

EC seeks action against addl DIG

He collected his brother's nomination in uniform for Jhenidah by-polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has directed the home ministry to take action against Additional Deputy Inspector General of Police Md Moniruzzaman for participating in election activities on behalf of his younger brother.

The EC sent a letter to the senior secretary of public security division of the ministry on May 13 in this regard.

EC Deputy Secretary Md Mizanur Rahman signed the letter, saying Moniruzzaman was present in uniform while collecting nomination papers for an aspirant candidate from the office of a political party for Jhenidah-1 by-election, according to reports published in media.

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FARMING IN BARIND Govt, NGO officials at odds

Minister calls for collaboration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An altercation between NGO officials and government agricultural scientists broke out at a workshop in Rajshahi Circuit House yesterday, which was attended by Agriculture Minister Md Abdus Shahid.

The workshop was jointly organised by DASCOH, World Bank's 2030 Water Resources Group (2030 WRG), and Coca Cola Bangladesh Limited.

During the workshop, the minister asked the government agriculturists what they have been doing, when NGOs are pointing out and solving different issues, which resulted in the altercation.

Syeda Sitwat Shahed, consultant of Agricultural Water of 2030 WRG, presented a multimedia presentation at the beginning of the programme, where she described the necessity for adopting climate-smart technologies in Barind

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Hope to revive a forest dashed

Shipbreaking yard given permission to resume activities on forest land in Chattogram

SIFAYET ULLAH

As many as 5,000 trees weren't spared the axe in a five-acre forest area in Tulatoli of Chattogram. This lush-green forest was turned into a shipbreaking yard.

The Forest Department, however, wasn't about to go down without a fight. They challenged the legality of the land lease agreement signed in February 2022 between the district administration and Kohinoor Steel, the owner firm of the yard.

The land used to be a "notified" forest area according to Section 4 of the Forest Act-1986, meaning the district authorities could not lease it out to a private entity without consulting the Forest Department first, it claimed.

The place was part of a 400-acre mangrove forest developed by the Coastal Forest Division in 1983-1984 to protect the locality from natural disasters, the officials added.

The Forest Department also challenged the yard authorities and filed three cases against them for felling trees without permission.

Felling trees without permission from the Forest Department is illegal under the Forest Products Transit Rules 2011.

Responding to the call of the Forest Department, the district administration, by the order of the deputy commissioner, cancelled the lease agreement in 2023 and sealed off the yard.

A glimmer of hope for the forest's revival was seen. But that hope has been short-lived.

The divisional commissioner has overruled the order last month, reinstating the lease agreement and paving the way for the shipbreaking yard to move full steam ahead.

This decision deals a devastating blow to efforts to restore the lost forest, according to the forest department and environmentalists.

Visiting the area recently, this correspondent found that the yard authorities cordoned off a large area with wire fencing, while some workers were

constructing a brick wall.

"The district administration cancelled the lease illegally. Later, we appealed to the higher authorities and they ordered the district administration to reinstate the lease," said Abul Kashem alias Raja Kashem, owner of Kohinoor Steel.

Contacted, Tofayel Ahmed, divisional commissioner of Chattogram, confirmed that they ordered to reinstate the lease after inspecting related documents.

"We found proper grounds for ordering to reinstate the lease contract after inspecting all the relevant documents. The decision was made after holding a hearing in presence of both parties," Tofayel said.

Shahadat Hossain, the then Sitakunda upazila nirbahi officer who had signed the lease agreement on behalf of the district administration, claimed that the land to be recorded under the district administration.

"We informed the Forest Department before leasing out the land, but they didn't respond," he said.

Abdur Rahman, the then divisional forest officer of Chattogram Coastal Forest Division, however, said, "The district administration leased out the forest land to Kohinoor Steel without informing us."

Belayet Hossain, incumbent divisional forest officer of Chattogram Coastal

Forest Division, said, "No one can lease out notified forest without obtaining permission from the Forest Department."

He informed them that they formed a committee to take the matter to court.

Yard owner Abul Kashem stressed that no one can hinder his business.

"I have already invested several crores of taka to build the shipbreaking yard. I am trying to bring a scrap vessel to the yard soon for dismantling," he added.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS
If the yard becomes fully functional, felling of 5,000 trees won't be the last of the environmental harm.

Shipbreaking, particularly when conducted on tidal mudflats in South Asia, causes severe environmental pollution and health hazards for workers, according to NGO Shipbreaking Platform.

Toxic spills from shipbreaking operations contaminate coastal ecosystems and devastate local communities dependent on them, it added.

Lack of proper waste management results in hazardous materials being dumped on beaches, leading to soil contamination and metal accumulation. Besides, pollutants spread through currents and tides, harming marine biodiversity, destroying fishing livelihoods, and endangering mangrove ecosystems.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

They appear amid heatwave and disappear after rain

Mealybug infestation causes fear in Ctg's Boalkhali

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Residents in Boalkhali upazila of Chattogram are in a state of panic following giant mealybug infestation in the area for the past several days.

The pest, originating in Africa, is a small, oval-shaped insect that attacks trees and feeds on tree-sap during warm weather, said experts.

The recent heatwave triggered the mealybug attack, affecting a large number of trees in wards 8 and 9 under Boalkhali Municipality, Pachim Gomdandi, Gulzarpara, Samdar Talukdar Bari, Char Khidirpur, and Bande Ali Masjid areas, according to upazila agriculture officials.

This year, the bugs are considerably larger than previous year, said the officials, suggesting people to use pesticides to kill the bugs.

Locals said the bugs were also seen crawling up houses, shops and even Gulzarpara Government Primary School building.

"The affected areas have a previous record of giant mealybug infestation. Due to the heatwave, the bugs come out in large numbers, and disperse away after rainfall," said Durga Pada Deb, deputy agriculture officer in the upazila.



"This year, we have noticed that the bugs are bigger than the previous year and have infested big trees including those on the roadsides. At night, it releases a kind of fluid from its body that can cause itching to human skin. We have already told people to use pesticides to kill the bugs," he also said.

"However, individual effort cannot curb the pests. We need collaboration. We have informed our senior officers and mayor in this regard. Research should be done to prevent further attack of the pests," he added.

Earlier, giant mealybugs were reported to be found in Dhaka's Cantonment, Farmgate and Khamarbari areas and in some places in Panchagarh, Thakurgaon and Dinajpur districts during a survey in 2011. It made newspaper headlines again in 2014 following an outbreak at Home Economics College in the capital.

"After the rains on Sunday, the bugs disappeared. We are spreading pesticide to prevent further attack. We have already informed the UNO, agriculture and district livestock departments," said Md Jahurul Islam, mayor of Boalkhali municipality.

Contacted, Dr Md Shahidul Islam Khan, chief scientific officer of Regional Agricultural Research Station, said they were unaware about the matter.

"If we are informed, we will send our team to research," he added.

Buri Teesta to get a new life

S DILIP ROY, from Kurigram

To rejuvenate the Buri Teesta river in Kurigram and save the riverside people from bearing the brunt of extensive floods during monsoon, the Barendra Multipurpose Development Authorities have begun excavation work in the river.

The 76-kilometre-long river was once part of the main Teesta river channel but gradually became a tributary, as Teesta changed its course over time, according to the Bangladesh Water Development Board.

The river has long been on its deathbed due to rampant encroachment and siltation, causing inundation of croplands on both its

banks during the monsoon, thereby damaging Aman paddy cultivation.

Now, BMDA will dredge a 9-km stretch of the river between Nazimkhan union under Rajarhat upazila and Thetrai union under Ulipur upazila. The excavation will be completed in 15 phases at a cost of Tk 3,73,88,700, said BMDA officials.

In each phase, 590 metres of the river will be dug to a depth of 12 feet at a cost of Tk 24.92 lakh over a period of three months.

"The excavation work began with an allocation from the Ministry of Agriculture. We are monitoring that the excavation is completed on schedule. The first phase started in Nazimkhan union in March and will end in May. The second phase

will begin after the monsoon," said Mostafizur Rahman, executive engineer of BMDA in Kurigram.

The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation earlier started dredging a 20-km stretch of Buri Teesta river from Itakuri area of Rajarhat upazila to Thetrai Union in 2021 and finished two kilometres before local grabbers lodged cases to put an end to the initiative in 2022, according to locals.

Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Kurigram, said, "The government has allocated funds for dredging the river. After completion, farmers will be able to produce Aman paddy on 2,500 hectares of land on the river bank."



PHOTO: STAR

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