

# Fishermen pass hard time as blockade hampers trade

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Thousands of fishermen in coastal districts of Patuakhali and Barguna are passing hard days with their families as fish trade is badly hampered due to countrywide non-stop blockade enforced by BNP-led 20-party alliance.

Many fishermen have stopped fishing as traders are not buying the perishable item due to problem in sending it to Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and other

places amid the indefinite blockade, said Md Seraj Mia, a fisherman of Kuakata.

"Fishes are now selling for low prices in local markets and so, it is difficult to manage even the cost for fuel and labour. I sold one maund of faisha, a local species of fish, at Tk 3,800 only on Tuesday although it sold for Tk 6,000 before the blockade, he added.

"We urge the political parties to shun blockade and violent agita-

tion so that our earning is not hampered," said Abdul Karim, another fisherman of the same area.

Abdur Rahim Khan, a fish wholesaler at Mohipur, a fish landing station near Kuakata, said they have to count losses as they cannot send trucks loaded with fish to Dhaka and other places and the prices in local markets have fallen.

"Truck drivers do not want to carry fish as roads have become risky

due to the blockade. And some agree to do so for double or more fare," said Nimai Chandra, former secretary for fishing trawler owners association in Mohipur.

The fish traders are facing serious problem due to the blockade while fishermen have lost interest to catch fish in the sea and rivers as they do not get proper prices, said Md Abbas Kazi, secretary of Kuakata-Alipur Matsya (fish) Aratder Samity.

## Man held with 11 gold bars in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Jessore

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) arrested an alleged smuggler along with 11 gold bars, weighing around 1.3 kg, from bordering Daulatpur village under Benapole Port Police Station in Jessore yesterday.

The arrestee, Babul Hossain, 32, son of Abul Hossain, is a resident of the village.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of the border guards raided the area in the morning and arrested Babul along with the gold bars, worth about Tk 1 crore, said Lt Col Abdur Rahim, commanding officer of BGB 23 Battalion.

BGB handed over Babul to Benapole Port Police Station. A case was lodged with the police station.

## Two jailed for 10 years for selling girl to brothel

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

A court here yesterday sentenced two people to 20 years rigorous imprisonment (RI) for selling a Class VII student to a brothel in Doyamoyee area in the district town in December 2003.

Judge AKM Enamul Haque of Woman and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Jamalpur delivered the verdict. The court also fined the convicts Tk 10,000 each, in default they are to suffer 15 days more in jail.

The convicts are Moynal Haque, 46, son of Hazrat Ali of Kacharipara village in Jamalpur town, and Shabana, 36, of Nilokkhia Majhipara village in Bakshiganj upazila. She is also a sex worker of the brothel.

According to the prosecution, the girl, daughter of a farmer of Satur village in Birganj upazila of Dinajpur, mistakenly boarded a Dhaka-bound bus while she was returning home from her Madrasa at the upazila headquarters in December 2003.

As she got down from the bus at Gabtoli bus terminal in the capital, Shabana's sister Lovely deceived the girl, saying that she would send her back home and took her to Moynal's house in Jamalpur town.

Later, Moynal, with the help of Shabana sold the girl to the brothel.

When her father came to know of her whereabouts, he with the help of Jamalpur police rescued the girl from the brothel on May 18 in 2004 and filed a case with the court accusing the convicted the same day.



PHOTO: STAR

Ansar men patrol the railway at Hatiya in Kalihati upazila under Tangail district yesterday as the authorities arranged special guarding on the 64-kilometre track from Joydevpur to Bangabandhu Bridge to prevent possible sabotage by miscreants during the blockade programme of BNP-led 20-party alliance.

# Salinity tolerant jute brings hope for farmers in Kalapara

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The Jute Research Institute at Pakhimara village in Kalapara upazila under the district is going to introduce salinity tolerant variety of jute at the farmers' level in April this year.

At the initial stage, about 25 acres of land of 250 farmers in five villages of the upazila will be brought under jute cultivation as local farmers showed interest to cultivate the cash crop.

"In last year we invented a salinity tolerant variety of jute that has already been approved by National Seed Board. We planned cultivation of this

new variety at farmers' level this year," Dr Mahmud Al Hossain, acting scientific officer of the institute.

"Ten lakh six thousand hectares of land in 18 coastal districts remain uncultivated due to salinity and we have a plan to bring the vast areas under jute cultivation that would bring profit to farmers," he added.

To motivate local farmers to cultivate jute and provide required trainings for the purpose, the Ministry of Agriculture set up the Jute Research Institute on 10 acres of land at Pakhimara village beside Patuakhali-Kuakata road in

2001.

"Once jute was cultivated in the area but farmers gradually lost interest in it as demand for jute and jute goods declined due to popular use of synthetic items. Besides, the lands became unfit for jute growing due to salinity. Now we hope to cultivate jute again as seed of its salinity tolerant variety will be provided us," said Md Sultan Gazi, a farmer of Pakhimara village.

Technical and financial help will be provided to the farmers interested in jute cultivation, said Md Moshir Rahman, Kalapara upazila agriculture officer.



PHOTO: STAR

The famous fish landing station at Mohipur in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district sees only a small amount of fish on Tuesday as the ongoing countrywide blockade enforced by BNP-led 20-party alliance badly hampers fish trade, discouraging fishermen in the coastal areas to catch fish.

## DEMAND FOR RETURN OF ADDITIONAL FEES

# SSC students lock school's office room in Natore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Students of Mirzapur Deegha High School in Naldanga upazila under the district locked up the headmaster's room and the office room of the school yesterday noon demanding return of the additional fees realised for filling up forms for the SSC examinations.

Ordered by the UNO, the school authorities started returning the money in the afternoon, said Shishir Prosad Talukder, headmaster of the school.

Mirzapur Deegha High School had to pay Tk 2400 to Tk 2900 each for filling up forms for the SSC examinations, said Wazed Ali Khan, officer in charge (OC) of Naldanga Police Station.

The High Court in a recent verdict ordered that the school authorities have to receive Tk 1385 each from students of science group and Tk 1280 from students of humanities group for filling up form for appearing at the SSC examinations, as the said amounts are stipulated by the education boards.

If any school takes addi-

tional money, they must return it, the HC verdict goes.

Hearing the matter, the SSC examinees of the school gathered in the headmaster's room and demanded return of the additional money which the headmaster declined.

Afterwards, the agitating students locked up the office and the headmaster's room of the school and started demonstration.

Informed, a team of Naldanga police led by OC Wazed Ali Khan rushed to the spot.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Sharmin Akter Jahan also went to the

school and ordered the headmaster to return the additional money to the students concerned.

The students unlocked the headmaster's room and the office room following assurance of returning the additional money.

"I have asked the school authorities to return the additional money to the students within 5:00pm today [Wednesday]," said UNO Sharmin Akter Jahan, the UNO.

"I have already started returning the money," said Headmaster Shishir Prosad Talukder.

# Schoolboy Ullash killing case, one more arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Police arrested one more suspect in schoolboy Ullash killing case in Hatibandha upazila of the district yesterday.

The arrestee is Swapan Islam, son of Sekendar Ali of Singimari village. He is a class X student of Hatibandha SS High School and Technical College.

Five students of the same institution were arrested soon after filing of a murder case by Ullash father on Monday, said Abdul Matin, officer-in-charge of Hatibandha Police Station.

They are Class VII student Alamgir Hossain, son of Oli Sheikh; Class VIII student Sohag Islam, son of Majnu

Miah; Class X student Sajib Islam, son of Amir Ali; Class X student Soukhin Islam, son of Saifur Rahman; and HSC examinee Jewel Islam, son of Shamsul Huda of the area.

Ullash Islam, 6, son of vegetable trader Nuruzzaman Miah of Singimari village, was a class one student of Hatibandha Shishu Niketan.

A gang abducted Ullash on Monday afternoon and then phoned his father, demanding Tk one lakh ransom for release of his son.

At around 8:00pm, the abductors informed his family through SMS that Ullash was killed at an abandoned building of the upazila parishad.



PHOTO: STAR

BEREAVED BY VIOLENT POLITICS: Visually impaired Selina Begum, extreme right, along with her daughter and parents pray for the salvation of the departed soul of her only son Sohag, beside his grave at Shankarpasha village in Nagarkanda upazila under Faridpur district yesterday. Sohag, a truck helper, was burnt to death as an alleged supporter of the ongoing countrywide blockade hurled a petrol bomb at the truck carrying him in Uzirpur upazila under Barisal district on Sunday.

# Cropland fertility in peril as brick kilns use topsoil

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Cultivable land in Joyfornagar area under Juri upazila of the district loses fertility every year as brick field owners collect earth from the topsoil of the land for making bricks.

Marginal farmers are selling topsoil of their farmland to the brick kiln owners in exchange for money.

A section of middlemen motivate poor farmers to sell the surface soil of their farmland to the brick field owners, who give the farm-

ers Tk 300 to collect earth from one foot surface of per decimal of land. Mini trucks carry the soil to different brick fields in the upazila.

"Everyday we receive Tk 2000 to 4000 for carrying soil to brickfields, and as such, we remain engaged in this work for at least six months," said trucker Rajob Ali.

Brick kiln owners start burning raw bricks after harvesting aman crop and continue till arrival of monsoon.

After removing topsoil from land, it remains uncultivable and fallow for the next three

years, affecting overall crop production, farmer Munim Ali of the area said.

Md Mostafizur Rahman, owner of M/S Shapla Bricks, said poor farmers of the area sell topsoil of their land as we offer them a handsome amount of money.

Contacted, Naziuddin Sheikh, Assistant Director at Kulaura office of the Department of Environment, said they cannot apply the existing rule of the government as farmers are willingly sell topsoil of their farmlands to brick kiln owners.



PHOTO: STAR

Massive extraction of topsoil for brick making badly affects fertility of agricultural lands. The photo was taken from Joyfornagar in Juri upazila under Moulvibazar district a couple of days ago.

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