

HARTALS, BLOCKADES

Tree felling worries forest staff, environmentalists

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR
TOPU, Pabna

Indiscriminate felling of roadside trees to block roads during political agitation like blockades and hartals has become a matter of concern for forest officials and environmentalists in the district.

BNP and Jamaat activists fell down 150 roadside trees worth Tk 1 crore for putting barricades at different places of Dhaka-Pabna, Pabna-Rajshahi and Kushtia-Pabna highways in last three months, said sources at district forest office.

Visiting Dhaka-Pabna road a couple of days ago, this correspondent found signs of indiscriminate tree felling at Rajapur, Jalalpur, Bangabaria, Modhupur, Pushpopara and some other places of the highway to put barricade there.

"At least one hundred roadside trees from Rajapur to Pushpopara point of Dhaka-Pabna highway and over 50 trees beside Pabna-Kushtia and Pabna-Rajshahi roads were felled in name of putting barricades during the last three months," said Md Shamim Ahmed, head assistant of Pabna forest office.

The Roads and Highways Department and Pabna Zila Parishad are owners of the



PHOTO: STAR

Jamaat-Shibir men block Dhaka-Pabna highway, felling a tree in front of Rajapur Jubo Unnayan office in Pabna Sadar upazila yesterday. They felled trees on eight spots of the road to enforce the blockade programme on the day.

trees, he said.

"The trees destroyed by BNP-Jamaat men in name of hartal and blockades would be worth Tk 1 crore as most of the trees are big. Unruly BNP-Jamaat men also took some of the felled trees to their houses," said Md Saidul Haque Chunu, administrator of Pabna Zila Parishad.

The Zila Parishad filed a few cases for felling roadside trees recently.

Md Haniful Islam, officer in charge of Pabna Sadar police station, said, "Unruly BNP-Jamaat men often cut down roadside trees at dead of night to put barricades on the highway. The police remain alert to protect the trees but it is difficult to

arrest the culprits red-handed."

"The felling of roadside trees badly affects the natural environment. Besides producing oxygen, the trees provide shade and help to keep the weather cool," said agriculturist Zafar Sadek.

45 Illegal brick kilns pollute environment in Bandarban

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA,
Bandarban

Forty-five brick kilns in the district are running illegally, much to the problem for adjacent residential areas, schools and farmlands.

Only five of 50 brick kilns in seven upazilas of the district have got no objection certificate (NOC) from the Directorate of Environment (DoE) while the others, including 17 in Sadar upazila, 18 in Faidong union of Lama

upazila, five in Alikadom, three in Naikkhongchhari and two in Ruma upazila are running without any valid license or legal papers, DoE sources said.

The owners of these brick kilns have not even taken any permission from the respective upazila, union parishad and municipality authorities for the purpose.

The brick kilns set up in residential areas, on agricultural lands, even beside schools, are posing serious health hazards and pollut-

ing environment. Instead of environment friendly chimneys, they are using small chimneys and burning forest wood for baking bricks.

Md Islam, a local BNP leader, has built a brick kiln named ABC Bricks on an arable land, also within 25 feet from Goungguru Khyangpara Primary School in Sadar upazila, defying law and ignoring protest from the students, teachers and locals.

It is very difficult to stay

in the classroom due to smoke from the brick kiln, and the noise and dust from the heavy trucks coming there, said several students and teachers of the school during this correspondent's visit to the area.

"We the teachers and local people drew the attention of local administration to stop the adjoining brick kiln but no action has been taken yet," said Jobeda Begum, headmistress of the school.

While visiting ABC Brick Kiln on Sunday afternoon, two correspondents were attacked by the laborers of the company.

Denying the allegations against him, Md Islam said, "I have already managed the district administration office. If you have any query you can talk with them."

Bandarban Deputy Commissioner KM Tariqul Islam admitted that there are several illegal brick kilns in the district.

"We formed an investigation committee. The district administration will take steps against the brick kiln owners who will be found guilty after inquiry," he said.

On Monday, journalists of the district formed a human chain in front of Bandarban Press Club, demanding punishment of Md Islam, owner of ABC Bricks, for harassing journalists.

They also demanded stopping operation of the illegal brick kilns in the district.



PHOTO: STAR

Chimney of ABC Bricks, set up just 25 feet from Goungguru Khyangpara Primary School in Bandarban Sadar upazila, emits smoke, much to the nuisance of students and teachers.

Brac extends help to rape victim in Nilphamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Nilphamari

Non-government organisation Brac has extended helping hand to a rape victim four-year-old girl at Khalisha Chapani village in Dimla upazila under the district.

The organisation will appoint a lawyers' panel and bear all expenditure to fight legal battle,

Humayun Kabir, Rangpur regional manager of Brac, said in a simple ceremony in presence of Brac officials and journalists at Dimla upazila branch office on December 2.

He also handed over money to the victim's father for her treatment.

He expressed Brac's commitment to continue efforts to bring to book

such heinous criminals and remove different social injustices.

Neighbour Saiful Islam, 20, a madrasa student, raped the girl on November 20 and The Daily Star ran a report titled 'Youth rapes four-year-old girl in Nilphamari' on November 24.

The girl's mother rescued her from a nearby bamboo cluster when she was bleed-

ing profusely.

She was taken to Dimla upazila health complex where doctors referred her to Nilphamari 100-bed Hospital as her condition was deteriorating fast.

The victim's father filed a case with Dimla police station on November 24 accusing Saiful, who is fugitive now.

Criminals smash tombs, plough land to occupy Hindu cemetery

EAM ASADUZZAMAN,
Nilphamari

Influential land grabbers smashed three memorial tombs to illegally occupy land of the only cemetery of Hindu community in Saidpur municipality under the district.

The 1.29-acre land comprising plot No 21 at Kundol mouja under Saidpur municipality is a khas land, which is recorded as cemetery of the Hindu community, according to official document of upazila land office.

Visiting the sight on Tuesday morning, it was found that some people were ploughing about 30 decimals of the occupied land of the cemetery in its east to cultivate potato there.

"Since my childhood, I saw bringing of dead Hindus to the cemetery for funeral. But local influential people including Abdus Sattar and Shahjahan engaged day labourers on December 4 to smash and remove old memorial tombs and occupy cemetery land," said octogenarian Md Amin, a resident of the area.

Nawsad Parvez, owner of Northern Cold Storage beside the cemetery, said,

"Hindus use it for burning dead bodies and spread the ashes in the Khorkhor River flowing beside. They also buried some dead bodies in the cemetery and built tombs in their memory."

At the north side of the cemetery, Hindus built a

spacious room for keeping dead bodies safely in case of natural calamity. Priests recite holy verses there during the funeral.

During Tuesday's visit, it was found that iron grills of windows and the door made of heavy iron bars of the room were stolen.

A vested quarter committed the crime to grab the cemetery land, said a few locals.

When contacted, Abdus Sattar, one of the alleged grabbers, said the land which was claimed by Hindus as cemetery land was their paternal property and they inher-

ited it lawfully.

Another alleged grabber Shahjahan Ali said the Hindus' claim was not right, as they had measured the land with genuine surveyor following land map. He however remained silent when this correspondent asked why they never forbade Hindus in the past to bury dead bodies and make tombs there.

Amit Kumar Roy, general secretary of Saidpur unit of Hindu Kalyan Society (welfare association), said, "Occupation of the cemetery land has hurt the sentiment of local Hindus. We lodged a written complaint

to Saidpur UNO regarding the matter on December 8 and also recorded a general diary in local police station. If the local administration fails to ensure justice we will launch an agitation programme."

Saidpur UNO Shafiqul Islam said, "I along with the officer in charge of Saidpur police station visited the spot on Tuesday afternoon and found the allegation to be true. I directed assistant commissioner (Land) to mark the cemetery area without delay. We have also identified the grabbers and legal action will be taken against them."



PHOTO: STAR

A portion of the cemetery, meant for cremation and in some cases burial, of the Hindus in Saidpur municipality under Nilphamari district gets ploughed by land grabbers who also demolished three tombs of the Hindus in the cemetery during the last few days.

Horoscopes

FROM PAGE 16

have a bad day, a study found.

It is because believers are convinced they cannot change their fate so get tempted to drop their plans, while people who don't set any store by their stars carry on as normal.

The study by Johns Hopkins University and the University of South Carolina gave people a pessimistic horoscope and then asked them to choose between going to a party or cleaning the house.

People who had said they believed in horoscopes were more likely to choose the party, while others chose the 'virtuous' option of cleaning up.

"Human nature drives us to believe in our own fate," said the authors of the study, Hyeonmin Kim, Katina Kulow and Thomas Kramer.

They added: "Given the prevalence of horoscopes in Western cultures, we looked at the influence one's horoscope might have on the decisions that person makes."

"Our results showed that reading an unfavourable horoscope actually has the opposite effect on a person."

INT'L MOUNTAIN DAY OBSERVED

'Save hills, mountains for sustainable development'

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Speakers at discussions marking International Mountain Day yesterday urged protection of hills and mountains, especially in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region, for sustainable development.

Our Rangamati Correspondent reports: The hills in CHT region should be protected for saving the customs, culture and tradition as well as livelihood of the indigenous people, speakers said at a discussion held at the municipality hall room in the town.

Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC) organised the meeting with support from CHTDF-UNDP, Rangamati.

RHDC Chairman Nikhil Kumar Chakma was the chief guest at the meeting presided over by Rangamati Deputy Commissioner Mostafa Kamal.

Superintendent of Police Amena Begum, Chief

Executive Officer of RHDC Irfan Sharif, Chief of Implementation of CHTDF-UNDP Robert Stoelman, spoke, among others.

The speakers emphasised creating awareness among the mass people to protect forests and environment.

RHDC took elaborate programmes including marathon run, rally, art competition, screening of documentary film on mountains and cultural programme marking the day.

Our Khagrachhari Correspondent adds: Khagrachhari Hill District Council (KHDC) yesterday organised a meeting titled "Mountains: Key to a sustainable future" marking International Mountain Day.

Gradual destruction of mountains to satisfy man's need badly affects the ecological balance of the earth and affects climatic change, rise in temperature and soil erosion, speakers said at the meeting held at KHDC

conference room in the town.

They urged the government to take effective initiatives to preserve the mountains of the country by strict implementation of laws especially in Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban hill districts.

Acting Chairman of Khagrachhari Hill District Council Chaitwoang Marna, its Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Salauddin Ahmad, Additional Deputy Commissioner Abdul Khalak, Additional Superintendent of Police Joynul Abadin, Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Extension Anil Chandra Roy and District Governance Officer of CHTDF-UNDP Suvash Chakma spoke at the meeting, among others.

Earlier a colourful procession attended by officials and activists of government and non-government organisations marched the roads in the

Absentee counsel loses

FROM PAGE 16

Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam also barred Syed Mizanur Rahman, the conducting counsel, from appearing in any other cases at the tribunal.

It also asked Yusuf to appoint a new lawyer within Sunday; otherwise the court will provide him with a state defence counsel to assist his junior counsel Gazi MH Tamim in the war crimes case.

Meanwhile, the accused Jamaat leaders' senior lawyers, who had been staying off the proceedings of the tribunals and the Supreme Court on hartal and blockade days citing "security concerns", were present at the SC yesterday.

Chief of defence counsel barrister Abdur Razzak along with several defence lawyers appeared before the SC when they moved a petition over the acceptability of an application

seeking review of its earlier judgment that awarded death penalty to Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah.

The prosecution, however, believe the "deliberate" absence of the defence counsels is a "strategy to hamper the trial proceedings".

Yusuf's conducting counsel, Mizanur Rahman, remained absent from the tribunal since November 25 prompting the tribunal to close cross-examination of five prosecution witnesses.

Yesterday, the court closed the cross-examination of Taiyab Ali Kha, 17th prosecution witness in Yusuf's case, as Mizanur Rahman again failed to show up before the court and Tamim expressed his inability to cross-examine the witness.

"You [defence] are causing serious harm to him [accused]. But we [judges] can't let it happen," Justice

Hassan said before passing the order.

The tribunal asked Yusuf twice to give his opinion whether he will cross-examine the witness or appoint new counsel. Otherwise, the court will provide him state counsel.

The war crimes tribunals sit amid hartal and blockades but cannot make much headway with the cases as senior defence counsels remain absent on strike days.

Although both the tribunals had repeatedly assured the senior counsels of Jamaat leaders of providing them with necessary protection, they refrained from attending the proceedings during shutdowns.

The Appellate Division, where appeals of several convicted Jamaat leaders remain pending, usually discharges judicial functions on strike days. But in the absence of any party,

the apex court does not proceed with the case.

Jamaat lawyers never attend proceedings of the Appellate Division during hartal and blockades.

Even the hearing on the appeal of another Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee didn't see any progress since the last week of November, as the defence didn't appear before the court during the opposition-enforced blockades.

However, this correspondent yesterday found defence counsels Abdur Razzak, Khondker Mahub Hossain, Tajul Islam, Ehsan A Siddiq, Imran Siddiq and Shishir Manir at the Appellate Division.

Tajul Islam told The Daily Star last night, "We appeared (before the Appellate Division) risking our lives only to save a life [Quader Mollah]. This should not be compared with other days."