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PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

CYCLONE MIDHILI

30 vessels wash ashore in Patenga



DWAIPAYAN BARUA

At least 30 lighter vessels ran aground in different areas on Patenga seashore during Cyclone Midhili last Friday. However, no casualties were reported in the incident.

Most of the vessels washed ashore after being caught in the high tides and heavy winds, as their masters failed to estimate the cyclone's impact and did not shift those toward safer locations.

More than 400 empty vessels opted to stay near the Charpara coast, where those usually remain anchored before going to Chattogram Port's outer anchorage for loading and unloading cargo.

Workers later managed to steer around 20 of the affected vessels back in the waters during high tides by Sunday, while at least 10 partly damaged vessels were still stuck at the sandy beach till the filing of this report on Monday afternoon.

The MV Rasheda Akter was the most affected one and needed towing down after it got stuck at a high level of the stone embankment and could not be steered back into the water so far during high tide.

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Visiting the coast on Monday, the vessel's master Mokhlesur Rahman was seen supervising workers trying to drag its anchor toward the sea.

The sea wasn't too rough early on Friday, and most of the vessels' masters, including him, thought the cyclone's impact wouldn't be significant as the weather forecast stated the storm would cross through Mongla and Payra regions, said Mokhlesur.

However, the weather became rough after Friday noon, and our vessel was washed into the stony embankment around 2:30pm, he added.

Bangladesh Lighter Vessel Workers Union vice president Nabi Alam said after cautionary signal-6 was announced around 9:00am on Friday, Chittagong Port Authority started shifting ocean-bound vessels from jetties to deeper sea and lighter vessels to inner harbour towards the upstream of Karnaphuli river.

They also stopped allowing entry of small vessels or boats to the port channel from the sea, leaving the vessels outside the channel with no option other than remaining near Patenga shore.

The vessels should have been shifted to safer areas immediately after cautionary signal-3 was announced a day earlier, said a senior CPA official.

POWER LINE THROUGH RESERVE FOREST

Palli Bidyut at odds with forest department

“Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s project to ensure 100 percent electrification is not being possible to implement in this upazila due to the forest department’s obstruction,” mentioned the lawmaker in his letter.

SIFAYET ULLAH

The Rural Electrification Board (Palli Bidyut) and the forest department are at loggerheads over connecting power cables through a forest reserve in Chattogram’s Fatikchhari upazila.

The old forest reserve, at Jungle Dantmara mouza under Narayanhat range of Chattogram North Forest Division, is home to over 95 species of trees and animals, according to forest department data.

The REB has been trying to set up several power lines through the 998-acre reserve forest.

Requesting approval to this end, Chattogram-2 lawmaker Syed Najibul Bashar Maizbhandari sent a demi official (DO) letter to the environment minister last June.

“Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s project to ensure 100 percent electrification is not being possible to implement in this upazila due to the forest department’s obstruction,” mentioned the lawmaker in his letter.

The ministry then sent a letter to Chattogram North divisional forest officer on October 10, seeking field opinion on this matter.

However, no structure can be



During a recent visit, it was seen that the REB is already preparing to connect power lines through the forest, with some electric poles set up there.

PHOTO: STAR

set up in a reserve forest under the existing Forest Act 1927.

Besides, the National Forest Policy 1994 prohibits any development projects within a forest, except when permitted by the prime minister.

Asked why he had sent a letter to take power lines through the reserved forest, Najibul Bashar Maizbhandari said, “Otherwise, we can’t ensure 100 percent electrification for the residents of this area. Many people here still



don't have power connection.”

“So, I have requested the forest and environment minister's permission,” he added.

This correspondent recently visited the area and observed that REB is already preparing to connect power lines through the forest, with some electric poles stacked there.

Mohammed Forkan, a local, said, “Palli Bidyut has already surveyed the area and we heard that they will start the work soon.”

Contacted, Mohammed Sarwar Jahan, general manager of the REB (Chattogram-2), said, “We planned to build a power line in view of the demand of the customers.”

“However, we will not construct the line through the forest without permission from the authorities concerned,” he added.

Thousands of trees would be felled if the power line were connected through the forest, and this has become a concern for forest officials, according to sources.

“We have verbally informed the authorities concerned that power lines cannot be taken through reserved forests,” said Narayanhat forest ranger Ilishur Rahman.

“We will take action as per existing laws if anyone wants to build infrastructure in forest reserves,” he added.

Meanwhile, environmental experts said power lines would endanger the fauna.

“Wildlife, especially birds and monkeys, will die if they come in contact with electrical wires, endangering the forest’s fauna and causing irreparable damage to biodiversity,” said Mohammad Kamal Hossain, former professor of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University.

Gas crisis hits port city

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Chattogram city residents have been hit hard by a severe gas crisis for around a month.

Residents in different areas, including Askar Dighir Par, Khulshi, Jamal Khan, Dewanji Pukur Par, Dewan Bazar, Hem Sen Lane, Shulak Bahar, Ghat Farhadbegh, Bakalia, and Chawkbazar, have been complaining about interrupted gas supply from early morning till afternoon since late October.

The port city dwellers have been facing a gas crisis every year between November and February for over a decade, said Shyamol Dhar of Askar Dighir Par area.

“I cannot cook for my two-year-old baby in the morning as gas supply stops at dawn and does not resume until around 4:00pm,” said Afsana Binte Rashid, a resident of the same area.

“My husband has to buy breakfast from a restaurant every day for around a month,” she added.

Sharmila Rudra of Khulshi area said while she uses a rice cooker as an alternative, many of her neighbours have to use kerosene stoves for cooking.

According to Karnaphuli Gas Distribution

Company (KGDC) sources, due to a shortage of gas supply from the LNG terminal at Moheshkhali in Cox’s Bazar, the daily allocation for Chattogram has been reduced from 320 mmcf to 280 mmcf.

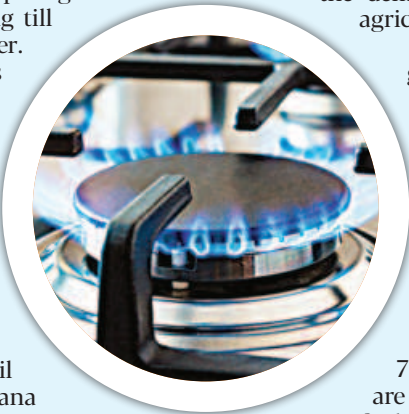
Moreover, two fertiliser factories in Chattogram – Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited and Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company Limited – are now fully operational to meet the demand for fertilisers in the agriculture sector this season.

As the KGDC has to supply gas to these factories for uninterrupted production, household supplies are being disrupted during winter months, said sources.

Of the daily allocation of 280 mmcf of gas, two fertiliser factories are supplied 75 mmcf, power plants are supplied 33 mmcf, CNG-refueling stations are supplied 12 mmcf of gas, and the rest to households and industries.

Contacted, Gautam Chandra Kundu, general manager (distribution) of KGDC, said the crisis occurred as one of the two LNG terminals in Moheshkhali is temporarily inoperative for maintenance.

“The crisis will be mitigated after the work is completed,” he said.



Jatishangha Park getting new life

ARUN BIKASH DEY

With the renovation works going on in full swing, Jatishangha Park located in Panchlaish Residential Area in the port city will be restored to its former glory soon.

PWD recently initiated a Tk 11.70 crore renovation project to rejuvenate and beautify the park, with the work underway at full swing, scheduled to be completed by June 2024, said officials.

Babar Associates and Coronation Corporation, a joint venture, has been given the contract for the project.

On December 4 last year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the project during her visit to Chattogram.

According to PWD officials, under the green garden development project, attractive greenery will be restored in the park with boundary walls and iron grills around it.

Besides, a walkway will be constructed with sitting arrangements for visitors. There will be a fountain at the centre and lighting will be provided all over the park. It will contain a kids’ zone, sports equipment for exercising, and two iron pergolas (thatched roofs). There will also be washroom facilities and drainage to prevent waterlogging.

During a recent visit, the site area was seen covered with corrugated iron sheets, with some 20 workers inside. The boundary wall has been constructed, while two swimming pools have been



Established by PWD in 1964, the 59-year-old park, built on 2.17 acres of land, is one of the few parks in the port city freely accessible to people.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

filled up with earth.

Workers said a pond will be excavated in place of the swimming pools. The park area is being filled with earth so as to elevate and keep it safe from water logging during monsoon.

Contacted, Rahul Guha, executive engineer of PWD, Chattogram (Div-I), said around 55 percent of the project work has been completed already.

“We expect to complete the project in six months,” he added.

Established by PWD in 1964, the

59-year-old park, built on 2.17 acres of land, is one of the few parks in the port city freely accessible to people. It was renamed Jatishangha Park in 2002.

Locals are happy the park is being rejuvenated to its former glory.

“The park used to be very beautiful once and we would visit it almost every afternoon...,” said Anindita Das, a local.

Abdullah Abu Sayeed, a teacher, said, “There is no other park in Panchlaish and adjacent areas, so many people used to come to Jatishangha Park for leisure.”