

Modern solutions for lightning strikes

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

With the plan of planting palm trees to arrest lightning failing, the disaster management ministry is now taking up a project to set up shelter houses and arresters to curb deaths due to lightning strikes.

Till May this year, 22 people died from lightning strikes. The death toll stood at 336 in 2021, according to National Disaster Response Coordination Centre (NDRRC).

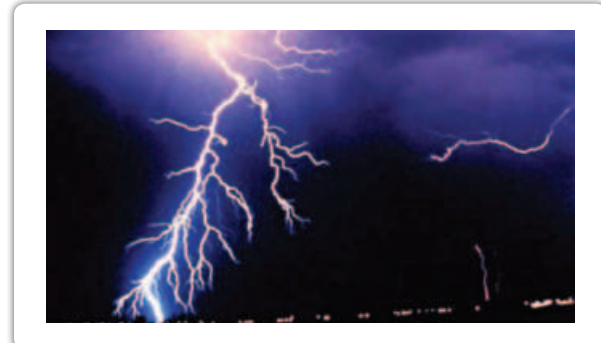
A total of 2,328 people were killed in a decade till 2020, of which 359 people, the highest, were killed in 2018.

Under the new project, shelter houses and internet of things (IoT)-based lightning arresters will be initially set up in lightning-prone areas of 15 districts.

The project, estimated to cost Tk 950 crore, is now pending before the Planning Commission, said an official of the disaster ministry.

In 2017, the disaster management ministry took up a project of planting palm trees across the country to reduce the number of deaths from lightning strikes.

However, it could plant only 38 lakh of them.



During a meet-the press yesterday at the secretariat, organised by Bangladesh Secretariat Reporters' Forum, State Minister for Disaster Management Enamur Rahman said they have stopped planting palm trees.

"It takes a long time for a palm tree to grow. Hence, we have taken a modern approach to prevent deaths from lightning," he said.

Contacted, Anjon Chandra Paul, project director of the disaster management department, said he could not confirm the status of planted trees immediately.

In 2016, Bangladesh declared lightning strikes a natural disaster when more than 200 people died in May alone, including 82 people on a single day.

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Schools to be more children-friendly

Beautification of primary schools underway to improve education quality



The proposed design of the six-storied Mohammadpur Govt Primary School.

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

All 342 government primary schools in Dhaka are set to go through beautification to make the campuses more children-friendly and improve the physical ambience for quality learning for over 2 lakh students.

The government has taken a Tk 1,159 crore project to build new campus buildings and classrooms and renovate the existing ones with modern amenities, and indoor and outdoor game facilities.

Under the project, new buildings will be built at 155 schools that would house 2,975 new classrooms while 1,167 classrooms will be expanded at another 177 schools.

The government will also set up 14 government primary schools in Dhaka. Among them, 11 will be in Purbachal and three in Uttara. Each of them will have playground facilities and the capacity to have about 350 students.

"Every school will turn into a full-fledged educational institution, where students will have the opportunity to learn in a children-friendly environment," said Primary and Mass Education State Minister Zakir Hossen while laying the foundation stone of Mohammadpur Government Primary School.

Alamgir Mohammed Monsurul Alam, director general of Directorate of Primary Education, said that under the project schools will be developed with eye-catching designs to attract students from all walks of life. He also mentioned that another target of the project is to turn all 342 government primary schools into single shift campuses, to increase contact hours and interaction between teachers and students.

According to DPE, students of grades 1 and 2 of a single shift school have 844 contact hours in a year, while students of a double shift school have 602 contact hours.

Students of grades 3, 4 and 5 of a single shift school have 1473 contact hours, while students of a double shift school have 782 contact hours.

Officials said some of the targets of the project include ensuring 100 percent enrollment, children's mental development and reducing social disparity in terms of education.

They have also mentioned that gates and boundary walls of the schools will also be beautified to ensure students' safety. Sheds will also be built for guardians waiting to pick up their children after school.

The government-funded project is scheduled to be completed by December 2024 under Local Government Engineering Department.

Gwyn Lewis new UNRC in Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed Gwyn Lewis of Ireland the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) in Bangladesh, with the host government's approval.

She is replacing Mia Seppo, who served as UN Resident Coordinator until December last year.

With more than 20 years of experience in international development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian affairs, Lewis previously served as Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Affairs in the West Bank, and Deputy Director of Programmes for UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon, according to a UN statement.

Gwyn Lewis also managed the Global Clusters Coordination section in the Emergency Division of Unicef in Geneva and worked for the Food and Agriculture Organization.



PROTECTING FORESTS USAID launches \$20m project

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

USAID has launched a \$20 million project to protect critical forests and wetland areas of the Sundarbans and Sylhet from degradation.

Planning Minister MA Mannan and USAID Deputy Administrator for Policy and Programming Isobel Coleman jointly launched the five-year project titled "Protibesh" during an event at a Dhaka hotel on Tuesday, according to a US embassy statement.

The project will help communities build long term climate resilience by adopting climate-smart agriculture approaches and learning business skills to diversify and increase their incomes, moving away from reliance on forest resources.

MISCONDUCT DURING ARREST

6 Jamalpur cops closed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Six police officers were closed to Jamalpur Police Lines yesterday for alleged misconduct while arresting four accused from a hospital in Sarishabari of Jamalpur the day before.

The closed officers of Sarishabari Police Station are sub-inspectors Saiful Islam, Montaz Uddin, Altaf Hossain and Wazed Ali; and constables Mozammel Haque and Sathi Akter, said Officer-in-Charge Mir Rakibul Haque.

The action came after a video that

showed one Abdul Jalil being dragged out of a hospital by police went viral on the social media on Tuesday, he added.

Departmental probe into the issue has started, he further said.

Locals said there has been a long-standing dispute over 20 decimals of land between Abdul Jalil (64), who seeks alms to make a living, and his neighbour Mujibur Rahman from Bausi Bazar in Sarishabari municipality.

Recently, Mujibur, an influential person, claimed ownership of the land

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Preparation is key: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ensuring everyone has proper knowledge of different types of disasters and how to prepare for them can effectively lessen the losses, said speakers at an event yesterday.

The event, titled "New Determinants of Household Disaster Preparedness Behavior and Policy Efficacy", was organised by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at its Dhaka office.

Dr Azreen Karim, BIDS research fellow, during her keynote presentation, said although disaster-related issues have been adopted in the curriculum, formal education contributes to only 1.46 percent of the entire disaster management scheme.

She emphasised scrutinising the short, medium and long term policies on disaster preparedness at household levels in light of the Climate Action Plan.

Dr Binayak Sen, BIDS director general, who presided over the session, said while knowledge is important in anticipating and mitigating disaster, social interaction is also crucial to prepare better for disasters.

Representatives from government and non-government organisations were also present at the event, sharing their insights on the issue.

Must reject syndication Recruiting agencies urge gov't on labour migration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shommitto Somonny Front, Baira -- a platform of recruiting agencies -- yesterday demanded that the government reject any "syndication" while sending migrant workers to Malaysia and settle the market open for all licensed agencies.

They raised the concern following media reports on a "syndicate" of 25 recruiting agencies that will be allowed to send workers to Malaysia. They said this will create scopes for money-laundering and deprive workers of their rights.

They raised the demand at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club.

On Tuesday, "Baira Anti-Syndicate Grand Alliance" -- another platform of Baira members -- held a press conference at Jatiya Press Club with similar demands.

Addressing yesterday's event, Mohammad Faruk, president of the front, said legal actions should be taken against syndication. He said Malaysia should hire workers through licensed recruiting agencies as they do from other source countries.

Mostafa Mahmud, secretary general of the front, also spoke at the event.

After more than three years of embargo imposed by Malaysia on Bangladesh's workers, both countries signed a memorandum of understanding on labour cooperation in December last year.

However, both countries are yet to agree on the labour-migration process.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Local Government Engineering Department Office of the Executive Engineer Pirojpur www.lged.gov.bd Memo No. 46.02.7900.000.07.001.2022.939 Date: 11.05.2022 Corrigendum Notice e-Tender Notice No. 43/2021-2022

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Local Government Engineering Department Office of the Executive Engineer District: Narsingdi www.lged.gov.bd Memo No. 46.02.6800.000.07.001.21-1321 Date: 09-05-2022 e-Tender Notice-34/2021-2022

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