

Plunderers now protectors

MIRZA SHAKIL, *Tangail*

The number of cases filed for stealing resources in Madhupur forest sees a significant fall during the last several months as once forest resource plunderers are now serving as community forest workers, helping protection and development of the traditional sal forest.

The dramatic change appeared as forest department in June-July last year provided 400 people two months' training under a project styled 'Re-vegetation of Madhupur Forest through Rehabilitation of Local and Ethnic Communities'.

As many as 368 and 354 cases were filed in 2008 and 2009 for stealing resources in Modhupur forests, said sources of forest department in Tangail.

But only 20 such cases were filed last year while the number of cases filed in first two and a half months this year is three, they said.

Since the independence, around 18000 cases have been filed for stealing of Madhupur forest resources and around 3000 of them are under trial at present.

Once spread over 45,000 acres of land, Madhupur forest has now shrunk to only 8,000 acres, forest department sources said.

To save the traditional forest from gradual extinction, forest department last year made a list of 500 tree plunderers and provided

Stealing of Modhupur forest resources marks significant fall because of positive steps by the authorities



PHOTO: STAR
These three Garo women, who earlier used to take away resources from Modhupur forest, now serve as community forest workers, helping protection and development of the traditional sal forest. They are among 400 people trained by the authorities on alternative livelihood and forest protection in Modhupur area last year.

400 of them two months' training under the government-run programme aimed at lessening their dependence on the forests.

The participants received trainings on apiculture, mushroom cultivation, nursery, afforestation, fire fighting, poultry, cow fattening, fish farming, vegetable gardening, grass growing, compost fertiliser production, cultivation of medicinal plants, production of jam and jelly etc.

Alongside getting the

opportunity of self-employment, the 400 people are serving as community forest workers, participating in forest development activities and assisting the forest guards to protect the forest resources.

They have been provided with identity cards and complete uniforms including boots, belts and caps and get Tk 200 each per week.

Preparations are on to provide similar trainings to some 150 more people, said a forest official.

"I was accused in over 100 forest cases as I had been stealing trees from Madhupur forest since my boyhood. But now I am serving as a community forest worker to protect the forest," said a middle-aged man of Gachhabari village in Madhupur upazila.

The government has also arranged grants and aids for rehabilitation of 5500 families living inside Madhupur forest. As per plan to make the dwelling houses envi-

ronment friendly farm-houses, each family has got 100 saplings of firewood trees, 50 saplings of fruit trees and 50 saplings of forest trees.

They have also got grant for cattle raising and cultivation of vegetables and medicinal plants.

Each of the families was also given a modern furnace so that they do not have to use wood as fire.

"Following failure to save the forest and its resources by filing cases for years, we are implementing the project to preserve forests by rehabilitating the forest dependent people and including them in the process to protect forest resources. The government has provided Tk 15 crore from its Climate Trust Fund for the purpose," said Asit Ranjan Paul, divisional forest officer in Tangail.

Influential forest plunderers, both locals and outsiders, have also grabbed vast areas of forestlands and raised orchards including pineapple and banana plantations and set up makeshift structures there, forest department sources said.

Over 40,000 people living in 57 villages, set up in Madhupur forest areas after 1950, are dependent on the forest resources for livelihood.

Besides, over 100 brickfields made around Madhupur forest in seven upazilas of Tangail and Mymensingh districts are dependent on the firewood from the forest to burn bricks.

Verdict in case against 52 mutineers today

Charges against 71 others framed

STAR NATIONAL DESK

The special court-17, set up at Six Battalion headquarters in Jamalpur under BGB Mymensingh sector, will deliver judgement in the mutiny case against 52 jawans of the battalion today.

The court, headed by Kushtia Sector Commander Col Md Nazrul Islam Sarker, framed charges against the accused on completion of arguments between the prosecution witnesses and the accused on February 9, according to a correspondent.

Two other members of the court are Lt Col Gazi Md Salahuddin and Major Md Ashfaq Hossain. As many as 11 witnesses gave their statements before the court. The accused claimed innocence and begged for mercy.

Meanwhile, Mutiny charges against 71 jawans of 30 Battalion under Khagrachhari sector were framed yesterday.

Trial of the mutiny case against 52 jawans of Jamalpur battalion began at the special court-17 on November 24 last year. At the beginning, Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Md Azizul Islam of the battalion brought allegations against 52 jawans.

The DAD told the court that the jawans

revolted against their officers on February 26 in 2009, took control of the battalion headquarters and looted firearms and ammunition from armoury, court sources said.

In Khagrachhari, the special court-15, headed by Lt Col Abu Wahab Mohammad Hafizul Haque, yesterday framed charges against 71 mutineers of 30 Battalion, reports a correspondent.

Prosecutor Lt Col Md Zakir Hossain read out the charges in presence of the accused at the court.

According to the charges, the jawans revolted against their officers at the battalion headquarters in Panchhari on February 26, 2009 and looted arms and ammunition from armoury.

One of the accused named Md Faruk Mia confessed to his involvement in the mutiny while the rest 70 claimed innocence.

The special court will start recording depositions of the prosecution witnesses today and asked the authorities concerned to produce all the 71 accused in the court at 9:00am today.

Two others member of the court are Lt Col Sayadis Sakline and Major AZ M Golam Mostafa AL Mamun.

15 houses, 12 shops gutted

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least 15 houses and 12 shops were gutted in two districts yesterday and the day before.

In Kishoreganj, 15 houses were gutted in a fire at Kalatoli in Karimganj upazila early yesterday, reports our correspondent.

Sources said the fire originated from the cowshed of one Siraj Miah and soon engulfed the adjoining 14 houses.

On information, fire fighters from the district town rushed to the spot and doused the blaze in one and half hours of hectic efforts.

One Sirajul Islam was injured by fire and admitted to Karimganj health complex.

Fire service sources said the loss was primarily estimated at Tk 30 lakh.

In Patuakhali, at least 18 shops were gutted at Gopalia bazaar under Bauful upazila on Monday midnight damaging goods worth over Tk 20 lakh, reports our correspondent.

Locals said, at about 1.30 am, a fire originated from a pharmacy owned by Delwar Hossain and spread to other shops. On information fire service men from Bauful upazila headquarters rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control.

Girl rescued from brothel

UNB, *Rajbari*

Police on Monday midnight rescued a young girl from Daulatdia brothel and arrested three people for forcing her into prostitution.

Police said they rescued the 20-year-old girl and arrested Parvin, Shirina and Rashid from the brothel.

The victim who hailed from Narsingdi Sadar PS, said she had eloped with her lover Sagor, who later sold her to a middlemen of the brothel.

Poultry farm gutted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Sirajganj*

A poultry farm was gutted in a fire destroying over 2,100 chickens and 10,000 eggs at Bildhali village under Sadar upazila early Monday.

Witnesses said, the fire originated from an electrical short-circuit at the farm at a round 3.00am.

On information, fire service men rushed to the spot and doused the flame after an hour of hectic efforts.

The fire caused an estimated loss of Tk 40 lakh, claimed farm owner Lokman Hossain of the same village.

SNAPS AND SNIPPETS

Expat killed in Tunisia buried

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Narsingdi*

Jahangir Afrad, a Bangladeshi expatriate who died in a stampede in Tunisia was buried at his family graveyard at Noadia village under Monohardi upazila yesterday. Family members brought the body of Jahangir, 40, son of Abdul Ali Afrad, home after it reached Dhaka on Monday night. A pall of gloom descended on the house as the victim's relatives and well-wishers gathered to join the last rites.

Teenage girl commits 'suicide'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Nilphamari*

A teenage girl allegedly committed suicide in a remote village in Sadar upazila by hanging herself from the ceiling of her room on Monday afternoon as her father rebuked her over a family matter. Victim Lipi Bala Roy, 13, was daughter of Annadas Chandra Roy of Berakuti Barua village. Police and local sources informed that the victim's father rebuked the girl at about noon. At about 6:30pm, when other members of the family were busy otherwise, Lipi closed the door of her room from inside and committed suicide. Being informed, police from Sadar PS went to the spot and recovered the body and sent it to Nilphamari 100-bed hospital for autopsy.



PHOTO: STAR

Vice-Chancellor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (Sust) Saleh Uddin inaugurates the second female dormitory of the university on the campus yesterday.

Two children drown

UNB, *Gaibandha*

Two children drowned in a pond at Hatiadah village in Gobindaganj upazila yesterday. They are Moyna, 7, daughter of Ramzan Ali of Gandhabbari village and Ria Moni, 6, daughter of Rezaul Karim of Hatiadah village. The two children, who were cousins by relations, fell in a pond near their house while playing on its bank in the morning. They were rushed to local hospital where the doctors declared them dead.

Highway blocked for 3 hours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Manikganj*

Locals blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway for three hours yesterday following a road accident that left an SSC examinee injured near Baniajuri in Ghior upazila. Sathi Akter, daughter of Selim Bhuiyan of Jabra village and an SSC examinee from Baniajuri Union High School, was admitted to Manikganj Sadar Hospital and later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition. Witnesses and police sources said, an Aricha-bound microbus hit Sathi at Baniajuri bus stand while she was crossing the road at about 10:00am. Hearing the news, locals and the students of the school put up a barricade on the highway at 10:30am demanding punishment to the culprits and a speed breaker at Baniajuri bus stand. They removed the barricade at about 1:30pm after the local authorities started constructing a speed breaker at the spot.

Bird flu affected poultry culled

UNB, *Rajbari*

At least 1,000 bird flu affected hens were culled and 1,500 eggs destroyed at a poultry in Sadar upazila on Monday night. Officials of livestock department said they culled the hens and destroyed eggs following detection of the disease. Earlier on Sunday night, a good number of hens of the farm, owned by Kader Mia at Koidanga village, suddenly died, which prompted the local officials to take action.

UP ELECTION

Supporters of rival candidates clash: 60 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

At least 60 people were injured as supporters of two chairman candidates in the upcoming election to Chhoto Baishdia Union Parishad (UP) under Galachipa upazila clashed yesterday.

The chairman candidates are ABM Mannan Howlader, also the president of Awami League Chhoto Baishdia Union unit, and Licon Talukder.

Locals and police sources said Mannan Howlader along with his supporters went to his rival candidate Licon Talukder's Kawkhali village at noon to seek votes from the villagers.

During campaign, Manna's supporter Sohel, also a local BCL leader, exchanged heated words with Mokhes Mia, one of the supporters of Likhon Talukder, over election issue and assaulted him.

Licon Talukder was busy with electioneering in

another area of the union. Hearing the news, he returned to his village and tried to pacify his supporters and the opponents. But Mannan's men, at one stage, swooped on Licon's supporters with sharp weapons and sticks, leading to a fierce clash between the two rival groups.

At least 60 people from both sides were injured during the clash that continued for an hour.

Manna's men also ransacked 14 houses and three shops of Licon's supporters at the village. Being informed, police rushed to the spot, dispersed the clashing groups and brought the situation under control at around 2:00pm.

They also arrested four people--Atahar Ali, 40, Helal, 35, Siraj, 30 and Abu Naeem, 25--on the spot.

A tense situation was prevailing in the area as of filing of this report at 5:00pm yesterday. Police have been deployed at Licon's house.

125 hurt as BCL, Shibir clash at two colleges

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least 125 people were injured as the activists of Chhatra League (BCL) and Chhatra Shibir clashed in two colleges in Cox's Bazar and Rangpur districts yesterday.

More than 100 people including college teachers, journalists and police were injured in two rounds of clashes between BCL and Shibir at Cox's Bazar Government College yesterday morning, reports a correspondent.

Police arrested 15 people including Shibir college unit secretary Lokman Hakim for their involvement in the clash.

The clash followed a dispute over according reception to the first year honours class freshers.

Police and witnesses said, the newly admitted students of the first year honours class were coming to the campus from 9 in the morning. Leaders and workers of BCL and Shibir stood in separate lines to welcome the freshers.

All of a sudden, more than 50 outsider Shibir cadres led by Shibir's college unit president Hasan Md Yasin, secretary Lokman Hakim, former president of the unit Sarwar Kamal launched an attack on the Chhatra League leaders and workers which the BCL men retaliated.

During the clash college principal Md Salimur Rahman, teacher Mujibul Haque, police sub-inspector Anu Mong, constable Sudarshan Barua, journalist of a local newspaper Abdullah Nayan, college BCL convenor Hillol Das, joint convenor Wahidur Rahman were also injured. The injured were admitted to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital and different clinics.

As the condition of BCL leader Halimur Rashid and activist Sahel deteriorated they were

sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Principal Salimur Rahman, teacher Mujibul Haque sustained injuries in their head, hands, legs and other parts of the body.

Refuting the allegation of attack, Shibir college unit president Hasan Md Yasin said that the BCL cadres attacked their activists in presence of police. He claimed that more than 30 Shibir activists were injured.

District BCL later brought out a protest procession that paraded the main roads of the town in the afternoon and held a rally at Laldighir Par.

In Rangpur, at least 25 BCL and Shibir activists were injured in a series of clashes on Carmichael College campus yesterday.

Police arrested 21 Shibir leaders and activists from the college on charge of violence on the campus, reports our correspondent.

College sources said, BCL activists attacked a few Shibir activists while they were preparing to bring out a rally the freshers at about 11:45am.

After a little while, the Shibir cadres swooped on the BCL leaders and activists with sticks and drove them out of the campus.

On information, police rushed the campus at about 12:30pm and charged baton on the Shibir activists.

In the afternoon, police raided Gopal Lal Hostel of the college in the afternoon and recovered a huge quantity of bamboo sticks.

Police arrested 14 more Shibir activists and leaders from the dormitory on charge of keeping bamboo sticks in their rooms.

Meanwhile, the academic council of the college held a meeting hostel rooms. After the meeting, the college authorities asked the residential students to vacate their hostel rooms by 6:00pm yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

People of three unions under Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar district form a human chain on the bed of the Monu River at Rajapur point yesterday demanding construction of a bridge over the river there. The participants said the proposed bridge would alleviate sufferings of people of 25 villages under the unions during the rainy season.

One held with fake notes

UNB, *Sylhet*

A man was arrested along with fake currency notes from a shop at Darbasta bazaar in Jointapur upazila on Saturday night.

The arrestee was identified as Zohir Uddin, son of Mahmud Hossain of Kurikhola village in Goainghat upazila of the district.

Police quoting local sources said, Zohir purchased some rice from a grocery at the bazaar and gave a note of Tk 100 to the shopkeeper.

As the shopkeeper found the note fake he with the help of local people caught Zohir and informed police.

Police rushed to the spot and recovered 3 more fake notes from him.