

# Land grabbers converting reserve forest areas into agri plots

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

A section of local influential people, allegedly with the connivance of forest officials, are grabbing the land of reserve forest at Gongamoti near Kuakata and converting it into agricultural plots.

The land grabbers felled trees in the forest areas

indiscriminately to make room for paddy cultivation.

At least 3,760 acres of land from the east side of Eco Park in Kuakata to Kowar Char point were declared a reserve forest in 1950, officials said.

Over 100 acres of the reserve forest at different spots between Gongamoti and Kowar Char area have

already been turned into cropland, Abul Hossain, a local farmer told this correspondent.

Several other villagers alleged that a section of forest officials were aiding and abetting the land grabbers to convert the forest land into agricultural plots for bribes.

Forest department beat

officer Muhammad Rezaul admitted that a few local people were cultivating paddy after clearing the reserve forest but denied his own involvement in it.

"It started long ago and the trend is still continuing", he said. "Nobody listens to me when I forbid them. So I informed the matter to the higher authorities to take

legal action against the grabbers," Rezaul added.

Khondakar Yaqub Ali, Kalapara upazila forest officer, however, said that he was not aware of the matter.

"None has the right to plunder the reserve forest, I am going to visit the area soon and take legal action if it is found to be true", Yakub said.

To avoid detection by the authorities, the process of grabbing forest land starts with stripping the trees of branches slowly over a period of time.

The land grabbers also make dykes on the banks of natural canals in the area to protect their paddy from salinity, locals said.

They slowly denude the patches of mangrove forest. Chaila, kawra, gauwa and tamarisk are among the trees being cut down, Abdul Hai, a local farmer said.

Among the grabbers, Sultan Mia, Akbar Ali, Khabir Uddin, Musa Mia, Joynal Mia, Shahjahan, Abdul Mannan and Khorshed are prominent, villagers said, requesting their names not to be published.

"One Sultan Mia of the area said that the plot had emerged from the river in front of his land and therefore he had the right to claim it.

"River erosion long ago devoured our land and now that it has emerged, it belongs to us", he said.



PHOTO: STAR

**Sonia, set on fire allegedly by her dowry-hungry husband and in-laws in Narsingdi, fighting for life at the burn unit of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.**

## BRUTALITY OF IN-LAWS FOR DOWRY

# Severely burnt Sonia fighting for life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A housewife, severely burnt allegedly by her husband and in-laws for dowry at Karimganj village in Raipura upazila on Sunday, is fighting for life at a hospital in capital Dhaka.

Police quoting locals and family members said that the husband and in-laws of Sonia, 19, on Sunday poured kerosene on her and set afire burning around 80 per cent of her person.

Sonia was married off to

Sabuj Mia of, 25, son of Abdur Rouf Mia of the same village only six months ago.

The family members of Sabuj started pressing the parents of Sonia for Tk. two lakh dowry immediately after the marriage to send Sabuj abroad through manpower agents, Sonia's mother Selina Begum said.

As the parents of Sonia failed to meet their demand, Sabuj along with his mother Shukria Begum and sister Asma Begum started to torture the housewife on Sunday. Later at a stage, they

doused her with kerosene and set on fire, locals said.

Severely burnt Sonia was rescued by neighbours and rushed to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital where attending doctor Abdul Baki referred her to the burn unit at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital in the capital.

Sonia's father Ilyas Mia yesterday filed a case against Sabuj, his mother and sister and 4-5 others with Raipur police station.

Police arrested Shukria Begum and Asma Begum on filing of the case.



PHOTO: STAR

**FOREST TURNS INTO CROPLAND: Part of the reserve forest near Gongamoti in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali district gets cleared for paddy cultivation as a section of local influential people has continued the callous act allegedly with the connivance of some forest officials.**

# Diarrhoea spreading in Chapainawabganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, C'nawabganj

Diarrhoea has continued to spread in the town and other areas of the district.

Civil Surgeon office sources said over 239 people, mostly children, have been attacked with the waterborne disease and admitted to Chapainawabganj Adhunik Sadar Hospital in a week.

Many diarrhoea patients are being treated in the hospital corridor due to lack of accommodation.

At least 25 to 30 patients come to the hospital every day, but the hospital authorities cannot provide them with accommodation at the 10-bed ward meant for diarrhoea patients, said a senior staff nurse of the hospital.

"Though oral saline, IV fluid and necessary medicines are available at the hospital, we face problems to deal with the growing number of patients for shortage of manpower," the nurse added.

According to a hospital source, 30 to 40 people attacked with diarrhoeal diseases also arrive at the outdoor section every day.



PHOTO: STAR

**A mother with ailing baby anxiously waits for her turn on the floor of the crowded diarrhoea ward at Chapainawabganj Adhunik Sadar Hospital.**

The on-duty doctors are providing better healthcare services for them, the source said.

Civil Surgeon (CS) Mohammad Abu Yousuf said all necessary measures have been taken to check spread of diarrhoea in the district and health workers are tak-

ing care of the patients in different upazilas.

There is no crisis of oral saline, IV fluid and necessary medicines at different hospitals and health complexes in the district to cope with the diarrhoea affected patients, the CS further said.

# IU teachers bring out procession on campus, besiege admin building

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushitia

The agitating teachers of Islamic University (IU) besieged the administrative building yesterday demanding removal of the vice chancellor, pro-vice chancellor and treasurer for their alleged involvement in irregularities in the recruitment of 132 teachers and officials on September 7.

Campus sources said around 250 teachers under the banner of Islamic University Teachers Association (IUTA) took out a procession on the campus at around 8:00 am and then put the administrative building under siege for four hours from 9:00 am.

A large number of officials and employees yesterday expressed their solidarity with the agitation that began on September 8. Since then teaches and most of the officials and employees have refrained from going to campus due to the deadlock

that followed controversy over appointment of the teachers and officials in the university.

Addressing a teachers' rally in front of the administrative building yesterday, IUTA President Prof Yakub Ali urged the government to take immediate steps to end the three-month-long deadlock at the university.

Prof Ali said the agitation will continue until their demand is met. He demanded immediate appointment of honest and competent persons as new vice chancellor, pro-vice chancellor and treasurer, removing the present ones.

IUTA General Secretary ASM Tariqul Islam, Vice-President Prof Abu Sina, former IUTA president Prof Matinur Rahman, IU Bangbandhu Parishad General Secretary Dr Ruhul Kuddus Saleh, and former general secretary Prof Mahabubur Rahman addressed the rally.

## Five bombs recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidaha

Police in a drive recovered five bombs from beside a canal at Dakhpara village in Harinakundu upazila yesterday.

Abul Khayer, officer in-charge of Harinakundu PS said, acting on a secret information, a team of police raided the area and recovered the bombs in a bag and three sharp billhooks in the morning.

Police could not arrest anyone as the criminals fled the scene sensing the presence of the law enforcers.

The bombs might have been kept there to commit crime, said the OC.

A CORRESPONDENT, Daudkandi, Comilla

Fighting for life for about three weeks, acid victim Farzana Akhter finally died at a private hospital in the capital city Dhaka yesterday.

Criminals threw acid on the 16-year old madrasa student and two others at Sonakanda village in Daudkandi upazila of the district on November 12.



PHOTO: STAR

**Acid victim Farzana Akhter.**

In the attack, Farzana, daughter of Jalal Uddin and a student of class IX at a local madrasa, was severely burnt. Her nephew and student of class V at the same madrasa Faisal Ahmed, 10, and their domestic help Khadiza Aktar, 15, were also injured.

Sources said, a gang entered the house of Jalal Uddin at around 2.00am and threw acid at Farzana, Faisal and Khadiza while they were asleep and fled the scene.

Hearing their screams, other family members rescued them and took them to Dhaka for treatment.

Daudkandi police recovered a can containing acid from the spot.

After the acid attack, Farzana's father Hazi Jalal Uddin filed a case with Daudkandi police station accuse six people including Saddam Hossain of the locality as the main accused.

The next day, police arrested Saddam's three alleged accomplices -- Amin, 25, Babu, 19, and Russel, 18, -- while the main accused still remained at large.

Farzana's elder sister Zakia Akter alleged that Saddam of neighboring Jamalkandi village used to sexually harass Farzana. A teacher of the madrasa also stalked her. They also had proposed to marry Farzana, she said.

On November 16, local people and teachers and students of the locality formed a human chain, demanding arrest and punishment of the culprits.



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