

# Brokers engaged by AL men collect Teesta toll money

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A gang of brokers allegedly engaged by a section of local ruling party men control toll collection from the vehicles crossing the Teesta Bridge in Gokunda union in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, depriving the government of revenue worth around Tk 40 thousand daily for the last four months.

At least 2,000 motorcycles, 1200 'easy bikes' and 800 other three wheelers move on the bridge every day, paying Tk 10 as toll for the purpose but almost the full amount is pocketed by the brokers and a section of officials of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) sources said.

However, the toll collected from heavy vehicles crossing the Teesta Bridge is duly deposited to the authorities concerned.

Meanwhile, at least eight people were injured in an hour-long clash between two groups of ruling Awami League and its associate organisations over taking control of the toll plaza on Wednesday night.

Police arrested five activists of Jubo League, Sramik League and Chhatra League, the youth, labour and student wings of AL, from the spot.

To disperse the clashing activists, police fired 47 rubber bullets, said officer in-charge of Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station Mahfuzur Rahman, but he refused to confirm the names and identities of the injured men.

The arrested five AL men were identified as Jubo League activists Rasel Miah, 30, and Jony Islam, 23, Sramik League activists Shah Alam, 26, and Shariful Islam, 27, and Chhatra



PHOTO: STAR

Brokers allegedly engaged by some ruling party men collect toll from vehicles crossing Teesta road bridge in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. Photo shows a village cop taking money from a bike rider on the bridge.

League activist Masum Miah, 20, all residents of Teestavillage.

RHD officials in Lalmonirhat Sadar said the bidder who was given contract to pay Tk 5 crore and 17 lakh for collecting toll money from all the vehicles moving on the bridge in 2013 offered Tk 4 crore and 20 lakh for the same work this year.

The RHD authorities did not approve the low rate and their officials have been collecting toll money since April this year, they said.

Seeking anonymity, a RHD staffs responsible for toll collection at Teesta Bridge alleged that

a broker gang engaged by local ruling party men is taking away the toll money collected from light vehicles, while the RHD staffs often remain helpless amid threat of physical assault.

Several locals, on the other hand, said the broker gang dared not create any disturbance when the bidder's men collected the toll money last year, but the gang became active after the RHD staff started collecting the toll.

The alleged collusion of a section of RHD officials who get a share of the embezzled money from the gang.

Admitting the problem

due to disturbance by brokers, estimator of RHD Sahidul Islam said, "Now we are collecting toll of Tk 1 lakh and 20 thousand on an average daily from the vehicles moving on the bridge. We the RHD staff want relief from the complexity of toll collection from the Teesta Bridge."

Denying the allegation against RHD officials, RHD Executive Engineer Suruz Miah said, "The department is going to take final decision to select a bidder for collecting toll money at the Teesta Bridge, as RHD staffs are facing manifold problems due to disturbance by the brokers."

# Robbers abduct 5 fishermen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Robbers abducted five fishermen from the River Meghna under Hatiya upazila early yesterday.

They also took away two fishing boats from them.

The victims are Alauddin Maji, 35, Nurul Haque, 45, Sahabuddin Maji, 32, Jobidul Haque, 40, and Salahuddin, 35. All hailed from Char Ishwaravillage in the upazila.

Md Mijan and Sahadat, owners of the boats, said the five went to catch hilsa fish in the river at 5:00am.

When they reached near the ghat a gang of forest robbers swooped on the victims and kidnapped them, said the boat owners.

Nations 'Bhuttu Bahini' might have been involved in the abduction, they said.

Sayed Fazleh Rabbi, officer-in-charge of Hatiya police station, said he informed coastguards at Nijum Deep about the abduction.

# Hill people agitate for 16-pt demand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Hill people yesterday held a rally in the district town to press their 16-point demand.

Organised by Adivasi Forum, the demands include immediate implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord 1997, holding elections to three Hill district councils with repeal of HDC (Amendment) Act 2014 and CHT Development Board Bill 2014 as they are 'anti-people' and 'anti-CHT' acts.

Later, they submitted a memorandum to the prime minister through the deputy commissioner in their regard.

They also demanded withdrawal of the government decision to set up Medical College and Science and Technology University in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The speakers urged constitutional recognition of all ethnic groups as indigenous people and repeal of the clause concerned of the 15th amendment to the constitution.

"The government failed to fully implement the accord in last 17 years and still controlled the CHT causing severe insecurity to Jumma people", said Jolly Mong Marma a cultural activist of the district.

# Couple shot in Matiranga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A couple sustained bullet injuries as a gang of local criminals opened fire on them allegedly over a land dispute in Taindong area in Matiranga upazila early yesterday.

The injured are Jyoti Bikash Tangchonya, 45, son of Ishwar Chandra Tangchonya and his wife Rini Chakma of the area.

Locals, however, caught one Mohammad Ripon, 23, son of Ali Akbar of the same area and handed him over to police, on suspicion of his involvement as he had a longstanding dispute with the couple.

# Koyra-Betgram road cries for fresh lease of life

Home-bound people suffer as Eid nears

UNB, Khulna

The Koyra-Betgram Road in Khulna has become unfit for vehicular movement due to lack of repair, much to the sufferings of the home-bound people ahead of Eid.

Talking this correspondent, a number of drivers and commuters said 50 kilometre stretch of the 60 km road under Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in the district has remained in dilapidated condition, causing road accidents almost every day.

In recent time, a bus loaded with passengers met an accident at Kachikata point of the road, leaving two people dead and 20 others injured.

In another incident, a truck overturned after falling into a pothole on the road, killing its helper.

Besides, mishaps by unauthorised vehicles Nasimon-Korimon are taking place frequently on the road due to its decrepit state.

As a result, local people are increasingly falling prey to the road accidents.

Drivers of different passenger and goods-laden

vehicles said it takes seven to eight hours for them to cross the bumpy road which is usually supposed to take three hours.

Sources at RHD office in Khulna said, of the 65-kilometre road stretching from Betgram to Koyra upazila via Tala and Paikgachha, 25 kilometres area of the road from Tala to Mahmudkati is in worst state.

Public movement through the road becomes further troublesome during rainy season as the nearby Kobadak River overflows it.

For this, work is currently going on to increase height of the road, sources said.

During a visit, this correspondent found that numerous potholes developed on about 13 kilometre stretch of the road from Koyra upazila headquarters to Chand Ali Setu (bridge).

The condition of the 27 kilometres area of the road stretching from Paikgachha to Betgram is in such a bad shape that vehicles have to cross the portion of the road amid risk of accident.

Line secretary of Bus-Owners' Association, Khulna division, Sheikh Zahidul Islam said passengers are to undergo immense sufferings while crossing the road as development work on the road remained hanged in the balance.

With the onset of the rainy season, the road has become unfit for vehicular movement, he said, adding that this year, traffic movement on the road remained suspended for a few days with the start of the monsoon.

He, however, said traffic movement resumed as the authorities began repair work on the road dumping sand into broken points to keep smooth vehicular movement during Eid.

"Still, drivers are to operate vehicles amid high risk of accidents," he added. Contacted, officials of RHD office in Khulna said repair work has already begun on the portion of the road from Betgram Zero point to Tala to restore vehicular movement.

The RHD officials expressed the hope that they would be able to complete all repair work of the road before Eid.



PHOTO: STAR

The flood control embankment in Rohodaha area in Sariakandi upazila of Bogra is on the verge of collapse due to constant onslaught by the river Jamuna.

# EROSION BY JAMUNA IN BOGRA Flood control dyke on verge of collapse

Thousands fear losing homesteads

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Erosion by the River Jamuna has devoured large portions of the flood control dyke at two points in two unions of Shariakandi upazila, threatening collapse of the dyke any moment.

The river turned furious in Rohodaha area under Kamalpur union and Adbaria area under Kutubpur union in the last couple of days.

Water Development Board (WDB) sources said the flood control embankment is on the verge of collapse as breaches have developed at at least two points of the dyke.

And due to the heavy current, WDB men are unable to reach the breaches for dumping sand bags at those points, added the sources.

WDB sources said that the boats cannot reach the points with the sand bags brought by the contractor's men of the WDB, and

because of that they can not prevent erosion there.

The Adbaria Government Primary School, surrounded by a 4 km-long flood control dyke built at a cost of Tk 9 crore, and another 6 km-long flood control dyke between Kutubpur and Kamalpur unions, are on the verge of collapse due to the erosion.

Locals feared that if the erosion continued in such pace, thousands of inhabitants of those villages would be homeless.

WDB sources said, they have already started constructing a 2.1 km-long ring dam at an estimated cost of Tk 1.63 crore on emergency basis, as only three feet of the old dyke remains intact.

Contacted, Nurul Islam, executive engineer of WDB in Bogra, said the town protection dyke is now in worst condition and it may collapse any moment at any of the two points.

# Hiro hopeful of growing Saudi dates in Bogra

MAMUN-UR-RASHID, Bogra

Saudi Arabian dates see successful cultivation in the orchard of Abdur Rouf Hiro at Tulasion in Buroil union of Nandigram upazila under the district.

A graduate from Rajshahi University, Hiro went to Saudi Arabia with the job of a designer at a non-government company in 1999.

"During my stay in Saudi Arabia I got interested in date farming. Encouraged by Motaleb Hossain of Bhaluka upazila under Mymensing district, I returned home with some

"I have planted around 400 date trees on a three-bigha land. Last year, dates grew in eight trees and eight more followed this year. I am hopeful of success in growing huge dates in the area if necessary support from the agriculture department as well as NGOs is extended," he added.

Quite a few local farmers are interested to grow quality Saudi dates but it requires much effort to get good yield of the foreign fruit in our land and weather, said Morshedul Haque, upazila agriculture officer of Nandigram.

high quality dates in 2008 and started the date orchard named 'Ma Saudi Dates and Nursery', Hiro said.

"I have planted around

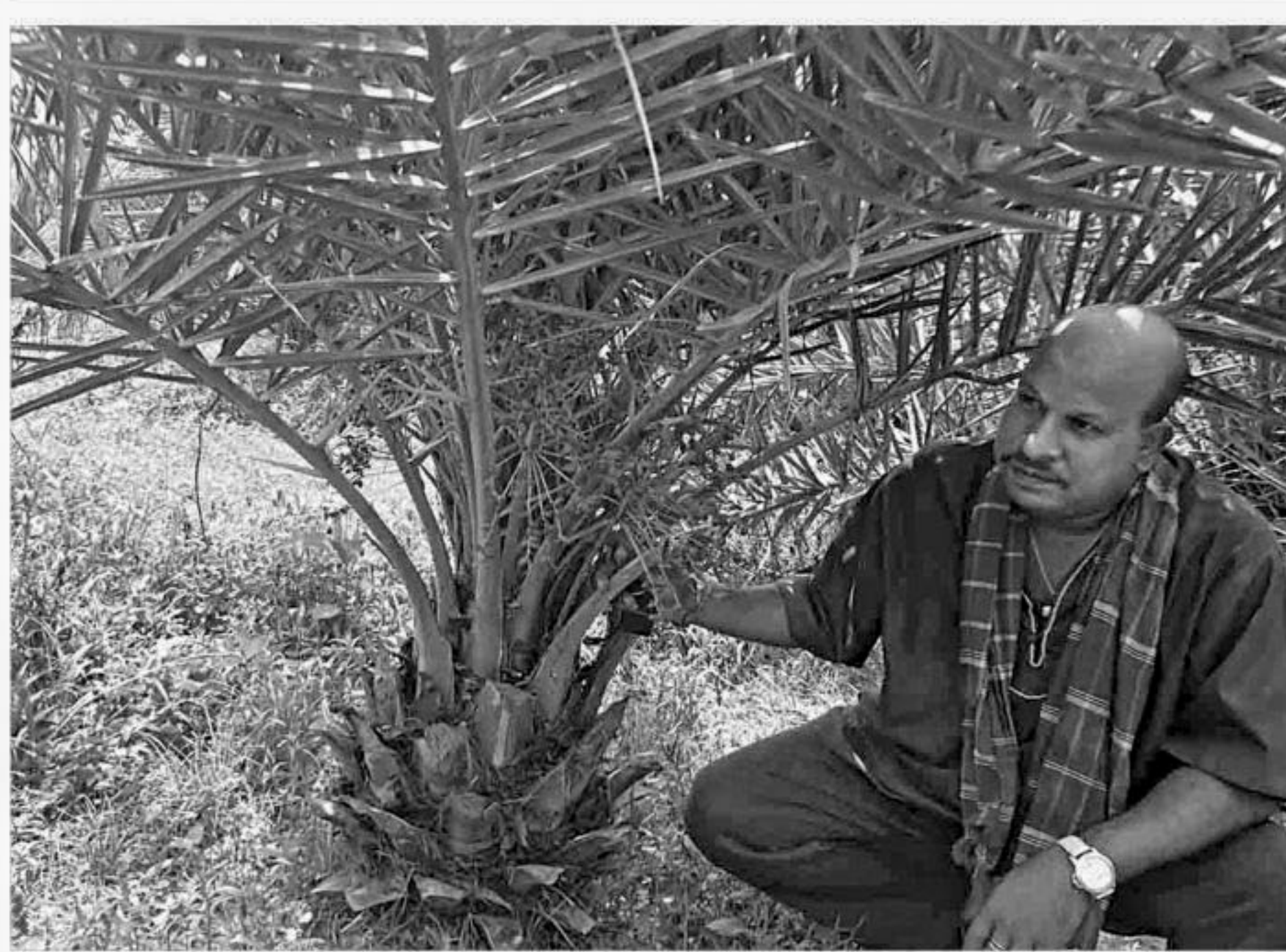


PHOTO: STAR

Abdur Rouf Hiro tends a date tree at his orchard at Tulasion village in Nandigram upazila of Bogra district.

# SNAPS AND SNIPPETS



PHOTO: STAR

Criminals cut down at least 1,000 banana trees at an orchard of an ex-UP chairman at Omarpur village under Abdulpur union in Chirirbandar upazila of Dinajpur on Monday night.

# Fugitive BNP man held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A local BNP leader of Gaibandha district accused in 14 sabotage cases was arrested in the town on Wednesday night. Fugitive accused Shah Alam sarker, 52, is president of Palashbari upazila unit BNP and son of late Kashim Uddin Sarker of Giridharipur village in Gaibdnah. On secret information, police raided a shop at Goshala Road in the town around 10:00pm and arrested Shah Alam, said Lalmonirhat district assistant superintendent of police Abidul Islam. The cases were filed with Palashbari police station against the arrestee before and after the January 5 national election, said the ASP.

# 'Rapist' charge sheeted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Charges have been pressed against a youth who allegedly raped a schoolgirl at Dattabaria village in Adamdighi upazila on March 10. The accused is Firoj Poshari, 24, son of Abdul Hamid of the village. Sub-inspector Subrato Ghosh, also the investigation Officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Court-2 yesterday. According to the case statement, the accused picked up the girl while she was going to a religious function at the village at around 7:00pm. He took her to a bush near a mosque and raped her.

# 2 zakat clothes seekers killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Two elderly women died of suffocation when thousands of destitute people gathered to collect zakat (give away) clothes in front of a local influential's residence at Girls School Road in the district town early yesterday. At least 10 others fell sick during the incident. The deceased are Jamila Khatun, 55, wife of Ayen Uddin of Baroil village and Saleha Begum, 50, of Purba Dasura village in Sadar upazila. Shah Alam, second-officer (SO) of Manikganj Police Station, said Syed Mahub Morshed Runu, one of the brothers-in-law of Shah Alam, chairman of Bashundhura Group decided to distribute zakat clothes among the destitute. Following that at least 8,000 to 10,000 distressed people from different