

Mindless extraction of earth from river worries villagers

RAFIQUL ISLAM, from Dumki, Patuakhali

Indiscriminate extraction of earth from river Paira at Angaria point of Patuakhali and Dudhalmou point of Bakerganj upazila in Barisal by influential quarters has put Lebukhali ferry terminal and many nearby villages under the threat of erosion.

Random removal of earth from riverbanks and shoals has changed the course of the river at Dudhalmou and Lebukhali points, sources said.

People of the localities are now passing days in great anxiety as their homesteads and cropland might disappear during next monsoon.

Locals said a section of ruling party men, particularly including 10 Jatiya Party (JP) and one Awami League leaders, has been extracting soil from the riverbanks in broad daylight during low tide and sending it to different brickfields of Kalos Kati by trawlers. These men are also the owners of brickfields.

A worker seeking anonymity said they work on daily basis for extracting soil from char land located on the west bank of the river Paira.

"The soil extractors are so influential that no one dares to protest against their work," said Altaf Sarder, a member of Bharpasha Union Parishad under Bakerganj upazila, adding that the river will not last long if such extraction continues.

Locals said some hired men of soil collectors assaulted Jamal Hossain, a landless farmer, when he tried to resist soil extraction from the char land. The farmer recently got allocation of the piece of char land.



Men employed by brick kiln owners lift onto engine boats earth from the char (newly emerged land) of Paira River where landless lessees had planted paddy. The photo was taken from near Lebukhali ferry terminal on the border of Barisal and Patuakhali districts recently.

Jamal alleged that Reza Hawlader, an Awami League activist, threatened him with dire consequences if he creates any obstacle to their work.

Villagers alleged that a land grabber is selling earth by cutting the bank of the river at Lebukhali ferry terminal point. The grabber is doing a brisk business allegedly by selling earth at Tk 500 to 1,200 per trowler. If it continues, the nearby areas will be in a great danger, villagers said expressing fear.

Acting Chairman of Bharpasha UP Md Masud Khan told this correspondent that during the tenure of last caretaker government sand extraction occurred only at night. But it now takes place in broad daylight also. He said they lodged a complaint with the UNO in this regard.

"We will submit a memorandum to the divisional commissioner, urging him to take prompt action in this regard," said Akhter Hossain, a resident of Angaria in Patuakhali, adding that they

will also raise their voice by involving mass people of Barisal and Patuakhali to stop looting of soil.

Subhash Chandra Biprabedanti, divisional office coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), said extraction of soil from agricultural land, shoal or riverbank affecting the normal water flow is illegal.

The officer-in-charge (OC) of Bakerganj police station said they are aware of the matter but they cannot do anything until the AC land

directs them to take action.

Contacted, Mehdi Masuduzzaman, UNO and acting AC land of Bakerganj, said he would look into the matter after visiting spots.

Deputy Director of Environment Directorate of Barisal Kaiser Ahmed said he was not aware of the problem and would investigate the matter.

Mashiur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner of Barisal, told The Daily Star that he will take stern action against the persons involved in such illegal activities.

7-hr traffic jam as truck stuck on bridge

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Traffic movement on Dhaka-Kapasia-Kishoreganj Road remained suspended for seven hours from 4:00am yesterday as a goods laden truck bound for Kishoreganj got stuck on Rajabari Bridge on the road.

Several hundred vehicles remained stranded on both sides of the road, causing sufferings to the passengers.

A serious traffic jam was created at Maona crossing on Dhaka-Mymensingh road as vehicles from Kapasia, Kishoreganj and Kotiadi had to use the road through Sreepur.

A team of Sreepur police struggled for about three and a half hours from 8:00am to remove the truck from the bridge. Finally normal traffic movement was restored at 11:15am.

Image of goddess damaged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kustia

Criminals damaged an image of goddess Kali at a temple at Fulbaria village in Khoksa upazila in Kustia on Wednesday night.

Devotees yesterday found the image on the floor of the temple. Left hand, fingers and chaplet of the goddess and trumpet of Shiva were broken into pieces.

Rakhal Sharma, an elderly member of the Hindu community immediately called people of the village irrespective of religion. They rushed to the spot and informed the matter to police. A police team led by Officer-In-Charge (OC) of Khoksa police station

Belal Hossain went to the spot and held a meeting with the locals. Contacted, the OC said, investigation is going on and the criminals involved in the incident will be taken to task.

SNAPS AND SNIPPETS



PHOTO: STAR

Rapid Action Battalion arrests Oliur Rahman with fake currency notes worth Tk 15,000 from Kalikapur in Patuakhali town yesterday.

Criminals beat up Rab man

A CORRESPONDENT, Natore

A member of Rab-5 was seriously injured at around 2pm Wednesday in an attack by criminals when he went to recover arms from them in the guise of a buyer. Police and Rab sources said, Rab-5 detective branch member Kamal Hossain went to a spot at Dhanadaha village under Boraigram upazila. At one stage of bargain, illegal arms dealers Sajib, Rezaul, Barek and Don took the money but refused to hand over the arms. The also beat up Rab member Kamal and fled the scene. Rab-5 assistant director Anwar Hossain said drives are on to arrest the culprits.

Housewife's body recovered

A CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Police yesterday morning recovered the body of an expatriate's wife from Sawdagor Bari in Paschim Lalpur village under Kabilpur union in Senbagh upazila. Police and locals said, Nazmun Nahar, 23, daughter of Qatar expatriate Mohin Uddin of the village was married to their neighbour Saudi expatriate Anwar Hossain Sohag about five years ago. Nahar had been staying in her father's residence for the last two years as she was suffering from cancer. On Wednesday night, she went to bed after dinner. But in the morning, her grand mother found her body hanging from a wooden beam of the bathroom. Sub-inspector (SI) Abu Yusuf of Senbagh police said, they recovered the body and sent it to hospital for postmortem.

Fire at Thakurgaon hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Fire at Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital yesterday noon halted scheduled operations of the patients for a few hours. Resident Medical Officer (RMO) Dr. Sultanul Alam told this correspondent that the fire broke out in a switch board on the wall of operation theatre due to short circuit within 10 minutes it damaged the cables of the operation theatre badly. The incident delayed the scheduled operations of the patients, he said. On information, fire fighters rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control. Later, a three-member probe committee headed by senior consultant Dr. Partho Sharothi was formed to investigate the matter.

Woman stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A woman was killed allegedly by her husband at Bhimpur village under Sadar upazila in Naogaon early yesterday. Victim Tahmina Khatun alias Khuki, 37, was wife of Abdus Salam, 45, and a mother of two children. Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sadar police station said, following an altercation with his wife at 1:30 am Salam stabbed her wife with a sharp knife killing her on the spot. The OC said Salam often pressed Khuki to sell her one and half bigha land. As she refused, Salam killed her and fled away. Victim's elder brother Sadekul Islam filed a case with Sadar police accusing Salam of murder.

Sex worker murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A sex worker was murdered yesterday at a brothel at Romesh Sen Road in the town. The victim was identified as Meena alias Rita, 22. Police said, Rajib, the so-called husband of Rita assaulted her severely the previous night following an altercation over a trifling matter. Critically injured Rita was taken to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) early yesterday but she succumbed to her injuries after some time. The body was sent to MMCH morgue for autopsy yesterday afternoon. There were marks of injuries on the body of the victim, said Sub-Inspector (SI) Abdul Mazid, also the Investigation Officer (IO) of the case.

Madrasa teacher, student held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police arrested a teacher and a student of a madrasa for suspicious movement on Chittagong court building premises Wednesday afternoon. The arrestees are Habibur Rahman, 23, a teacher of JM Hat Noorpur Madrasa at Fulgazi upazila under Feni district and Mobarak Hossain, 23, a student of Hathazari Madrasa. Police arrested the two from police check-post at the court building at around 12:30pm. Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mohiuddin Mahmud of Kotwali police station said the arrestees claimed that they went to the court building for a visit. Habibur is an ex-student of the Hathazari Madrasa and son of Ali Hossain of Kanthalia under Jhalakathi district and Mobarak is son of late Abdus Sobhan of Babupara under Lalmonirhat district, said the OC.

Two arrested in Bandarban

BSS, Bandarban

Ruanchhari police arrested two suspected tribal criminals from forest office area under the Sadar upazila on Wednesday. With the arrest of the two, a total of 22 suspected criminals were arrested from different places of the district in the last two months, police said. The arrestees are Sujan Chakma of Kalindipur, Rangamati and Khokan Chakma of Dighinala, Khagrachhari. They are members of the newly formed Chittagong Hill Tracts National Forum (CHTNF). They confessed to the police that they have been involved in abduction, extortion and various other crimes in the localities.

Two held with forged stamp

UNB, Savar

Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) members arrested two people along with forged non-judicial stamp worth Tk 3 lakh at Hemayetpur yesterday morning. The arrestees are Tajul Islam, 50, and Kazi Keramat Ali, 35, of Comilla district. Acting on secret information, a Rab team arrested Tajul and Keramat with the forged stamps of different denominations.

Cancel Cox's Bazar dist BNP body

Rivals demand at rally

A CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A faction of BNP Cox's Bazar unit yesterday formed a human chain in the town demanding cancellation of the district body approved by the central committee.

The faction led by former lawmaker from Cox's Bazar-3 constituency (Sadar-Cox's Bazar) Lutfur Rahman Kajal also held a rally on the main road demanding cancellation of Shahjahan-Swapna committee of the district unit.

Shahjahan Chowdhury, former lawmaker from Cox's Bazar-4 (Ukhia-Teknaf) constituency, and former public prosecutor (PP) Advocate Shamim Ara Swapna were declared president and general secretary of the district unit following a council that was marked by a clash at local stadium on November 20.

At least 50 leaders and

workers from both factions were injured in the clash. Later, a committee was declared through a press statement signed by Shahjahan Chowdhury.

Rejecting the committee, Kajal-led faction formed a human chain in front of the district BNP office at Shaheed Sarani Road on November 21.

The group later announced a committee with Lutfur Rahman Kajal and former lawmaker from Cox's Bazar-2 seat (Moheshkhali-Kutubdia) Alamgir Mohammad Mahfuzullah Farid as president and general secretary of the district unit and sought approval of the central committee.

But as the central committee approved the committee led by Shahjahan Chowdhury and advocate Shamim Ara Swapna.

Toxic ice creams put Sirajganj kids at serious health risk

GOLAM MOSTAFA JIBON, Sirajganj

Around 500 factories in Sirajganj are producing ice creams with harmful chemicals posing a serious health hazard to the ice-cream lovers particularly children.

Intake of chemical-mixed ice creams often cause them various diseases like stomach pain, diarrhoea and dysentery.

"Children may suffer from deadly diseases like cancer and kidney infection if they take such harmful chemical and colour mixed ice creams regularly," said local pediatrician Dr Quamrul Hasan Parvez.

Health of school-going kids is at serious risk as they take these low quality ice creams at schools, he added.

During a spot investigation for about a week recently, this correspondent found that about 500 ice cream factories have been set up in the district without the knowledge of the authorities.

These factories are producing ice creams in most unhygienic way with low quality ingredients due to lack of supervision by the authorities concerned.

Most factory owners are ignorant of the food act as they use harmful ingredients, including impure water, arrowroot, toxic dye, flavour, soda, date expired powder milk and saccharin, in ice creams.

They are using arrowroot as alternative to milk while saccharin in place of sugar. Besides, they often use contaminated water from local ponds or canals.

On the other hand, most of the factories do not have trade licence, sanitary certificate and even BSTI (Bangladesh Standard Testing Institute) approval, which are a must for running business.

According to a source at



PHOTO: STAR

Unaware of the danger of the toxic ingredients used to prepare the favourite item, a child savours a coloured ice cream at Sirajganj.

the local Civil Surgeon Office, only 46 factories out of 500 have got sanitary and fitness certificates from their offices while the rests are running without their acknowledgement.

While visiting a number of ice cream factories on AK Fazlul Haque Road and at Mirpur, Kandapara and Kalibari in the town this correspondent had the same impression.

In most of those factories the labourers were mixing the ingredients without wearing hand gloves although most of them were suffering from skin diseases.

There were also no monitoring of qualities or expiry date on ice cream packets.

Contacted, Chand Mia

and Ekram Ali, proprietors of Chand-Yesmin Super Ice Cream Factory and Mina Ice Cream Factory respectively, admitted that they were carrying on their business by 'managing' some officials of the health department.

They disclosed that they pay Tk 200 each to a number of policemen and sanitary inspector regularly.

"We produce ice creams three to four months of a year. During the period, we collect ingredients from the local shops and they supply materials as per our demand," said Soleman Ali, owner of Kanok Super Ice Cream Factory on AK Fazlul Haque Road in the town.

Nur-e-Alam Liton, proprietor of Shuvo Super Ice Cream Factory, also admitted that he collected certificate from the sanitary inspector bribing him Tk 1000.

Contacted, Ram Pado Shaha, district sanitary inspector, however, denied the allegation.

Expressing surprise, Civil Surgeon of Sirajganj Lutfur Rahman told The Daily Star he can not believe how these unhygienic and illegal factories were running under the nose of the authorities.

He, however, said that he would look into the matter and ask the district sanitary inspectors to take necessary action in this regard.



PHOTO: STAR

Two men repair the signal light adjacent to Nazirpur launch terminal in Lalmoohan upazila of Patuakhali district yesterday as the authorities, apparently alarmed by the tragic launch accident on November 26, have taken initiative to make the signal system operative after a long time.