

Fire at JU burns 10 acres of greenery

JU CORRESPONDENT

A fire incident on Jahangirnagar University (JU) campus severely burnt trees and plants on about 10 acres of reserve forest area yesterday.

At noon, the fire originated at the reserve forest area, adjacent to the university's chemistry department building, said Jefrul Hassan Chowdhury, security officer of the university.

"We reported the incident to the fire-service station as fire spread out around 1:30pm. Later, two units of Savar fire service brought the situation under control," he said.

It took an hour to douse the blaze.

"The reason behind the fire is still unknown; miscreants lighting cigarettes at the area might have started it," station officer Mahfuzur Rahman told reporters.

Although the university's estate office is responsible for maintaining the area, none of its officials were seen at the spot during the incident.

Abu Sayeed, general secretary of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front's JU unit, alleged that university gardeners set fire to bushes to keep places beside the roads and buildings clean, as trimming overgrown bushes is time-consuming.

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Disinfection booths in front of the ticket counters at Barishal River Port are being used for storage about a year into their installation. With proper maintenance, these booths would be useful again this year, but a lack of foresight and care has rendered them useless.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

ATTACK ON MINORITIES

'Facebook posts insulting religion' a familiar tactic

Says delegation after visiting Shalla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attack on minorities on the pretext of Facebook post insulting religion has become a familiar tactic, claimed a citizen delegation that visited Noagaon village in Shalla of Sunamganj on March 26 and 27.

The attacks in Pabna's Santhia in 2013, Cox's Bazar's Ramu in 2012, Brahmanbaria's Nasirganj in 2012 had the same pattern; even though police have arrested the persons behind the Facebook posts, most of the investigation is still incomplete, and the real culprits have never come under justice, the delegates said at a virtual press conference organised for sharing the fact-finding of the visit.

On March 16, Jhumon Das, a young man from Noagaon of Shalla posted a Facebook update criticising Hefajat-e-Islam joint general secretary Mamunul Haque, which caused a stir among Hefajat supporters near Noagaon.

That very night, thousands of people gathered following announcements from local mosques. When Hindu residents of the area fled, the attackers destroyed 80 houses and eight temples.

Expressing grave concern over the administrations' negligence in taking adequate security measures, they claimed that the local administration could have prevented the attack, as they were informed about the announcements.

The delegates went to the house of 40-year-old Shudha Rani Das and found numerous signs of machete attacks in her tin walls. She told the team that when they saw them coming armed with machetes and local

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An elderly patient receives treatment at Chattogram City Corporation's newly inaugurated isolation centre at the city's Laldighir Par area. PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

Field hospitals, isolation centres reopening in Ctg

Surging number of Covid-19 patients putting pressure on healthcare facilities

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

With the worsening situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, field hospitals and isolation centres in the port city are opening again, to handle the increasing numbers of patients.

Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) opened a 50-bed isolation centre at Laldighir Par in port city on Tuesday, after the second wave of Covid-19 hit the country.

Besides, Bidyanando Foundation in assistance with Premier University Chattogram and Chattogram Metropolitan Police is going to open a 70-bed field hospital soon.

Earlier in June last year, when Covid-19 cases reached the then-highest peak in the country, CCC had introduced a 250-bed isolation centre to accommodate increasing number of patients. Once the number of patients began dwindling in August, the centre was closed.

Bidyanando introduced a 100-bed field hospital in last year at Patenga for Covid-19 patients.

These were only two among many initiatives taken by different humanitarian organisations and individuals in the port city and upazilas of the district last year. But almost all such initiatives were wrapped up once the number of infections dropped.

Now, as the country records over 7,000

infections daily, very few such initiatives are being noticed.

Sources said at least 20 field hospitals and isolation centres were introduced in 2020 in the city and 15 upazilas. These had the capacity of accommodating around 3,000 patients in total.

One such initiative was taken by Dr Bidduth Barua. He introduced the 60-bed Chattogram Field Hospital in the outskirts of the city with support from Navana Group and funds collected from people at Salimpur in Sitakunda upazila.

Asked whether he would reopen the hospital amid this second wave, Bidduth said he wanted to do so.

"We introduced the hospital in partnership with Navana Group. They provided us with land and infrastructure to open it," he said, "I will talk to them. If they cooperate with us this time, we will re-open the hospital."

Besides, this requires permission from the government authorities, he said.

Another isolation centre was introduced by the incumbent CCC mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury at East Bakalia last year. Rezaul was a mayoral candidate at the time.

Now that he is the mayor and CCC has already introduced an isolation centre, it is not clear whether he will reopen the isolation centre.

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80pc marine fishers don't have enough safety equipment

Reveals MJF study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a virtual discussion yesterday underscored the need for providing technological, financial and educational support to those working in artisanal marine fisheries to ensure their human rights and enrich their livelihoods.

Pointing out the contribution of coastal areas' fisher folks who risk their lives to provide highly nutritious seafood to the market, the speakers called for recognition of people employed in the small-scale coastal fisheries sector as labour force by amending the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006.

They made the remarks at a virtual discussion titled "Sector-wide impact assessment (SWIA) of artisanal marine fisheries sector of Bangladesh" organised by Mansher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and The Daily Star.

The SWIA was carried out between September 2018 and March 2021 under a project of the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) and MJF.

The assessment -- consisting of a survey, focus group discussions, interviews and analyses -- was carried out among 1,400 men and 600 women in Cox's Bazar and Barguna.

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DU CAMPUS

Small vendors, floating people fear the worst

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Ramiz Uddin had become jobless during last year's shutdown. To carry on with his life, he had taken Tk 2 lakh loan from a bank and invested the money in coconut business.

He now sells coconuts at an entrance of Suhrawardy Uddyan and keeps an amount of his profit aside to pay the loan back in instalments.

However, after the weeklong lockdown started, he was found sitting idle with his coconuts. "I didn't stop selling coconuts, but there's no buyer," said Ramiz out of frustration.

The lockdown is exasperating the already dire situation of many small vendors of Dhaka University (DU) campus like Ramiz, who took loans last year to survive the Covid-19 outbreak.

They fear that this time, the lockdown would drag them to the streets.

Although DU's academic activities have not resumed yet, students and visitors used to go to DU campus every day, which

boosted sales for vendors.

On Sunday, the government imposed a seven-day restriction on public movement to curb the infection of Covid-19. Following that, DU authority restricted entrance of outsiders. As a result, the whole campus became vacant.

This correspondent talked with about 15 vendors, who described their miseries.

Kobita Begum used to sell colourful glass bangles at DU. Though meagre, her income was enough to ensure meals for her children. But after the restrictions were set, Kobita lost her only means of livelihood. "My family depends on my income. I don't know how I'll run the expenses," said Kobita, a widow, adding that after bearing daily expenses, no money is left to save.

Vendors like Kobita, who earn their living by selling ornaments, tea, cigarettes, seasonal fruits and snacks at TSC area of DU, are bearing the brunt of the restrictions.

Not only vendors but floating people of the campus are also passing hard times.

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LOAN DEFAULTERS FROM ILFSL

HC summons PK Halder, 128 others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has summoned 129 loan defaulters from International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL), including much-talked about Proshanta Kumar Halder known as PK Halder, directing them to appear before it to place their plans about returning around Tk 1,800 crore.

The defaulters have been directed to appear in person at 10:30am on May 24 and 25 to explain when they shall pay off the money that they have taken from ILFSL as loan.

The court, however, said in the order that they would be permitted to come up with their pay-plan in installment so that they can gradually repay their dues within a reasonable time.

The HC bench of Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar came up with the order on March 16 after holding hearing on a petition filed by the ILFSL along with the lists of persons and entities, who took the loan from ILFSL, seeking necessary order.

The full text of the HC order was released recently after the judge completed writing and signed it.

During hearing the petition on March 16, ILFSL's lawyer Md Mahfuzur Rahman Milon told the HC bench that the persons and entities, who took loans from his client, should be brought before this court by issuance of summons for the purpose of assessing the damage caused to the ILFSL, and

if needed, arresting them -- to recover the damage.

The lawyer also said the loan defaulting persons and entities should be prosecuted for committing criminal offence of cheating and misappropriating the public money or funds, their bank accounts should be frozen and they should be barred from transferring their all sorts of movable and immovable properties for an effective disposal of the matter.

Mahfuzur Rahman Milon prayed to the HC bench to pass an order for confiscating their passports till disposal of the instant matter, according to the written order of the HC.

After the hearing, the HC also directed the loan defaulters to show causes why the Anti-Corruption Commission should not be ordered to initiate proceedings against them for misappropriating the public money/funds.

Mahfuzur Rahman Milon told The Daily Star that ILFSL has an outstanding loans of about Tk 1,800 crore from these 129 borrowers.

Earlier, the same HC bench summoned 286 loan defaulters from People's Leasing and Financial Services Limited (PLFS), another non-banking financial institution, which is under the process of winding up. Complying with the court order, 164 borrowers appeared in the court on February 23,

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ROOPPUR NUKE POWER PLANT

260 foreign workers sent to quarantine

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A total of 260 foreign workers of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant who returned from their home countries -- mostly from Russia -- were sent to institutional quarantine yesterday.

They have been quarantined at three separate places of the project site, said Dr Fakhru Islam, a physician of the power plant's residential area "Green City".

A 14-day quarantine is compulsory for those who arrive from Europe, he said.

Their samples will be collected for Covid-19 test after 13 days, the doctor said, adding that they will be allowed to join work if the test reports come negative.

Sources said 2,800 foreigners in total are working for the project.

Ishwardi Upazila Health Officer AM Asma Khan told The Daily Star that the workers who came from Russia are receiving the Russian Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik-7 under special arrangement.

So far, 1,000 Russian workers have been vaccinated, she said.

Three-way collision injures 10 people in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 10 people were injured in a three-way collision involving a truck, a trolley, and an autorickshaw at Patuakhali's Amkhola Bazar area yesterday noon.

The accident took place on the Patuakhali-Galachipa Upazila connecting road and left six people critically injured. They have been admitted to Patuakhali General Hospital, while the rest have been treated locally.

According to police officials and locals, a truck coming to Galachipa from Patuakhali to fetch watermelons collided head-on with a trolley coming from the opposite direction while crossing the Amkhola bazar area.

The two vehicles then went on to hit an auto-rickshaw that was standing beside the road.

This injured include auto-rickshaw driver Siddique Hawlader, passengers Enayet Imrul, Jalal Matubbar, Saleha Begum, and trolley driver Rubel. Locals rushed in to rescue the critically injured and took them to Patuakhali General Hospital, confirmed Galachipa Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shawkat Anwar Islam.

Police has seized the truck, although the driver managed to escape the scene, the official added.



People wait for TCB trucks to buy groceries at subsidised prices on Rampura's DIT Road in the capital. As the lockdown sets in across the country, cash-strapped families are starting to feel its heat. Some say it's even worse this time around, as they have no savings due to last year's shutdown. This photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAO

Dhupkhola kitchen market shifted to local playground

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To ensure social distancing, Gandaria police have again shifted the capital's Dhupkhola kitchen market -- which usually sat by a road -- to Dhupkhola playground again.

The process to relocate the kitchen market started on Tuesday and it began functioning at the new place from yesterday, said locals.

"We have taken the move to ensure social distancing as instructed by Shah Iftekhar Ahmed, DC [Wari] of Dhaka Metropolitan Police," said Gandaria Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Shaju Miah.

Shaju said the market will go back to its previous place once the crisis is over. "We had relocated it last year to ensure social distancing," he said.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus-induced shutdown, the kitchen market posed challenges in maintaining social distancing, as it was running on a narrow, busy road adjoining the playground. The road is only 13 feet wide, which narrowed down even further due to makeshift shops, making commute and shopping both difficult.

Last year, the kitchen market was moved in April, but it returned to its previous place few days before Eid-ul-Azha as the field was used as a cattle market.

Appreciating the move, Mohammad Ripon, a resident of Sarafatganj Lane, said people are unaware and most of them do not want to maintain physical distancing.

However, Md Nizam, a trader of the market, said his sale has dropped to 50 percent due to the shifting. "I hope the situation would improve quickly," he said.