

Forest dept fells 266 roadside trees in Natore

OUR CORRESPONDENT

The Natore forest department cut down 266 roadside trees in the Sadar upazila allegedly flouting rules.

Some 400 trees were planted 13 years ago by the road from Burirbattola to Ramnagar under a social forestry project, a joint initiative by the department and Tebaria Union Parishad, said the union chairman, Golam Sarwar.

Local people helped plant the trees and took care of them since then.

According to the rules, a tender should have been floated for the felling of the trees after the expiry of the contract between stakeholders.

However, the forest department sold 266 trees at Tk 2.5 lakh without tender, Sarwar said, adding that the amount should be divided between the department, union parishad and those who had looked after them.

Receiving complaints of irregularities, the local administration stopped the tree cutting.

Sarwar claimed that there was some corruption since the trees were sold at a lower price.

Abu Abdullah, forest officer in Natore, said the authorities had followed all the rules before cutting down the trees.

Nairuzzaman Khan, upazila nirbahi officer of the Sadar upazila parishad, said he had visited the place and that stern action would be taken against anyone if found guilty of corruption.



Logs of trees recently felled in Natore allegedly in violation of the related laws. At least 266 trees, planted along the Burirbattola-Ramnagar Road in Tebaria union by the locals under the social forestry project 13 years ago, were cut down by a businessman who reportedly had bought them from the district forest department without any tender.

PHOTO: STAR



Attack on MP motorcade Cop, 4 others hurt in clash in Feni

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

Five people, including a policeman, were injured when a clash broke out over an attack on a motorcade of independent lawmaker Rahim Ullah in Feni yesterday.

Quoting witnesses, police said a group of Jubo League and Chhatra League activists started hurling brick chunks at the MP's motorcade at zero point in Sonagazi upazila around 7:00pm when he was on his way to Dhaka.

Following the attack, activists loyal to the lawmaker of Feni-2 got locked into a clash with the attackers that left Inspector Mesbah Uddin and four others injured. Several homemade bombs were also exploded during the clash.

Later, police brought the situation under control, said Humayun Kabir, officer-in-charge of Sonagazi Police Station.

Mesbah was admitted to Sonagazi Health Complex.

Talking to reporters, the MP alleged that the ruling party men launched the attack.

However, Ruhul Amin, acting president of Sonagazi upazila unit of AL, refuted the allegation. Locals claimed that Rahim Ullah had been at loggerheads with the district AL President Nizam Uddin Hazari over establishing supremacy in the area for long.

Nizam was unhappy after Rahim, also president of Jeddah chapter AL, was elected independent lawmaker through the January 5 elections and took control of his constituency, they added.

It was the third attack on Rahim Ullah in the last two years allegedly by ruling party men.

Lanka requests IMF bailout to tackle budget deficit

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has made a formal request for an IMF bailout package to aid its struggling economy after a sharp slowdown in growth and with its budget deficit widening, officials said Saturday.

The International Monetary Fund confirmed the island nation had asked for assistance, but did not give details on the value of a potential programme or say whether it would grant the request.

"The IMF has received a request for a program with Sri Lanka," the fund said in a statement from its headquarters in Washington DC.

Sri Lanka enjoyed a blistering economic growth rate averaging more than 8.0 percent for two years after a prolonged civil war ended in 2009.

But the pace of expansion has since slowed, falling to 4.8 percent in the third quarter of 2015, according to official data.

Great effort, yet some concern

FROM PAGE 1

"I've seen many physically-challenged people pulling rickshaws and I talked to some of them," said 34-year-old Sahidul.

"I told them that I am a young man, yet I am doing [begging] this. I felt ashamed and wanted to work."

One Raju, who is also physically challenged and pulls a rickshaw, helped him find a man from whom he bought the battery-run rickshaw.

Shahidul bought the vehicle for Tk 48,000 from one Yunusur Rahman of Kamrangirchar. He gave Yunusur Tk 10,000 as one-time down payment and would pay the rest of the money by giving Tk 300 per day.

"Earlier, I received a one-day training on rickshaw driving and started

running it from Friday [January 22]," said Sahidul, father of three, two of whom are school-goers.

Yunusur said, "I have five rickshaws and I rent those out to people. I had no plan to sell any of them but I sold him one as he told me that he wanted to get out of begging."

Sahidul, the lone breadwinner of his five-member family, used to earn Tk 150 to Tk 250 daily from begging. Now he earns Tk 450 to Tk 500. "I am very happy now," he said with a big smile on his face.

Towards the end of the conversation with him near the High Court, one Mamun Hossain arrived there looking for a rickshaw.

After knowing about Shahidul,

Mamun praised him for leaving begging behind but raised questions about his ability to control the vehicle on the busy streets of Dhaka.

He said riding a rickshaw by a physically-challenged person can pose risk of serious accidents for both the passenger and him. He also suggested that Shahidul should better consider doing small business rather than running a rickshaw.

Shahidul, however, said he does not face any difficulty in manoeuvring the vehicle.

Tanvir Ahmed, associate coordinator of the Centre for Disability in Development, an organisation working for people with disabilities, said that battery-run rickshaws are illegal

on the streets. But when a physically challenged man runs the vehicle, it is a special case and the authorities should give it special consideration.

If he was not allowed to drive the rickshaw, he might return to begging. So, his condition should be considered "specially" or he should be given an alternative job, Tanvir told The Daily Star.

He said there was no exact number of physically challenged people in the country. However, the Department of Social Services in 2013 conducted a survey to count the number of people with disabilities, but the results have not been released yet.

As per a 2005 survey of National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled, 5.6 percent of the total

Export to India at high risk

FROM PAGE 1

He is surprised to see the complaint lodged for the first time in more than 40 years.

Referring to the cash incentives by the Bangladesh government to encourage jute production and export, he said it was wrong on the part of the Indian authorities to be concerned about it.

"The cash incentive is decreasing gradually. At present, it stands at 5 percent for yarn and 7.5 percent for other jute goods, down from 15 percent several years ago," Khaled told The Daily Star.

Majority of the Bangladeshi millers and exporters have declined to respond to the Indian government's queries sent to them to reply by January 29, after extending the deadline once.

The DGAD first set December 15 last year as the deadline. So far, only 20 percent millers and exporters responded.

State-owned Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), which is the single largest Bangladeshi seller of jute and jute goods to India, has provided information on a limited scale.

"We've given some information, but we don't want to give our business secrets, such as the selling price to other export markets," said Maj Gen Humayun Khaled, chairman of BJMC.

He, too, questioned the DGAD investigation after so many years.

Gopi Kishon Sureka, chief executive of Fiber 'N Fibre in Bangladesh that exports jute goods to India, said the government in recent years cut down the cash incentive twice. This indicates neither the government nor any individual manufacturer has the intention of dumping the products in India.

"It is impossible to furnish the details of the questionnaire sent to us by the DGAD of India. National export figures should be taken into account instead

of individual company's details," said Sureka.

He also urged officials of the two governments to resolve the issue through talks.

The move has made Indian importers concerned as well because it would help a few Indian millers make a monopoly market, for which consumers will be the ultimate victims.

In a letter on January 28, the Jute Products Importers Association (JPIA) of India requested the commerce minister of Bangladesh to intervene.

"The JPIA strongly feels that there is no case of imposing any duty on import of jute goods from Bangladesh into India," read the letter obtained by The Daily Star.

This correspondent talked to Rishi Jalan, joint secretary of the JPIA, who visited Dhaka last week to persuade the government on the issue.

"The demand for jute goods in India is

higher than the supply, and the gap is met by the imports from Bangladesh. A few Indian millers want to make it a monopoly market," Jalan said, explaining the intention behind the move.

If the anti-dumping duty is imposed, Indian consumers will suffer and will be forced to use plastic bags, he said.

Sheikh Abdul Mannan, acting chairman of Bangladesh Tariff Commission, which is the designated authority of the government to deal with the issue, said they were aware of the move.

On the stringent questionnaire sent by the DGAD, he said it was in line with the rules of the World Trade Organisation.

"Jute millers and exporters should respond to the Indian queries for fair treatment of the allegation," said Mannan.

Bangladesh's imports from India were around \$6 billion against its exports worth just \$500 million in

El Nino linked to Zika outbreak

FROM PAGE 1

underdeveloped brains. Brazil has seen 4,783 suspected cases of babies born with small brains.

However, it has not yet been proved that Zika causes either microcephaly or Guillain-Barre.

"We have confirmed and attributed three deaths to Zika," said the head of Colombia's National Health Institute, Martha Lucia Ospina.

"In this case, the three deaths were preceded by Guillain-Barre syndrome."

Guillain-Barre is a rare disorder in which the body's immune system attacks part of the nervous system. It isn't normally fatal.

Ospina said another six deaths were being investigated for possible links to Zika.

Meanwhile, scientists said the exceptionally hot and dry winter and

spring recently experienced in northeast of the country created the perfect conditions for the Zika-carrying Aedes mosquito to thrive.

While the high temperatures recorded in the region encouraged the growth of the mosquito population, the drought that ensued also played a role, they added.

In times of drought people are compelled to store reservoirs of water in containers near their homes, thus creating a convenient habitat for the mosquito, experts at the University of Haifa and the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), said.

The World Health Organization declared the current outbreak, which erupted last summer, a public health emergency on Monday, over fears the virus is linked to a serious birth defect.

In Brazil more than 4,000 cases of microcephaly - where a baby is born with an unusually small head, and often brain damage - are feared to be linked to the virus.

Some experts have attributed the outbreak to heavy rains in parts of Latin and Central America - another result of El Nino.

But Dr Paz and his colleagues say their findings suggest the opposite El Nino effect is to blame.

He said the relevant factor was not the heavy rain, which actually fell in areas removed from the outbreak, but rather the intense spell of hot weather in northeast Brazil.

According to the findings, based on data from the US agency the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the latter half of 2015 - the winter and spring season in

the southern hemisphere - saw the highest temperatures since records began, combined with severe drought.

Dr Paz noted the Zika outbreak erupted in these areas in the weeks that followed.

He said it is known that high temperatures - up to a limit - encourage an upsurge in the growth rates of the Aedes mosquito, which carries the Zika virus.

Meanwhile, the US has advised men to abstain from sex or use condoms after visiting affected countries, if their partner is pregnant.

The US Centers for Disease Control believes a recent case of Zika was spread through sex. Meanwhile, the governor of Puerto Rico has declared a public health emergency over Zika. The US territory has 22 confirmed cases.

JCD gets full committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night approved a 736-member full committee of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatradal, the pro-BNP student wing, party sources said.

Besides, the JCD central committee approved committees for different educational institutions, including Dhaka University, Jagannath University, Jahangirnagar University and private university units, says a press release signed by its Office Secretary Abdus Sattar Patuarty.

Al Mehedi Hasan Talukder and Bashar Siddik have been made president and general secretary of its DT unit.

On October 14, Khaleda approved a 151-member "partial committee" of the JCD, announcing Rajib Ahsan as president and Akramul Hasan as general secretary.

Following that announcement, the student body had to face resistance from within, with dissidents rejecting the committee.

In the full committee announced last night, however, many dissidents got posts.

According to the JCD constitution, the central committee should comprise 151 members. But the new committee is five times bigger.

The JCD announced Dhaka University Committee after three years and hall committee after ten years.

Asked about the 736-member committee, Sattar said the BNP chief and the JCD president and secretary made the decision to enhance the organisation.

Pedestrian killed in fire fight over dues

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A private car driver was shot dead and another man suffered bullet injuries when they were caught up in a gunfight between two groups of people at Digarkanda in Mymensingh Sadar upazila last night.

The dead is Shimul, 28, son of Nurul Islam Sarker of Kewatkhal area in Mymensingh town. The injured is Sohan, 30, also from the same area.

Police said the victims were pedestrians and that they were not involved in the incident.

Quoting locals, Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said, there was a feud between one Bhutto and his cousin Rony over payment of dues.

When Rony along with some of his friends went to Bhutto's house at Digarkanda and asked for the money, Bhutto and his brother Kabir locked in an altercation with him, and a scuffle broke out between the two groups around 11:30pm.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Mustafiz

FROM PAGE 1

left-arm pacer was bought by Sunrisers Hyderabad for 1.40 crore rupees (approximately Tk 1.64 crore), almost thrice his base price of 50 lakh rupees. There was a bit of a battle between Hyderabad and Royal Challengers Bengaluru during the auctions with both teams interested in the player.

However, once Hyderabad bid 1.40 crore rupees, the Royal Challengers backed out of the race.

Since his international debut, Mustafizur has been riding a wave of success both on and off the field. Apart from being the most successful bowler for Bangladesh since his emergence, he is also one of the most valuable brands in the marketplace.

The other Bangladeshi cricketers drafted in the list did not have similar luck. Despite putting in stellar performances in 2015, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar and Taskin Ahmed went unsold yesterday.

The reason could well be the fact that the national players are still finding their feet in T20 cricket, the newest format of the sport, evidenced by their struggles in the recently concluded Zimbabwe series.

The other players who received IPL contracts in previous editions were Abdur Razzak, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mohammad Ashraful, Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim. Of them Shakib is the only player who has managed to continue his stint in the lucrative T20 competition.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday Mustafizur said that he was ecstatic and looks forward to make the most of this opportunity. "Shakib bhai is doing very well in the IPL. Many other players have also played there before. So now it feels really good that I am getting a chance to play there. I hope I can learn and improve my skills by playing in the competition," he said.

Earlier, Mustafizur was also drafted by the Pakistan Super League team Lahore Qalandars for USD 50,000 in the ongoing Pakistan Super League. But he is not playing in the competition due to a shoulder injury at the time he was drafted.

1.25 lakh terror accounts closed

FROM PAGE 1

pinpointing genuinely terrorist content online.

Describing itself as an "open platform for expression", the website further discussed the difficulty of striking a balance between the prohibition of certain behaviours online and their desire to be a forum for free speech and debate.

In January, the wife of an American

citizen who was killed in an IS bombing in Jordan filed a court case against Twitter, blaming them for her husband's death.

"Without Twitter, the explosive growth of Isis over the last few years into the most-feared terrorist group in the world would not have been possible," ran the complaint.

As such, the decision to announce the suspension of these accounts is

being understood in some quarters as a well-timed PR move.

The company has previously been criticised for taking a laissez-faire approach towards improper use of the platform it provides.

According to its own internal "transparency report", the website did not honour any of the removal requests it received from the US government between January and June

last year.

In a memo leaked in February 2015, Twitter CEO Dick Costolo wrote to staff: "We suck at dealing with abuse and trolls. It's no secret and the world talks about it every day."

In February of this year, a parody account set up to criticise Twitter's failure to suspend abusive tweets and accounts was itself suspended, while the company has also mistakenly