

WEATHER FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S TEMPERATURES	DHAKA	CHITTAGONG	SYLHET	RAJSHAH	KHULNA	BARISAL	RANGPUR	COX'S BAZAR
	H 28.1 L 15.0	H 29.5 L 19.0	H 30.0 L 14.7	H 28.4 L 12.8	H 29.0 L 14.4	H 28.4 L 14.8	H 27.5 L 14.5	H 30.0 L 20.7

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country. The sun sets in the capital today at 6:04pm and rises tomorrow at 6:15am. Country's highest temperature 30.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday in Sitakunda and lowest 11.0 in Sreemangal.

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Grove of lohakath trees in Lawacherra.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Lohakath

The first time I saw lohakath was some years ago during monsoon on my way to Padma Resort with friends. About an hour from Dhaka, near Louhojong, I noticed roadside groves of tall, elegant trees with leaves of deep green. My friend Micky informed me they were lohakath trees, so called because the wood was so hard that it was impossible to hammer a nail (loha) into the wood.

That was my first encounter with lohakath whose botanical name is xylia xylocarpa. The tree belongs to the large fabaceae family of plants – a family that includes peas and legumes. What surprised me is that within the family, lohakath occupies a slot in the mimosidae sub-family. After all, the tiny mimosa (lojjaboti) and this tall tree had very little in common.

Lohakath can grow very tall (40 metres) and attain a girth of perhaps a metre. Branches are sparse and start growing at a substantial height. They radiate from the trunk allowing sunlight on the forest floor. A native to tropical Asia, lohakath thrives on higher land, particularly hilly, well-drained terrain.

I saw the most impressive lohakath trees in Lawacherra National Park. I had gone there looking for pig-tailed macaques. Having spotted and photographed them quickly, I found myself with free time to wander the trails. A few hundred feet from the entrance, to the left, was a grove of lohakath, magnificently shooting up to the sky.

What were they doing here in the park? It turns out that lohakath was planted in Lawacherra in the 1950s by the Forest Department. During that time, it was a popular choice for Forest Department plantations. Lohakath groves can also be found in Satchari,

Rema-Kalenga and other protected forests and plantations of Sylhet, as well as in forests in Chittagong.

The wood of lohakath, coloured an attractive red, is very strong and useful for heavy-duty uses such as construction, railway slippers and boats. Lohakath bark is used in traditional medicine for a slew of illnesses including diarrhoea and fever.

Lohakath has another potential benefit. Normally, it is difficult to grow other plants on the ground between tall trees because sunlight cannot reach them. But because of the sparse density of lohakath branches, it might be possible to grow crops such as vegetables and strawberries in the ground between the trees in lohakath groves. Scientists have discovered that as long as they are not planted too close to the base of the trees, the yield of these crops planted in gaps among lohakath trees is comparable to those grown in open land. This opens the possibility of interplanting other cash crops among lohakath trees, important in Bangladesh where acreage is at a premium.

So, why is it that we don't see more of this elegant tree?

The main reason seems to be other hardwood trees such as acacia auriculiformis (akashmoni), which yields similar if not better quality timber while growing faster than lohakath. It is also easier for nurseries to grow saplings of akashmoni than lohakath. Thus, for economic reasons, akashmoni – and some other hardwood trees – are more popular than lohakath in our countryside.

Be that as it may, I am certainly grateful to those who planted the lohakath trees in Lawacherra, for their beauty is memorable.

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Two workers die from silicosis

UNB, Lalmonirhat

Two workers of stone-crushing plants in Burimari Land Port of Lalmonirhat have reportedly died from silicosis, an occupational lung disease, in the last two days.

The dead were Belal Hossain, 37, son of Abul Hossain, of Srirampur village, and Abdur Rashid, 32, son of Fazlul Haque, of Ufarmara area of Patgram upazila.

Of the two, Belal used to work at Bappi Enterprise while Rashid worked at Siam Enterprise, said Chairman of Burimari union parishad Abdul Karim.

He said Belal died at the National Institute of Chest Disease and Hospital in the capital yesterday after suffering for about a month while Rashid died at Rangpur Medical College Hospital on Thursday morning.

Silicosis is a form of occupational lung disease caused by inhalation of crystalline silica dust, and is marked by inflammation and scarring in the form of nodular lesions in the upper lobes of the lungs.

Avijit murdered as part of anti-liberation forces' plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The killing of secular writer Avijit Roy was not an isolated incident but rather the execution of a plan by religious extremists who have been working against the spirit of the Liberation War and Bangladesh, speakers told a human chain yesterday.

Citing the past incidents of impunity, they voiced concern that if the government fails to ensure justice for Avijit's killing, it would deal a big blow to the existence of a secular Bangladesh.

Many elderly politicians and freedom fighters took part in the protest at the capital's Shabbagh organised by Sammilito Samajik Andolon. They demanded punish-

ment for his killers, an end to ongoing violence, and a ban on all extremist political parties including Jamaat-e-Islami.

Senior politician Pankaj Bhattachariya, also president of Oikya NAP, said that though Bangladesh was born out of a dream of secularism, an advocate of secularism and humanity like Avijit could not live here.

The government must be pro-active to prosecute his killers, added Justice Kazi Ebadul Haque.

The speakers observed that the anti-liberation force had become very active in killing civilians in the name of political movement on one hand and eliminating



Avijit

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This bus of Salsabil Paribahan hit the pillar of Kaola footbridge and lost its roof near Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital yesterday, after a speeding BRTC bus trying to overtake a third one collided side-on with the Salsabil's, leaving at least one person killed and seven others seriously injured, said witnesses. The Salsabil bus had 40-50 passengers on board. Story on page 4.

PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

REOPENING OF SAUDI LABOUR MARKET FOR BANGLADESH More Rohingyas entering for migration bid

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Influx of Rohingyas into the country through the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in Ukhiya upazila has seen a sudden rise after Saudi Arabia reopened its labour market to Bangladeshis, according to officials of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

In the first two months of this year, BGB had to push back some 2,500 Rohingyas to Myanmar along the 76-km stretch of the border in the upazila while 5,000 Rohingyas were pushed back in the whole of last year.

Talking to the news agency, Lt Col Saiful Islam Khan, commanding officer of Cox's Bazar BGB Battalion-17, said aided by a local human trafficking cartel, Rohingyas

are taking their chances to enter Bangladesh in a bid to migrate to Saudi Arabia posing as Bangladesh nationals.

On February 1, the Saudi government reopened its manpower market for Bangladeshi jobseekers lifting the long seven-year ban, which is expected to boost manpower export to the Gulf country.

Meanwhile, BGB members yesterday detained 108 Rohingyas by intercepting three jeeps on the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway in Ukhiya.

A clash also broke out between BGB personnel and members of the cartel leaving a BGB member bullet injured.

A case was filed in this connection.

Two found dead in Sylhet

UNB, Sylhet

Two persons, including a teenage girl, were found dead in different parts of Sylhet yesterday.

Nazrul Islam, in-charge of Bandarabazar police camp under Kotwali Police Station, said a hotel employee, Tera Mia, 34, son of late Jalil Mia of Sunamganj, was found dead at Sunflower Hotel in Dhoadighir Par in the city early yesterday.

Being informed by the hotel authorities, police recovered the body with the legs tied and several injury marks. Police could not ascertain the reason behind the death of the hotel employee.

At Joypasha in Kulaura municipality area, police recovered the body of a girl whose throat was slit. The identity of the girl, aged about 13, could not be known immediately.

Police sent the bodies to Sylhet Osmani Medical College morgue.



Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury sees off President Abdul Hamid who left for London yesterday for eye treatment and health checkup, at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka. He reached London at 4:20pm local time, reports UNB.

PHOTO: PID

ENCOURAGING FISH FARMING RAKUB lending picks up

BSS, Rajshahi

The special credit programme of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) for boosting fish production has gained momentum in northwest region for the last couple of years.

The bank has been operating the special loan programme styled "Rakub Fisheries Village" for extensive fish cultivation in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions to encourage small farmers in fish farming in small ponds and other water-bodies using modern and scientific technologies instead of traditional ones.

The programme has given emphasis on forming fisheries village with at least 10-12 small ponds at potential places.

Talking to the news agency, Deputy Managing Director of RAKUB Abdul Khaleque Khan said there was a bright prospect for increasing fish production in all the northern districts with optimum uses of the existing natural resources.

Khaleque said now all 371 branches of the bank are disbursing the special loan in 16 districts under Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions.

Around Tk 8.66 crore has so far been disbursed among the interested fish farmers during the first seven months of the current fiscal year, he said.

The farmers having experiences of fish farming and at least four-week training programme on improved fish cultivation are being given preference to get the loan.

The Rakub has established an easy process for extending necessary credits to small and medium fish cultivators so that they could contribute to the economic growth of the country, Khaleque Khan added.

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