

MORE NEWS

Govt to set up fire academy in Munshiganj; home minister

UNB, Dhaka

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Fire Academy will be established in Gazaria of Munshiganj to ensure modern training facilities for the firemen.

"The acquisition work of 100.92 acres of land in Gazaria is at final stage," he said at a programme on the occasion of Fire Service and Civil Defense Week held at Mirpur Fire Service Training complex.

Around 1,000 members of fire services will get training at the academy at a time. There are some 456 fire service stations in country and some 109 more will be built within the next fiscal year, he said.

Stricter anti-tobacco law stressed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A powerful Tobacco Control Act and proper implementation can save people from a possible epidemic of tobacco-related diseases in Bangladesh, said speakers at a workshop yesterday.

It was organised by PROGGA and Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance, with assistance from Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids at BMA building in Dhaka.

Md Mostafizur Rahman, lead policy advisor of CTFK Bangladesh; Hasan Shahrier, chief of tobacco control project at PROGGA; Meer Mashrur Jamal Rony, senior news editor of Channel i; Mizan Chowdhury, co-convenor of ATMA and MA Salam, grants manager of CTFK Bangladesh team, also spoke at the workshop.

Five robbery gang members arrested: DB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives claimed to have arrested five members of an airport-based robbery gang in Dhaka, Madaripur and Faridpur. Taiyab Ali, his wife Rima Akhter Happy, Milon Sardar, Monir Hossain and Bipul Debnath were held on Wednesday, said AKM Hafiz Akhtar, additional commissioner (DB) of DMP, during a press briefing at DMP yesterday.

The arrestees used to invite migrant workers outside the airport for a ride in their cars. Once they got in, the gang snatched gold, cash and valuables posing as law enforcers.

A tale of hopeless hills

No let-up in hillock cutting in Sylhet; environmentalists concerned as development projects worsening situation



Since the last two decades, Sylhet's hillocks have been at the mercy of those who want to sacrifice the environment for money, according to green activists. Despite laws being in place, even government projects were seen violating the rules. These photos were taken recently from the city's Mohammadpur, Fatema and Tilagar areas.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

As the days go by, the hillocks that stand tall in Sylhet district are being replaced by towering concrete structures. Due to rampant, illegal hillock cutting in absence of adequate enforcement of the law, Sylhet's surroundings are in grave danger. Green activists have flagged this activity as the most notable environmental threat facing the district for the last two decades.

They claimed individuals backed by local influential people are razing and cutting hillocks, while government projects are adding fuel to the fire.

According to Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), based on 1956 land survey, there were 1,025 hillocks in the district, including 199 in the city

and surrounding areas.

"Almost half the hillocks have been long lost, and their numbers are declining fast. Despite this situation, no government office knows the current number of hillocks," said Advocate Shah Shaheda Akther, divisional coordinator of the organisation.

Recently, hillocks have been razed in all upazilas of the district, but the most alarming situation is in the city's surrounding areas.

In August last year, Sylhet City Corporation's 26.50-square kilometre area was expanded to 58 sq km, incorporating many parts of Sadar and Dakshin Surma upazilas.

Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) in Sylhet, said, "As the demand for land started increasing in the newly extended

city areas, hillock cutting is rampant there."

In a recent visit to Baluchar, Molaitila, Brahmanashon, Haowldarpara and Khadimpara of Sylhet city and surrounding areas, this correspondent witnessed that hillocks were being razed in the dead of the night.

The Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995 (amended in 2010) strictly prohibits cutting or razing of any type of hills or hillocks by any individual or institution. Exceptions may be made, but only after a clearance certificate is issued by the Department of Environment (DoE).

In November 2011, Bela filed a writ petition with the High Court to stop hillock cutting, and the court in 2012 banned cutting any type of hillock in Sylhet.

However, this activity continues.

Besides individuals, a government office recently joined in on illegally cutting hillocks in the name of a development project.

Last month, three hillocks were razed by the Department of Livestock Services at Tilagarh area for constructing Institute of Livestock Science and Technology.

After widespread criticism, DoE fined the contractor Tk 7 lakh on October 21.

Md Jahangir Alam, project director of the institute, said, "The land is owned by the department, and the plan was to construct the establishment on plain land, excluding the hillocks."

"But only a small portion of a hillock was razed, and DoE has done its inspection. The matter is settled now," he said.

Advocate Akther of Bela said, SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

COURT CORNER

SC forms committee against sexual harassment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court administration has formed a five-member committee to receive complaints of sexual harassment on court premises, conduct inquiry into them and make necessary recommendations to this effect.

Justice Krishna Debnath, a judge of the High Court Division, has been made chairperson of the committee.

The other members are: Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque, also an HC judge; Md Badrul Alam Bhuiyan, registrar of the Appellate Division, Advocate Fawzia Karim Firoze and Advocate Tamanna Ferdous.

The committee has been formed following an HC verdict delivered in 2009.

DU student rape case: Nur, 4 others relieved of charges

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka tribunal on Wednesday relieved former Ducus VP Nurul Haque Nur and four others from charges of a case filed over rape of a Dhaka University student.

The four are Nazmul Hasan Sohag and Saiful Islam, joint conveners of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad; Nazmul Huda, former VP of its DU unit and Abdullah Hil Baki, a DU student.

On September 20 last year, a DU student filed the case with Lalbagh Police Station, accusing six persons, including Chhatra Odhikar Parishad's former convener Hasan Al Mamun, of rape, abetting rape and shaming her on social media. In the case, Mamun is now behind bars.

Graft case against Falu sent to special judge's court

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Chief Metropolitan (CMM) Magistrate Court yesterday transferred the graft case filed against former BNP lawmaker Mosaddek Ali Falu and two others over siphoning off Tk 183.92 crore to Dubai.

The others are SAK Ikramuzzaman, managing director of RAK Ceramics and Rakhen Development Company Ltd, and Syed AK Anwaruzzaman, director of Star Ceramics Private Ltd.

CMM Rezaul Karim Chowdhury sent the case to the Senior Special Judge's Court of Dhaka for its trial.

Coordination the key

Govt institutions must work together to strengthen zila parishads, say speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Zila parishad chairpersons yesterday demanded that the government resolve the lack of coordination among government officials and local representatives for smooth functioning of local government institutions.

"Due to lack of coordination, redundant development projects are often taken," said Abdus Salam, chairperson of Chattogram's zila parishad.

His colleague Akhtaruzzaman, chairperson of Gazipur, said although a zila parishad chairperson is the guardian of a district, they cannot carry out their work independently.

They made the remarks at a national workshop on "Strengthening Zila Parishad in Achieving SDGs" organised jointly by Local Government Division and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at a city hotel.



LGRD Minister Tazul Islam speaking at a national workshop on "Strengthening Zila Parishad in Achieving SDGs" at a city hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

The chairpersons often have to rely on deputy commissioners and superintendents of police to operate eviction drives, said Akhtaruzzaman. "Our operations come to a halt when they [DCs and police] refuse to provide workforce or magistrates."

In his keynote speech, Professor of Public Administration at Dhaka University, Mobasser Monem said zila parishads have been facing several challenges, which affect their efficiency and effectiveness.

Pointing out that one district varies from another in terms of size of population and areas, Monem said policymakers need to take these matters into consideration.

According to the corresponding act, zila parishads do not have direct regular links with upazila and union

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Holding placards with slogan "The world is in dire straits", student volunteers of three youth based environmental organisations took part in a procession in front of Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday. They also carried a giant globe in a coffin in order to convey a call to action for all, towards taking more proactive steps against global-warming.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



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