

Gongamoti reserve forest areas in grip of land grabbers

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Land grabbers have put up several signboards in the reserve forest areas in Kalapara upazila, claiming the ownership of the lands. The forest department planted several lakh trees on

1338 acres of land in Gongamoti and Kuakata areas in two phases in 1911 and 1986 to reduce the effects of natural disasters in the areas. While visiting the two areas recently, this corre-

spondent saw several signboards at Gongamoti forest land. Locals claimed that one Mohiuddin hung a signboard, claiming the ownership of 5.13 acres of land two years ago.

After several months, one Golam Sarwar hung a signboard in the same area, claiming the ownership of 0.33 acres of land, locals said, adding that the grabbers later put up several signboards in the area to

grab the forest land.

Grabbers have already looted several thousand trees from nearby Lembur Char and Kawer Char areas and are now trying to capture Gongamoti reserve forest land, Abdul Mannan of Kawer Char area said. Forest staff seem to have overlooked the matter, he alleged.

Several locals, seeking anonymity, said an organised gang have made false documents to occupy the reserve forests in the areas. After felling the trees, the grabbers will erect illegal structures on the forest lands, they added.

Contacted, Mohiuddin, one of the grabbers, claimed that he had bought the land several years ago. But he declined to show any valid document in support of his claim to the correspondent.

Despite several attempts, the correspondent could not contact Golam Sarwar over his cellphone as his mobile was found switched off.

Forest officer Parvez Ahmed of Gangamoti forest office said such signboards were earlier removed from Gangamoti reserve forest area. "We will remove the rest of the signboards from forest land soon," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Several signboards like this one, claiming ownership of a reserve forest land at Gongamoti in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district, bear testimony to land grabbers' continued attempt to occupy government's reserve forest in the area.

EROSION BY RIVER TEESTA

100 Dahagram-Angarpota families homeless

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Erosion by the River Teesta in Dahagram-Angarpota enclave of Patgram upazila has rendered over 100 families homeless and devoured vast tracts of cropland, fruit orchards and bamboo clusters in the last one month.

Cabinet Secretary Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan recently visited the erosion-hit villages in the enclave.

A project to thwart the onslaught by the river will be taken soon to protect the enclave, he told the victims during his brief visit.

Mahir Ali, 65, an erosion victim at Mahimpura village, told this correspondent that they had been facing Teesta erosion after India constructed a dyke in the upstream four years ago.

As India built the dyke at Dakkhin Holdibari village of Jalpaiguri district in Pashchimbanga, the Teesta water flow severely hit the enclave, said Habibur Rahman Habib, chairman of Dahagram union parishad.

At least 150 families were rendered home-

less in the last one month due to the erosion, said the chairman.

"If the erosion is not stopped immediately, the river will devour the entire enclave, said Reza Islam, general secretary of Dahagram-Angarpota Enclave Protection Committee.

Teesta took a serious turn at Hajipara village in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur district in the last one week, report our correspondent.

Villagers said, the river has already devoured at least 100 dwelling houses, a vast tract of land and a large number of trees of the village and rendered hundreds of people homeless.

They said at least 100 families had to take shelter at safer places.

Many of the affected people are sufferings for want of food and fresh water, locals said.

The homeless people have taken shelter on the roads and other places and are passing a sub human life, they said.

The villagers called for immediate steps to protect their villages from being devoured by the Teesta River.



PHOTO: STAR

Locals look helpless as erosion by the Teesta has taken a serious turn, devouring areas of Dahagram-Angarpota enclave in Patgram upazila under Lalmonirhat district.

14 rescued on Benapole border 11 others held in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Jessore

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) men yesterday rescued 14 Bangladeshis, including 8 women, just before they were being trafficked to India through Sadipur border here.

Rafiqul Islam, camp in-charge of BGB 26 Battalion, said being tipped-off, the border guards rescued the victims in the morning.

The members of the group hailed from Narail and Faridpur district. They were handed over to Benapole port police, he added.

Away in Satkhira, BGB members arrested 11 Bangladeshi nationals while entering the country through Kulia border point in

Debhata upazila on Wednesday night.

The arrestees were identified as Tarak Mandal, 30, Mukti Mandal, 19, Debobrata Mandal, 17, Kripa Mandal, 22, Taposh Mandal, 22, Hari Mandal, 28, Bipul Sardar, 18, Sunil Kumar, 36, Hironmoy Mandal, 22, Ilias Sheikh, 40, and Jobayer Sheikh, 30.

All of them hailed from different areas of the district, reports UNB.

Lt Col Shamsul Kabir, commanding officer of Satkhira Nildumur BGB-34, said a team of the border force raided the area at night and arrested the group while trying to enter Bangladesh territory on their return from India without valid documents.

SNIPPETS

Youth killed by 'friends'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chuadanga

A young man was hacked to death by friends while playing cards at Senarhuda village under Ulhohi union of Jibannagar upazila on Wednesday night. The deceased was identified as Arif Islam, 27, son of Azizur Bux of the village. Witnesses said Arif had an altercation with some youths over playing game at a tea stall at the village at night. At one stage, one Tota, 22, attacked Arif and hacked him with a sharp weapon indiscriminately, leaving him critically injured. Arif later died at Chuadanga Sadar Hospital.

Minor girl violated

UNB, Magura

An eight-year-old schoolgirl was raped allegedly by a young man at Jagdal village in Sadar upazila on Wednesday night. Officer in-charge of Sadar Police Station Jahangir Alam said, Aziz Mollah, son of Hanif Mollah of the same village, entered the room of the girl around 9:00pm while she was studying. Later, the youth raped the girl as no one was in the room at that time. Hearing screams, locals rushed to the spot, but the rapist managed to flee the scene. The girl was admitted to Sadar hospital.

Cigarette trading shop looted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Armed robbers took away about Tk 15 lakh from a distributor office of British American Tobacco Bangladesh at Dokropara, just behind the Judge Court and adjacent to DC and SP office in Panchagarh town on Wednesday night. Police and distributor office sources said, a gang numbering nine, came by three motorbikes and swooped on Moulovi Brothers, distributor of the company, and looted cash Tk15 lakh at gunpoint while the staff were counting money. On information, police went to the spot and detained six supervisors including Abdul Malek, Md Raju, Anwar Hossain, Robiul Islam, Monowar and Mustafiz for interrogation.

Trader killed in Kushtia

UNB, Kushtia

A crockery trader was stabbed to death at his house at Bhatpara in Sadar upazila early yesterday. The deceased was identified as Bachchu Bhuiyan, 45, son of Yunus Bhuiyan, a resident of Katarikandi village in Raipur upazila of Narsingdi district. Quoting locals, police said Bachchu had been living alone at the house in the area while his family used to live in Dhaka. Bachchu's wife phoned him yesterday morning but she did not get any response. Later she informed Bachchu's neighbours. His neighbours also did not get any response and informed police. After breaking the grill of Bachchu's house, police and local people entered his room and spotted his body lying on the floor beside bathroom. The body bore stab marks, said police.

Rice seized from UP office

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Law enforcers seized 6,150 kg of rice meant for Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme from Tukuria union parishad (UP) office premises in Pirganj upazila on Tuesday. Sources said while visiting the VGF rice distribution programme at different unions of the upazila, ATM Ziaul Islam, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) in Pirganj found 6,150 kg of VGF rice kept in 123 sacks in an abandoned condition and seized those. Later, the seized rice was brought to a warehouse at the upazila headquarter. Contacted, Mizanur Rahman Shaheen, chairman of Tukuria Union Parishad, denied his alleged involvement and said several VGF cardholders sold their allocated rice to local rice traders-- Chan Mia and Phul Mia of Ramkanupur village, and Faruk Hossain of Tiomari village of the union. Contacted, UNO ATM Ziaul Islam told this correspondent that after investigation they would take necessary legal action against the culprits behind the incident.



PHOTO: STAR

Two underage boys guard Sri Sri Madan Mohan Jau Bigrahodev Mondir in Pabna town yesterday, as a good number of boys in the district, mostly school and madrasa students, have been given temporary job of security duty as 'Ansar members' on the occasion of Durga Puja.

'Ansar kids' on security duty at temples!

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Hundreds of underage school and madrasa boys have been employed as temporary Ansar members for security duty at temples on the occasion of Durga Puja although recruitment rule does not allow employment of people below 18 years for such job.

Md Firoz Hossain, 15, a Class IX student of Sadullahpur High School in Pabna, is performing security duty at Madan Mohon Jau Bigrahodev Mandir, an old temple of the district town.

"I never received Ansar training. I have got the duty from my platoon commander," Firoz told this correspondent on the temple premises Wednesday afternoon.

Visiting several other temples of the district headquarter, this correspondent found two or three underage boys performing duty along with the regular law enforcers in each temple.

Most of them were not provided any training for the purpose.

Ruhul Amin, a Class IX student of Nandanpur Kamil Madrasa and Sujon Islam, a Class VIII student of Sreekol School, were performing security duty at a temple of Goplapur village.

"I have taken the temporary job as the earning will be helpful for my poor parents. However, I am not yet to be confirmed how much I will get," Sujon said.

Asked why he took duty at a temple despite being a madrasa student, Ruhul

Amin kept silent.

According to Ansar camp sources, each Ansar member will be paid Tk 1700 and each platoon commander Tk 2000 for the five-day job.

But often underage boys are recruited for the temporary job as they hardly bargain and can be employed for low amounts.

Md Amzad Hossain, adjutant of district Ansar-VDP, denied the allegation. "Sometimes team leaders cut a little amount to bear transport cost of the poor Ansar members," he said.

Asked about employing underage boys, he said, "There is no scope to include boys below 18 years in a disciplined security force. Without proper training nobody is given the job. They are recruited after seeing their Class VIII certificates and national ID cards. How can we examine if anybody misinforms about age in the certificate?"

"Engaging school boys for security duty is risky for them. It will also hamper their study ahead of final examinations," said Hasina Akter Rosy, headmaster of Selim Nazir High School, also president of district teachers' association.

According to district Ansar camp sources, 2,000 temporary Ansar members have been recruited on the occasion of Durga Puza to perform duty along with the police in 306 temples.

At least 30 percent of the temporary recruits are underage boys, mostly school and madrasa students, sources said.



PHOTO: STAR

Villagers form a human chain at Patiadangi Bazar in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila yesterday demanding punishment of the killers of Mainuddin Sharif, 35, ward member of Rajagaon union parishad in the upazila.

Lightning kills five

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Lightning killed at least five people, including a woman and her daughter, in Bandarban and Cox's Bazar districts yesterday.

A woman and her daughter were killed by a lightning strike in Paglir Aga area of Lama upazila of Bandarban yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Jaheda Begum, 57, and her daughter Nasima Khatun, 16 of Fashiakhali union, reports our correspondent.

Police said a thunderbolt struck the hut of Jaheda during heavy rain killing both.

In Cox's Bazar district, lightning killed three people and injured four others at Konapara village in Chakoria upazila yesterday noon, reports our correspondent.

The dead were identified as Akbar Ali, 35, Nurul Huda, 30, and Ali Ahmed, 55.

Witnesses said, that the incident happened when all of them took shelter at a grocery during rain and a lightning struck the shop.

Three men drown in river, two kids in pond

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Three people drowned in the River Bongshahi after being electrocuted at Pardighi village in Mirzapur upazila of Tangail district on Wednesday.

The deceased are Anwar Hossain, 45, son of Azahar Ali, Sanwar Hossain, 42, and Robin, 22, son of Dhola Mia of the village, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said, the trio came in contact with a live electric wire overhead while they were going to their village home by a boat around 8:30pm and fell into the river and drowned.

Later, police with the help of local people recovered the bodies around 11:00pm.

In Jamalpur, two children

drowned in a pond at Sengua village in Sharishabari upazila of the district yesterday, reports our correspondent.

The deceased were identified as Sadia Khatun, 5, daughter of Imdadul Haque and her cousin Kawsar Mia, 4, son of Hafizur Rahman of the village.

Locals said the two kids accidentally fell into the pond near their home while playing on its bank and went missing at 12:30pm.

The family members later rescued the kids and sent them to the upazila health complex where on duty doctors declared them dead around 2:00pm, said Azmat Ali Bhuiyan, chairman of Sharishabari union parishad.