almost cleared. Labourers were digging out the roots of the felled trees and burning weeds and bushes. Some of those working there told The Daily Star they have been employed to chop down trees, remove those at night and ready the land for commercial fruit growing. They however would not say who their employers are. Asked about the allegations that ruling party men are involved in deforestation, Madhupur upazila chairman and AL leader Abdul Gafur Mantu said, "The information you've got is not

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A vast swathe of Sal forest clear-cut for commercial fruit orchards in Modhupur of Tangail. Locals allege that influential ruling party people in collusion with some corrupt forest department officials wiped out 250 acres of such forest in the last one year for the purpose. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Trade ties with S Korea to climb new heights

PM tells Bangladesh Festival in Seoul



Protocol chief of South Korean foreign ministry, Chotae-Young, and Director General Choichong Moon welcome Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her arrival at Seoul airport for a state visit yesterday. PHOTO: PID

UNB, Seoul
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is in Seoul on a three-day visit, made an impassioned plea yesterday for further enhancement in economic ties between Bangladesh and South Korea. She was addressing the 'Bangladesh Festival 2010', jointly arranged by the Korean labour ministry and the Bangladesh Embassy in Seoul's Jangchung Gymnasium gallery. The premier urged greater export of manpower from Bangladesh to augment the demand for labour in Korea's booming industries, and solicited increased foreign direct investment (FDI) from the Korean private sector in Bangladesh. The PM also urged the Korean authorities to increase imports of various products from Bangladesh to offset the imbalance in trade between the two countries.

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BNP to take part in CCC polls

No hartal call from Paltan rally, decides standing committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition BNP will participate in the Chittagong City Corporation election scheduled for June 17. The party also decided not to call hartal from its grand rally slated for May 19 at the Paltan Maidan. The decisions came at a meeting of the party's standing committee at BNP chairperson's Gulshan office. The committee gave complete authority to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to select the mayoral candidate for the CCC polls, said a source. Khaleda sat with party leaders Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Chittagong city unit president Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury after the meeting. BNP standing committee, the party's highest policymaking forum, sat last night to finalise anti-government programmes and decide on its leaders' participation in the CCC election. Khaleda earlier said she would announce anti-government programmes from her grand rally in Dhaka. The issue of CCC election figured prominently in the meeting

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No cheers for river steps

Taskforce meeting unhappy about river drive, demarcation outcome

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government could not finish the eviction drive and start riverbank demarcation in last one year despite the High Court's directive and firm commitments by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Environmentalists allege the administration is even narrowing down the existing rivers in the name of demarcation. At a meeting of the High-Powered Taskforce Committee on Rivers yesterday, the environmentalists alleged in most cases the district administration drew their lines to demarcate the rivers as per fake revised survey (RS) documents. The survey work should be done properly as it determines the future of the rivers, they told the meeting. The deputy commissioners of four districts -- Dhaka, Narayanganj, Munshiganj and Gazipur -- yesterday informed the meeting that construction work could not be started yet due to delay in fund release. They said they had not even floated tenders to construct concrete pillars.

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Nuke power deal with Russia likely in Sept

Dhaka team flies to Moscow Friday for initial signing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An agreement between Bangladesh and Russia, for cooperation in nuclear technology exchange for electricity generation, is expected to be signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's upcoming visit to Moscow in September. As a precursor to that a delegation comprising officials from the ministries of foreign affairs, and of science, information and communication technology (ICT) will fly to Moscow on Friday to finalise the details, and to sign a pre-contract initial, State Minister for Science Yeafesh Osman told the media yesterday. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has yet to include a power sector expert in the team that is dealing with the country's first nuclear

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Bus crash kills 9 in Narsingdi

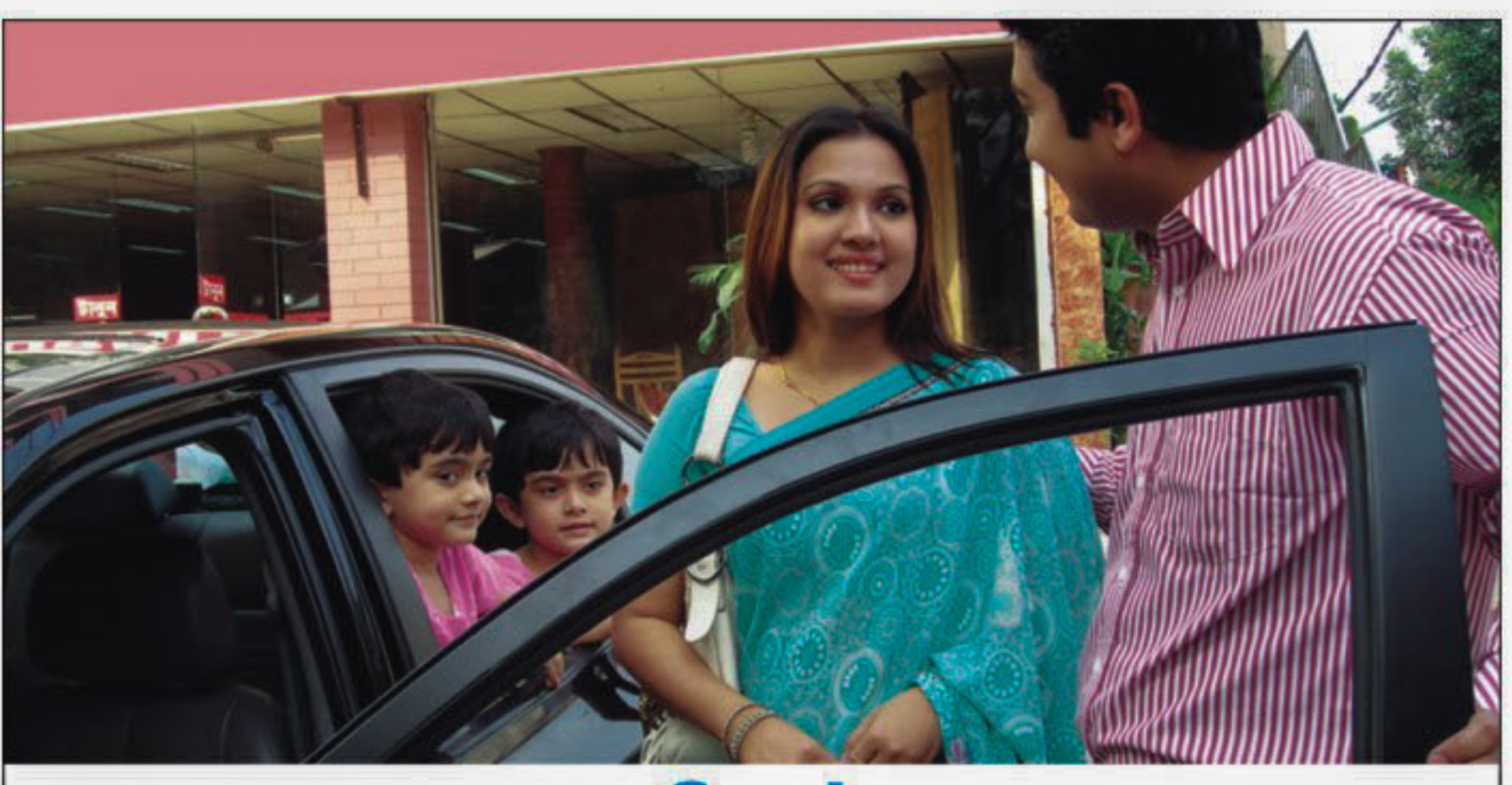
A CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

At least nine people, including five children, were killed and 30 others injured in a head-on collision between two buses on the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway in Sadar upazila of Narsingdi yesterday afternoon.

Eight of the dead were identified as Mili, 3, Refat, 8, Faysal Hasan, 8, Tanjina, 12, Sonia, 18, Lucky, 30, Parvin, 30, and Sharifa, 60, while a youth's identity could not be known immediately.

The accident occurred around 3:00pm on Velanagar Bridge in the upazila when a Bhairab-bound bus from

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