

Ruling party men wolf down profits of melon farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Random extortion by the ruling party men has appeared as a matter of concern for watermelon farmers in Rangabali upazila under the district during the plucking period of the popular summer fruit.

Besides, some influential people are drawing saline water to their fish enclosures through sluice gates, causing inundation of watermelon fields with saline water.

Demanding steps to save them from extortion and harassment by the men belonging to the ruling Awami League (AL) and its associate body Jubo League, local farmers held a rally and brought out a procession at Taktabunia Bazar in the upazila yesterday.

Jubo League leaders demand Tk 2 per watermelon when farmers pluck in their fields and they have to pay Tk 3 more for each watermelon when they load it on trawlers at Purba Bahelchar Sluice Ghat and Bahelchar Ghat, local farmers said.

A Jubo League man, who is forcing farmers to carry watermelon on his trawler, charges twice the usual fair for the purpose.

"Local Jubo League leaders extort us at three stages, making us bear additional cost of Tk 8 per watermelon to sent it to local market from our field," said Ansar Howlader, a watermelon farmer of Neta village under the upazila.

Badsha Sikder, a watermelon farmer of Purba Bahelchar village plucked around 500 watermelons from his field on Monday but he could not send it to local market till Wednesday for failure to pay the toll demanded by local Jubo



PHOTO: STAR



A farmer at Shyamchand village in Rangabali upazila under Patuakhali district gives a bleak look at his watermelon field that got flooded as a ruling party man callously drew saline water to his fish enclosure in the area, below, another farmer shows all signs of despair as he is not 'allowed' to pluck ripe watermelons from his field at Purbo Bahelchar village in Rangabali upazila for failure to give money to extortionists belonging to Jubo League.

League men.

Some Jubo League leaders are drawing saline water through sluice gates for fish cultivation at different enclosures in the area and the act causes damage to

watermelon fields due to flooding by saline water.

"My watermelon field covering four acres of land got over-flooded when Anamul Haque Litu, secretary of upazila AL, drew

saline water to his fish enclosure by opening the local sluice on the night of March 29," said Mohidul, a farmer of Shamchand village in Boro Baishchand union under the upazila.

"I cultivated watermelon on my four acres of land by taking loan of Tk 1.20 lakh from a local mohajon (moneylender). The yield was well this season but now I am worried about repaying the loan, let alone making profit," he said.

At least 20 other watermelon growers have similar tales to tell.

On March 29, an extortionist gang went to local watermelon farmers and demanded money from them. As Bipul Das, president of Awami League unit of ward No 1 under Rangabali union and his party colleagues protested the matter on the spot, the extortionists physically assaulted them.

Later on Monday, 58 leaders and activists including the assaulted men of the ward committee submitted their resignation to upazila AL president Ahsan Kabir Chan.

They alleged that several upazila unit Jubo League activists led by Duke Talukder, Babor Talukder and Rasel have continued random extortion everywhere in the upazila during the last three years.

"Local people including farmers and fishermen are helpless before the extortionists. They do not respect even the seniors in the party. And so, we have decided to resign from the party," said Bipul Das, president of local ward AL.

Asked about the allegations, Humayun Talukder, president of Rangabali upazila unit Jubo League, said, "We are not involved in any kind of extortion here. I do not know whether Awami League men resigned."

Anamul Islam Litu, secretary of upazila AL said, "I am not involved with saline water lifting through sluice gate."

Villagers confine 4 policemen, block road to protest their 'wrongdoing'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Aggrieved villagers confined four policemen to Pashchim Baluadanga village in Dinajpur municipality for three hours yesterday as the law enforcers allegedly assaulted female members of a house following their protest against attempt to arrest a man without showing any warrant.

Surprisingly, the four policemen had gone to the spot without the knowledge of the officer in charge (OC) of Dinajpur police station, said OC Md Aslam Iqbal.

Protesting the wrongdoing of policemen, locals also blocked Dinajpur-Bochaganj road for more than three hours.

Four policemen of Dinajpur police station led by sub inspector (SI) Md Jahangir Alam raided the house of Md Mozibur Rahman Mozd, 35, son of Ismail Hossain of Pashchim Baluadanga, at around 11:30am yesterday, locals said.

As the policemen said there was an

arrest warrant against Mozd, the residents of the house asked them to show it but without giving any reply, police handcuffed Mozd.

Mozid's younger sister protested handcuffing him without showing any arrest warrant but the policemen pushed her hard.

When Mozd's wife protested the assault of her sister-in-law, police assaulted her too and demanded bribe for releasing her husband, said the locals.

Hearing scream of Mozd's sister, locals gathered there and confined SI Jahangir Alam and constables Shah Alam, Md Mahbub and Chandan of Dinajpur police station to a room.

The aggrieved villagers also blocked

Dinajpur-Bochaganj road and burnt

tyres at different places of the area.

Hearing the incident, officer in charge (Investigation) Md Anisur Rahman accompanied by a police team rushed to the spot but the villagers declined to free the four policemen.

Later Dinajpur municipality Mayor Md Jahangir Alam went to the spot and assured locals that action would be taken if the four policemen were found guilty.

At around 3:00pm, the villagers released the four policemen and all the law enforcers left the area immediately.

When contacted, Dinajpur police station OC Md Aslam Iqbal said, "I do not know why the four policemen of this station went to the village. They went there without informing me."

He informed that there are two policemen named Jahangir Alam -- one is a sub inspector and the other is an assistant sub inspector, at the police station.

Contacted over phone, both of them denied going to Pashchim Baluadanga village.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent failed to contact a few high officials of Dinajpur police for their comments on the incident as none of them received phone calls.

Tension is prevailing in the area over the incident.

Two forest robbers held after gunfight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police and forest robbers locked in an hour-long gunfight on Chhera River in the Sundarbans under Koira upazila on Wednesday afternoon.

During the gunfight, two robbers -- Roknuzzaman, 32, son of Rafiqul Sana of Koira village and Khanjahan Ali Howlader, 30, son of Ansar Ali Howlader of Nobinpur village in Digholia upazila were injured. Police later arrested both the members of infamous 'Baki Billah Bahini'.

OC Ali Azam of Koira PS said, on a secret information that the members of 'Baki Billah Bahini' and 'Anwarul Bahini' were holding a clandestine meeting, a team of police raided the hideout at about 2:30pm.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the robbers opened fire on them triggering an hour-long gunfight.

Police and robbers traded 60 rounds of fire during the encounter. However, none was injured in the shootout, police said.

After a hot chase police arrested the two of the gang members while others managed to flee the scene. Two SBL guns, 100 rifle bullets were recovered from the spot.

Sub-inspector Md Shahjahan lodged two separate FIRs at night naming the two arrestees and a few unnamed others as accused.

The Daily Star - রবি ENGLISH FAIR



PHOTO: STAR

Prize winners of different events at yesterday's English language fair at Monjur Ahmed High School in Bholahat upazila of Chapainawabganj district flash V-sign.

Students learn amid an air of festivity

STAR NATIONAL DESK



English language fairs under English in Schools programme, a joint initiative of The Daily Star and mobile operator Robi, were held at two schools in Chapainawabganj and Khulna districts yesterday.

Adcom Ltd is the creative and event partner of the fairs.

Around 200 students of Monjur Ahmed High School at Futnibazar in Bholahat upazila of Chapainawabganj took part in English language fair held at the school's auditorium, reports our correspondent.

Mohamad Abdullah, headmaster of the school, formally inaugurated the fair at around 11:00am. Globally renowned movie The Lion King was screened, followed by quizzes on vocabulary, situation-based question-answer, extempore speech and role play. Students of the school participated in joyful interactions and watched the events based on the movie.

Eighteen students won different competitions. English teachers Abul

lessons.

"It is matter of pride and pleasure for us that The Daily Star has organised English in Schools programme in Koira upazila which is adjacent to the Sudarbans," Saidur Rahman said in his inaugural speech.

He hoped this noble cause will go a long way and the objective that The Daily Star and mobile operator Robi have set will not lose sight with passage of time.

The programme began with the screening of the movie The Lion King which was followed by competitions on vocabulary, extempore speech, one-word questions and roleplay.

Twelve students won different competitions as per judgment of a panel of three teachers who teach English at the school. Later, prizes were distributed among the winners.

Aiming to promote English language learning among school students across the country, The Daily Star in cooperation with Robi undertook English in Schools programme in 2009.

Under the initiative, each of one thousand schools selected from 64 districts of the country receives three complimentary copies of The Daily Star five days a week.

The ongoing English language fairs at different schools are being held in coordination with the education ministry as part of the three-year-long programme.

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Two girls of Koira Madinabad Secondary School and Technical College in Koira upazila of Khulna take part in a role play.

Woman killed as tree falls on house during storm

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A woman was killed while her husband was seriously injured as a storm hit Balidapara village under Kaliganj upazila on Wednesday night.

The dead was Sabina Khatun, 35, wife of Mofazzel Hossain of the village.

Mofazzel said, when the storm started at around 9:00pm he along with Sabina hurriedly went to the roof of his house to collect dried firewood.

All on a sudden a big rain tree on the Dhaka-Khulna highway adjacent to the house fell on the one-story building.

Seriously injured Sabina was rushed to Kaliganj health complex. As her condition deteriorated, she

was referred to Jessore Sadar Hospital. But she succumbed to injuries on the way to the hospital.

Mofazzel said he had submitted an application to Kaliganj UNO last year for removal of the old tree.

Finding no reply, he again sent another letter to Zilla Parishad officer Abdul Wahid Joarder but to no effect. Finally Sabina had to die for their indifferent attitude, he alleged.

Osman Gani, principal of

Balidapara Qawmi Madrasa said that the old tree was posing risk for long. Mofazzel wrote to remove the tree several times, but the authorities did not pay heed to his request, he said.

Contacted, UNO Anjumanara Begum said, she had forwarded the letter to Zilla Parishad authorities to take necessary action. But she could not say as to what happened to that letter.

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MEMBER REHAB



Women perform dance at the three-day long eleventh CHT indigenous cultural festival that began on the compound of local ethnic cultural institute in Rangamati town yesterday.