

Stern action against forest land occupiers

Warns Rizwana

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Syed Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, yesterday announced that strict actions will be taken, regardless of the power and influence of illegal occupants, to protect forests and the environment.

"Sixteen acres, out of total 90 acres of illegally occupied forest land in Gazipur, have been recovered since August 5," the adviser said at a discussion on forest and environmental conservation at the Gazipur Deputy Commissioner's office.

"The government knows
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Sikha Rani Pal carefully lays traditional clay pots on the ground to dry under the warm sun. Once dried, she sells these handcrafted items to traders in local markets, providing essential support for her family. The photo was taken in Barishal's Bakerganj upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Rizvi alleges conspiracy behind Secretariat fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur



BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday alleged that the recent fire at the Secretariat was a deliberate act orchestrated to destroy evidence of corruption and money laundering by the former Awami League government and its allies.

Speaking to journalists in Mithapukur upazila of Rangpur district, Rizvi claimed the fire was part of a broader conspiracy to cover up critical documents related to large-scale corruption and financial mismanagement during AL's tenure.

"The fire that engulfed the Secretariat is not an isolated incident," he said, adding that it was a well-planned act to erase traces of massive corruption, including files linked to a key principal secretary accused of siphoning off significant sums of money.

Rizvi alleged that the fire destroyed vital documents of five ministries, including evidence of corruption involving billions of takas, money laundering, and irregularities by high-ranking government officials.

"Among the files that burned were those tied to allegations of financial crimes by a principal secretary," he alleged. "This is a part of a deeper conspiracy by the former Sheikh Hasina government to ensure that information about their misdeeds never comes to light," he said.

Rizvi emphasised the importance of uncovering the
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CTG-SYLHET ROUTE

Only local train service suspended since 2020

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

The only local train on the Chattogram-Sylhet route, Jalalabad Express, has remained suspended for nearly five years since February 2020.

According to Bangladesh Railway officials, the suspension followed an acute shortage of locomotives and coaches. The suspension has adversely affected the state agency's revenue generation, they said.

Meanwhile, it has forced low-income passengers to spend more on commuting.

Currently, two intercity trains – Paharika Express and Udayan Express – serve the route, with around 2,500 passengers commuting daily. A Shobhan Chair ticket on these trains costs at least Tk 375, double the fare of the local train.



"The suspension of Jalalabad Express has increased my travel expenses, as I either have to commute through a bus or intercity train," said Abdul Aziz, an office assistant at a company in the port city and a resident of Moulvibazar.

Hiron Miah, a farm labourer from Habiganj district working in Chattogram, said they used to travel on this route with the local train as the ticket price was cheap.

"We work in paddy and vegetable fields in Chattogram seasonally. For this, we travel on this route around eight times every year. We could travel at a low cost before, but that opportunity is no longer available," he said.

As per 2019 data, the local train used to generate Tk 3 lakh in revenue from up-down trips daily.

Passengers of the route demanded BR to resume the service soon.

Abdul Malek, a fish trader from Habiganj district who regularly comes to the port city to buy dry fish and sea fish varieties, said, "The local train enabled me to transport my goods at a low cost. I urge the BR authorities to resume the local train service on this route."

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SITUATION IN MYANMAR BORDER

Dhaka needs to engage with Arakan Army

Say experts

BSS, Dhaka

Dhaka needs to engage with Arakan Army, which now controls over 80 percent of Rakhine State, including the 271-km border between Bangladesh and Myanmar, said security experts, former diplomats, and academics yesterday.

The call was made during a policy dialogue on "Rakhine after the Fall of Maungdaw: Implications for Bangladesh and the Region," organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) at a city hotel.

BIPSS President Major General (ret'd) ANM Munniruzzaman moderated the discussion, with former Defence Attaché to Myanmar and former Ambassador to Libya Major General (ret'd) Md Shahidul Haque, and East-West University Assistant Professor Parvez Karim Abbasi serving as panelists.

"I believe it's high time to engage diplomatically with the Arakan Army," said Abbasi. "This is a standard procedure in many cases, but we should also keep our military options open."

He suggested that if direct communication with a non-state actor like the Arakan Army isn't possible, Bangladesh should explore all informal channels to establish contact.

Abbasi also warned that the Arakan Army's control of Rakhine could escalate insurgency risks in India's northeastern states.

Munniruzzaman emphasised the need for Bangladesh to formulate a clear strategy for dealing with the

complex situation in Rakhine.

Referring to India's approach, Munniruzzaman said although New Delhi has historically maintained close ties with Myanmar's junta, it appears to be recalibrating its strategy to engage with the Arakan Army due to the shifting dynamics in Rakhine.

Major General (ret'd) Haque described engagement with the Arakan Army as a potential "win-win situation" for Bangladesh, which could benefit not only security but also economic interests.

Engagement with the Arakan Army could be a 'win-win situation' for Bangladesh, benefiting both security and economic interests.

MD SHAHIDUL HAQUE
Major General (ret'd)

He pointed out that the Arakan Army's dominance in Rakhine has created a complex situation for India, potentially presenting a strategic opportunity for Bangladesh.

"This is an opportunity for us... for the first time, we are in the driver's seat, especially in negotiating our interests with India," Haque said.

Last week, in Thailand, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain urged Myanmar to address ongoing border and Rakhine issues, reiterating that Dhaka cannot engage with non-state actors such as the Arakan Army.

Govt working to resolve land issues in CHT

Says Adviser Supradip Chakma

UNB, Dhaka

Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT) Affairs Adviser Supradip Chakma yesterday urged government officials to better understand and address the challenges faced by the people in the region.

Speaking at the inauguration of the extension building of the Bandarban Sadar Upazila Parishad Complex, the adviser said the people of the hill areas often struggle to voice their needs and problems.

He called for a more empathetic approach to solving their issues quickly.

"The people in these regions have difficulty articulating their concerns, so we must feel their problems and take prompt action to address them."

He also expressed confidence that all communities in the hills are receiving government services fairly and that efforts are being made to ensure quality education and development.

He emphasised the importance of prioritising the safety and well-being of ordinary citizens.

"Ensuring the safety of the common people is our primary responsibility," he added.

Earlier, speaking with journalists after inaugurating the new building of Bandarban Collectorate School and College, he discussed ongoing efforts to resolve land issues in the hilly areas, similar to the rest of the country.

'Revive Khulna's industry, economy'

Speakers urge govt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Speakers at a human chain yesterday called upon the authorities concerned of the government for prompt and planned measures to revive industrial infrastructures and economy in Khulna.

Khulna, the third-largest city in Bangladesh, was once a thriving industrial hub in the country, with seven state-owned jute mills, one of Asia's largest newsprint mill, and hardboard mills, among other industries operating there, they said.

Over time, all these mills were closed down, leaving thousands of workers unemployed, and deepening the economic stagnation in the region, they added.

The Greater Khulna Development Struggle Coordination Committee organised the event at Picture Palace Intersection in Khulna city.

Sheikh Ashraf Uz Zaman, president of the platform, presided over the event.

The speakers said despite significant nationwide development and the transformative

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6 fishermen return from Indian jail after 9 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Six Bangladeshi fishermen returned home through the Benapole check post on Friday night after spending nine months in an Indian jail.

The Petrapole Immigration Police of India handed them over to the Benapole Immigration Police at 10:00pm, under a special travel permit issued by the Indian government.

Sharsha Upazila Assistant Commissioner (Land) and Magistrate Nusrat Jahan, along with the members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), Border Security Force (BSF) of India, customs, police, and intelligence agencies from both the countries were present at that time.

The fishermen were handed over to the Benapole Port Police Station yesterday morning.

They were handed over to the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), a private NGO, said Md Russel Mia, officer-in-charge of Benapole Port Police Station.

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12 GOVT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Expansion work stalled for 3 years

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The expansion work of 12 government primary schools in Madhabpur upazila in Habiganj, under the Fourth Primary Education Development Project (PEDP 4), has been stalled for over three years now.

People have alleged that the delays have happened due to the contractor's negligence and lack of adequate supervision from the authorities. The project completion timeline also remains uncertain.

The project, which began in 2021, aimed to build additional floors in 14 government primary schools across Madhabpur upazila. While the work at Sakushail and Mantala Government Primary Schools was completed, the 12 other schools are still facing an uncertain situation.

Each school was allocated a budget of Tk 60 lakh, with the total budget amounting to Tk 8.4 core for all 14 schools.

The project was awarded to two contracting firms – Bengal Traders and M/s Golam Faruk, both owned by Abul Kalam.

Despite starting the work in 2021, the progress has been slow. In some schools, only one or two floors were completed, with roof installations. On the other hand, in

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The expansion work of at least 12 government primary schools in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj has been stalled for over four years now. Despite starting the work in 2021, the progress has been slow. In some schools, only one or two floors were completed, with roof installations. On the other hand, in several cases, the contractors abandoned the sites entirely.

PHOTO: STAR

Anti-fascist forces must unite

Says Jamaat ameer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman today called for unity among all anti-fascist political parties to build a "new Bangladesh" inspired by the aspirations of the youth.

Speaking at the 12th General Council of Khelafat Majlish at Dhaka's Suhrawardy Udyan this morning, Shafiqur emphasised the need for collective action to establish a democratic future for the nation.

"... In the new Bangladesh, all anti-fascist political parties will stand united," he said.

The Jamaat chief also expressed concern over

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Islamist parties to field single candidate in every constituency

Says IAB ameer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB) Ameer Syed Md Rezaul Karim yesterday said Islamist parties will present unified candidates in all constituencies during the upcoming national elections.

Addressing the party's central executive committee meeting at the IAB headquarters in Purana Paltan, Rezaul Karim emphasised that Islamist parties aim to ensure a single candidate for each seat in the parliamentary polls.

He said, "In the upcoming elections, Islamist parties will ensure a single, unified candidate for each constituency. We will field candidates in all seats unitedly, giving meaningful purpose to the revolution achieved through the sacrifices and blood of the people."

Rezaul said Bangladesh stands at a historically significant crossroads, presenting both great promise and critical challenges. He cautioned that

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