

Four of a family hurt in N'ganj fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Narayanganj

Four of a family were burnt in a fire caused by a leaking gas cylinder at their kitchen at Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila yesterday.

They are now undergoing treatment at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Dhaka.

The victims are Jahid Hasan, 40; his wife Ruma Begum, 27; their daughter Laboni Akhter, 11; and son Md Yasin, 8.

Police said Jahid works in a factory in Rugganj and lives in a rented flat in Dahargaon area.

Their daughter Laboni is a fifth grader and son Yasin a second grader.

Talking to The Daily Star over phone, Ruma said she woke up early in the morning and went to the kitchen to lit a stove.

The fire originated after she lit up a matchstick.

Instantly, she was caught on fire. Her husband and children also sustained burn injuries as they tried to rescue her.

They were eventually rescued by the neighbours who took them to the burn institute, said police.

The burn institute's doctor Ayub Hossain said Jahid, Ruma, Laboni and Yasin were admitted to the hospital with 29, 23, 22 and 10 percent burns on their bodies respectively.

Hefajat seeks release of leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefajat-e-Islam yesterday came up with fresh seven-point demand including immediate release of its arrested leaders and activists.

The Qawmi madrasa-based Islamist organisation raised the demand during its "National Olama-Mashaek conference" at the capital's Kazi Bashir auditorium.

The six other demands are withdrawal of all false cases filed against Hefajat men since 2013, passage of blasphemy law in parliament, declaration of Qadiani community as non-Muslim, making examination of religious education compulsory in the education curriculum, keeping a representative of Hayatul Uliya in the National Education Commission and not allowing Maulana Saad of Delhi-based Tablighi Jamaat to attend Bishwa Ijtima in Dhaka.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



A woman dries and sorts dried fish under the open sky in Bakalia area of Chattogram near the banks of Karnaphuli. The peak season -- between late Ashwin (October) and early Falgun (March) -- for dried fish has kept producers in Chattogram busy at work, with collection, sorting, drying, piling, warming, packing and storing going on in full swing. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

'Will help ever come our way?'

150 families living under open sky for two months since Sitrang's devastation



FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Suvash Chanda Jaldash, now 75 years old, had land, home, and much more in Noakhali's South Hatia island in the early 90s. With his wife and five children, he had a happy life in the then "Aladi village" in Hatia's Nalchira union.

But the nightmare started when the Meghna river swallowed his whole village, along with his properties and belongings, around 25 years ago, leaving him homeless.

"I have shifted my family eight times, looking for a safe place, after losing everything to the river... I came to Chattogram's Patenga area 25 years ago and started living by an embankment," he said.

"But cyclone Sitrang once again took everything away," Suvash said, sitting in a small, makeshift shelter on Outer Ring Road in Bandartila area, near the embankment. He has built the shelter, under which seven members of the family stay, with polythene, bamboo and foam.

Like Suvash, nearly 150 families, whose members mostly

consist of fishers, lost their homes to Sitrang at the embankment location of Akmal Ali Ghat in EPZ area in late October this year. Landless people from Noakhali's Hatia, Sandwip island, and other coastal parts of Chattogram region had been living by the embankment for 25 years.

When they arrived in the city long ago, those who had the means managed living spaces in different shanties, but the rest found refuge in the embankment area.

Since Sitrang turned their lives upside down, families of the embankment area have been living under the open sky.

They claimed that aside from initial days after the cyclone hit, they have not gotten any government aid.

"After the cyclone, we just received some dry food, nothing else. Now, no one cares about us," said Suvash's wife Sumitra Jaldash, sitting in her 7-foot by 12-foot shelter.

"In 2008, a survey was conducted in our slum. Authorities gave us some cards and assured

us that we will be rehabilitated to another place. But those cards have washed away along with all our belongings during the latest cyclone," told Laxmi Rani Das, who was displaced from Sandwip island following erosion.

This correspondent visited Akmal Ali Ghat's "Jele Para" and talked with over 15 families. They complained that they did not receive any aid from government agencies.

The residents do not have toilets to use. People are using polluted water to meet their daily needs. Laxmi told this newspaper, "We've become used to urinating and defecating in the open. There is no source of drinking water... This is not how a person should live."

A recent study conducted by the Department of Environment shows that average sea-level rise in the coastal zone of Bangladesh has been 3.8 to 5.8 millimetres per year over the last 30 years.

"The ocean is changing every day. Tides have been getting higher, submerging lower coastal parts in the last several years. We have no place to move from the

embankment area, and so are forced to live here," said Champa Rani Jaldash, another victim of Sitrang.

District relief and rehabilitation officer Shojib Kumar Chakraborty said, "We had asked the local councillor and city corporation to submit the list of affected people in the area, but we have not received it. And so, we failed to distribute relief in that location."

"We had provided them with dry and cooked food for a week. After receiving the list, we will assist them," he added.

Rejecting the claim of the relief officer, local councillor Zual Haque Suman said, "I personally submitted the list to the district administration. I will talk about this again."

"Landless and homeless people, mostly victims of climate change, are thronging to different places from coastal areas and other parts of the country," he said. "It is tough to work alone and aid them. Every organ should work jointly in this regard. The people of the area need to relocate to another place."

2 die as bus falls into ditch in Dhamrai

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Two persons were killed and 30 injured as a bus fell into a roadside ditch in Dhaka's Dhamrai upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased could not be identified immediately, said Sub-inspector of Dhamrai Police Station Md Ashraful Islam.

He said the accident took place around 5:30am on Dhamrai's Kaulipara-Kalampur road when the bus carrying workers of Pratik Ceramics fell into a roadside ditch.

Later, locals rescued the injured workers and sent them to different hospitals nearby, said the SI.

The fire service reached the spot and rescued three people who were trapped in the bus, said the SI, adding that of the three, two died on the spot and one was seriously injured.

Ashraful said at least 30 workers were injured in the accident.

Akram Hossain Sarker, senior manager (administration) of Pratik Ceramics, told The Daily Star that the bus was coming to the factory from Sauria area of Manikganj with 40 workers.



The misdeeds of a Swechhasebok League leader

Occupies govt land, drives fish traders out of business

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A local leader of one of the associate organisations of ruling Awami League has allegedly grabbed two acres of government khas land along the bank of the Shibbaria river in Kalapara upazila.

Locals alleged that supporters of Sagir Khan, vice-president of Patuakhali District Swechhasebok League, occupied portion of khas land alongside the flood control embankment at Nijapur village under Mohipur union on Friday and hung a signboard there.

Prior to hanging the signboard, the AL leader's men forcibly evicted the workers and traders, engaged in dry fish processing, in a bid to grab the land.



Meanwhile, several leaders of different associate organisations of the ruling party alleged that Sagir has been carrying unlawful activities in Mohipur since he was made vice-president of district Swechhasebok League.

Villagers said hundreds of local fishermen and dried fish traders have been earning a living by producing dried fish in the land along the riverbank for decades.

On December 2, a group of 20 to 25 men led

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Four held with 1 lakh yaba pills in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-7) in a drive yesterday arrested four alleged drug peddlers from port city's Shah Amanat Bridge area along with one lakh yaba pills.

The arrestees are Md Elias, 45, Md Imran Hossen Rasel, 24, Md Mir Erfanul Haque Maruf, 23, and Md Gias Uddin, 28, said Rab.

Nurul Absar, assistant director of Rab-7's Media and Press Wing, said being tipped off, a team of Rab intercepted a CNG-run auto-rickshaw on Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Highway, which was coming towards the city from Banskhalia upazila.

"Searching the bag of Elias, Rab personnel found 1 lakh yaba pills and arrested them. During primary interrogation, they admitted that the yaba was smuggled in Cox's Bazar from Myanmar," he said.

The four were handed over to Bakalia Police Station. A case was filed against them.

Hill-cutting spree in Tangail

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Tangail's red clay hillocks are being razed indiscriminately, creating an imbalance in the ecosystem and destroying biodiversity in the region.

Local influential people, especially earth traders, have been destroying the hillocks bit by bit in broad daylight while the authorities concerned kept turning a blind eye, alleged locals.

Earth traders backed by a section of local politicians, have been cutting down hillocks and selling the earth to brick kilns. The earth cut from the hillocks is also being used for filling up low/wet land, said local sources.

The earth traders carry the earth by trucks, especially at night, damaging rural roads and creating nuisance for local residents, they added.

Earlier, the natural Shalforests covered the hillocks at Ghatail, Sakhipur, Mirzapur and Madhupur upazila in Tangail. But now, a large portion of the wildlife and trees have disappeared due to illegal activities.

Goutam Chandra Chanda, divisional coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said hillocks are unique geological features of Bangladesh and an enormous number of small and medium-sized hillocks are common in the midlands of Tangail and Gazipur districts.

"The hillocks cutting goes on so indiscriminately that its contributing to potential risks of landslides. The authorities concerned haven't been active to save them either," he added.

On the other hand, the recent study by the Department of Environmental Science and Resource

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Red-clay hillocks are disappearing from Tangail as earth traders are cutting hills indiscriminately while the authorities concerned continue to pay a blind eye. This photo was taken in Ghatail area recently.

PHOTO: STAR