

Extortion from vehicles rampant in Thakurgaon

The malpractice ahead of Eid adds to prices of commodities

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Illegal toll collection by a section of transport workers and dishonest traffic policemen from vehicles at different points in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila has appeared as a nuisance ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

"I have given Tk 800 as toll while bringing my goods-laden truck through the highway from Tangail at different points in different districts," truck driver Rafiqul Islam told this correspondent on Thakurgaon-Dhaka highway in front of Ejab Cold Storage near the BGB Battalion Headquarters.

"We are forced to pay toll at many points. Even after maintaining all documents properly, we have to face harassment by police who demand money. There is none to look after the matter," said Liton Mian, another truck driver who was coming from Chittagong.

Visiting the area on Wednesday, this correspondent saw a group of members of Thakurgaon Distinct Truck, Tank-Lorry and Covered Van Workers' Union forcing every truck coming from both sides on the highway to give Tk 20 in the name of workers' welfare fund.

The money collectors were also giving receipts to the drivers.

Kamal Hossain, vice president of Thakurgaon Distinct Truck, Tank-Lorry and Covered Van Workers' Union, claimed that their money collection is not illegal as they give receipt against the received money. He admitted that different groups of transport workers collect money



PHOTO: STAR

Men of a transport workers' association bargain with a truck driver for the toll money that they regularly collect from heavy vehicles on Thakurgaon-Dhaka highway in the name of so-called welfare fund. The photo was taken from near Ejab Cold Storage in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila on Wednesday.

from vehicles before each Eid.

General Secretary of Thakurgaon District Transport Workers' Association, main platform of Thakurgaon transport workers, told this correspondent that they informed police to take action against those who collect illegal toll.

When contacted, Gopal Chakrabarti, officer in charge of Thakurgaon police station, said, "Leaders of the workers' organisation came to us for permission to collect funds for welfare fund but we did not give any such permission. During the last two days police drove away several illegal money collectors."

Md Hasan, a wholesaler of grocery items in Thakurgaon Station Road area, said the illegal toll adds to the carrying cost of their goods and ultimately the consumers have to bear the burden.

Illegal toll collection by a

section of dishonest traffic policemen rises before the Eid-ul-Fitr approaches.

"Before any festival like Eid every year, the traffic constables stop vehicles and collect money in the name of checking licence, fitness certificates or other documents. Traffic Sergeant Farukh Hossain seized my tractor on Tuesday evening from Kalibai Bazar in the town and let it go the next morning after I gave Tk 500," said tractor driver Mofizul.

If a driver or owner refuses to give money, policemen often seize their licence and registration documents or file cases against them on false charges, alleged several drivers.

"We are forced to give money to release the documents," said a driver.

Some dishonest traffic policemen especially target vehicles without route permit and other necessary

documents for bribery, sources said.

This correspondent saw a few tractors lying stranded beside the traffic sergeant's temporary office near the circuit house in the town yesterday afternoon.

Asked about the allegation of taking toll from tractor drivers, traffic sergeant Farukh Hossain said over cell phone, "We do not take toll from tractor drivers. We seize the tractors as per decision of district law and order committee's meeting to resist movement of tractors or power trolleys in the town from 8:00am to 8:00pm."

Abdul Ali, sociology teacher of a local college, said, "The unethical practice of charging tolls by traffic sergeants and constables leaves a bad influence on the mind of young people. Adequate punitive measures should be taken to resist the ill-practice."

One killed, 50 hurt as supporters of 2 UP members clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A man was killed and at least 50 others were injured in a clash between the supporters of two union parishad (UP) members at Manika village under Bahubal Upazila in Habiganj district yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Abdul Ali. Of the injured, 26 were admitted to the Upazila Health complex while the rest to Habiganj Sadar Hospital.

Locals said there had been a long standing rivalry between Satkapon Union Parishad members Joinal Mia and Dilara Khatun over establishing supremacy in the area.

Recently, Dilara raised a boundary wall of a graveyard at the village with financial help from Zila Parishad, but Joinal and his men demolished the wall at midnight on Tuesday.

As Dilara along with her supporters tried to rebuild the wall yesterday morning, Joinal and his men swooped on them, prompting their opponents to retaliate.

During the clash, Abdul Ali of Dilara group died on the spot while 50 others from both sides injured. Police recovered the body and sent it to Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Officer in Charge of Bahubal Police station Azizur Rahman Sarker said the incident was a sequel to long standing rivalry between the two UP members over establishing supremacy at the village. No case was filed in connection with the incident as of 5:00pm yesterday.

In Sunamganj, over 40 people were injured in a clash between two groups of people at Betura-Asadnagar village in Chhatak upazila of Sunamganj district on Tuesday evening, UNB.

Local sources the clash was a sequel to rivalry between Nur Mia and Abdur Rahim of the village.

Supporters of the two equipped with lethal weapons locked in a clash at around 7:00pm, leaving at least 40 people from both sides injured.

Five get life for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sentenced five people to life imprisonment for killing a man in Sadar upazila in 2007.

District and sessions Judge Md Hassan Imam pronounced the verdict at around 4:00pm.

He also fined the convicts Tk 50,000 each, in default they are to suffer another three months in jail.

The convicts are Md Samsul Alam, 48, son of Hossain Khan, Md Alauddin, 22 son of Raisuddin, Babu Pramanik, 21, son of Zakir Pramanik, Md Aynal, 36, son of Md Khorshed Alam and Md

Jane Alam, 25, son of Samsul Alam of Jalalpur Natunpara village in Pabna Sadar upazila. Jane Alam has been absconding since the incident.

According to the prosecution, Md Hazrat Ali of the same village was killed by the five over a land dispute on August 1 in 2007.

Victim's wife Sheuly Khatun filed a case with Pabna police station the same night. After investigation, police pressed charges against the five on September 29, 2007.

Advocate Abu Bakar, counsel for the convicts, they will appeal to the High Court against the verdict.

SNIPPETS

Rival JCD men clash, 8 injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least eight activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were injured in a factional clash in Mehendiganj upazila town on Wednesday. Two rival factions--one backed by JCD district joint convener Asaduzzaman Lablu and the other by upazila joint convener Naim Hossain Tuhin--clashed near Bazar Jame Masjid area over formation of the upazila committee at around 12:30pm. The clashing groups used sharp weapons during the clash, leaving eight activists from both sides injured. Being informed, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Of the injured, Ripon Bhuiyan from Tuhin faction and Himu from Lablu faction were admitted to the upazila health complex while the rest given first aid.

Boy drowns

UNB, Munshiganj

A two-year-old boy drowned in a pond at Brahmanaganj village in Louhajang upazila on yesterday. The deceased was identified as Rifat, son of Liton Bepari of the village. Officer-in-Charge of Louhajang Police Station Abdul Malek quoted family sources as saying that Rifat slipped into the pond beside their house while he was playing on its bank in the morning. After a hectic search, locals rescued Rifat from the pond and took him to the local health complex where the doctors declared him dead.

Criminal held with pistol

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapool, Jessore

Police arrested a criminal along with a Pistol in Dighipara area under Benapole Police Station early yesterday. The arrestee is Liton Hossain, 24, son of Ismail Hossain of the village. Acting on a tip-off, law enforcers raided the area at around 3:00 am and arrested Liton from his house. They also recovered a pistol from his possession. A case was filed under Arms Act against Liton.

Man to die for killing wife

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

A Chandpur court on Wednesday sentenced a man to death for killing his wife for dowry in 2007. The convict is Sadek Sarkar, 33, son of Ismail Sarkar of Rasulpur village under Matlob (South) upazila of the district. Additional District and Sessions Judge Md Motahar Ali pronounced the verdict in presence of the convict. According to the prosecution, Ayesha Akhter Bithi, daughter of Abdul Mannan of Rasulpur village, was stabbed to death by her husband Sadek Sarkar on May 18 in 2007 following a quarrel over dowry. Awlad Hossain, brother of the victim, filed a murder case with Matlob (South) police station against Sadek. After investigation, police pressed charges against Sadek.

Stalker jailed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A stalker was sentenced to 75 days imprisonment in Sadar upazila on Wednesday. The convict is Raihan, 20, son of Abdur Rahim of Nolpur village in the upazila. Sudharam police said Raihan used to tease Rozina Akhter Shipi, a class nine student of Nolpur High School, on her way to school. On Wednesday, locals caught Raihan while he was teasing Rozina and later handed him over to the police. Police produced Raihan before the Executive Magistrate Israt Jahan. After a brief hearing, the magistrate punished the boy.

Two girls commit 'suicide'

UNB, Sirajganj

Two girls allegedly committed suicide in separate incidents at Amlapara in the district town and Deghol Beltoli village in Shahjadpur upazila on Wednesday night. The deceased were identified as Happy, 23, a domestic help at the house of one Minatullah in the town and Phuljan, 26, daughter of Kurban Ali of Deghol Beltoli village. Police said locals found the body of Happy hanging from the ceiling fan of a room on the second floor of the house at night and informed them. The law enforcers went to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy. The reason behind the suicide could not be known as of yesterday. In another incident, Phuljan allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself from the ceiling of her room following a quarrel with her mother. Later, police recovered the body and sent it to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

Two electrocuted

UNB, Faridpur

A young man and his nephew were electrocuted at Moheswari village in Bhanga upazila of the district yesterday morning. The deceased were identified as Monir Hossain, 25, and his nephew Imran, 11. Police said the duo died on the spot when they came in touch with a snapped live electric wire on a road at around 11:00am.

4 held for killing easy bike driver

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Tangail yesterday arrested four people in connection with an easy bike driver killing case. The arrestees are Masud Rana, 18, of Santosh area, Noor Mohammed, 18, of Thanapara area, Mohammad Arif, 18, of Majhipara area and Aminul Islam, 22, of Mohishkhola area in the town. Acting-on a tip off, a police team from Sadar police station led by its officer-in-charge Nazrul Islam raided different areas in the town and arrested the four. Police recovered the body of easy bike driver Bachchu Miah, 40, from Boruha area in Sadar upazila on Tuesday morning. Victim's wife Nazma Begum filed a murder case with Tangail Model Police Station the same day. During preliminary interrogation, the arrestees confessed to killing Bachchu and snatched his easy bike, police said.

Summer bean farming brings them solvency

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Cultivation of *rupvan*, an early variety bean, has appeared as a profitable venture for many farmers in Ishwardi upazila, an area famous for growing the popular winter vegetable.

The farmers became interested in the summer season bean after the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) introduced it in Pabna district three years ago, said AI Shahin, development officer of the DAE, Pabna.

The variety is usually suitable for cultivation in hill areas but now it sees successful farming in plain

land, he said.

A total of 1,350 hectares of land in Ishwardi upazila, including 800 hectares in Muladuli union alone, has been brought under bean cultivation this year, said farmers and DAE sources.

The cultivation area is about double of last year's.

Farmers of Muladuli, Faridpur, Sheikhpura, Ramnathpur, Majhgram are cultivating the early variety *rupvan* bean to get more profit, said Md Habibur Rahman, Ishwardi upazila agriculture officer.

During a visit to Muladuli vegetable market on Saturday, this correspondent

learned that 15 to 20 maunds of *rupvan* bean is sold there every day. The price is Tk 100 to 120 a kg now.

"Rupvan was cultivated during summer and we have already started harvesting it. The special variety bean goes to Dhaka and other districts across the country and sells for good prices due to its high demand," Aminur Rahman, a bean farmer of Muladuli union, said.

"The price will come down when supply becomes abundant within a few days. It will remain available in the market till October," said Aminur, also a wholesaler at Muladuli.



PHOTO: STAR

Villagers cast a bleak look standing on the eroding bank of Nautara River at Satjan village in Dimla upazila of Nilphamari as the otherwise tranquil river, fed by water released from Teesta Irrigation Project during the ongoing rainy season, causes massive erosion in the area.

RELEASE OF EXCESS WATER FROM TEESTA PROJECT Overflowing Nautara River causes massive erosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Usually a quite and smoothly flowing river, the Nautara has turned turbulent, causing massive erosion at Satjan village in Dimla upazila.

This situation arises every year during the rainy season as Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) releases excess water of Teesta Irrigation Project to reduce pressure on the infrastructures, to Nautara River through an escape regulator two kilometres away from the affected village, locals said.

When the BWDB releases water through the regulator, the river swells rapidly and flows with strong current devouring the bank at Satjan village, they said.

Visiting the affected area on Saturday, this correspondent found that within a week the river devoured 42 homesteads, making 225 people homeless. It also washed away 200-metre approach road of Nautara Bridge, cutting off the village from a large part of the upazila.

Sixty acres of cultivable land with newly transplanted amon paddy and vegetables and a madrasa were also eroded by this time.

The erosion victims have taken refuge at their relatives' houses and at a nearby government land making makeshift shelters with polythene, paper and clothes while the people still staying at the village are passing their days amid fear of serious erosion any moment.

Local resident Nurul Islam, also former chairman of Nautara union parishad, said,

"The problem appeared after the start of Teesta Irrigation Project. If water in the Teesta River swells alarmingly, consequently the main irrigation canal (coming out of the river) overflows and the authorities open the gates of the escape regulator at Kakra village. The released water, after proceeding about half a kilometre, falls into Nautara River. It creates violent current causing massive erosion at Satjan village."

This time the erosion is more serious than that of previous years, he added.

Erosion victims Saifullah, 45, Rabiul, 35, Jamiar, 45, Momin, 48, and others said Teesta Irrigation Project has become a bane of them although it is a boon to many.

It has become an urgent task of BWDB to save the people of Satjan village from erosion by Nautara River, said Aftabuddin Ahmed, chairman of Dimla upazila parishad.

When contacted, Zohurul Islam, executive engineer of BWDB in Dalia Division, said, "We have started making spurs with bamboo and sandbags in the river as a temporary measure to protect Satjan village from erosion by Nautara River. For permanent solution, we have submitted a project to the higher authorities to divert the river course by excavating a new channel."

"Nautara River is very long and winding. Water from nearby villages flows into it, causing strong current there. We do not open gates of the regulator unless it is necessary," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Flowering plants of *rupvan*, an early variety of popular vegetable bean, spreading over a vast field in Ishwardi upazila under Pabna district offers a captivating sight. Harvested in the ongoing rainy season, the variety is now a profitable venture for many farmers in the area.