



PHOTO: STAR
Prospect of paddy yield looks dim due to decreased fertility as topsoil from this farmland at Dhairkhata village in Kulaghat union of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila was removed for use in a nearby brickfield.



Farmlands turn infertile as topsoil sold to kilns

Lalmonirhat crop yield down in favour of bricks

S DILIP ROY with ANDREW EAGLE

Krishna Chandra Barman, 58, a farmer from Ghanoshyam village in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila is disappointed with the productivity of his land. "I used to harvest three crops per year from my land," he says, "but now it only produces a single crop each year." Like many local farmers, Barman was pressured into selling his topsoil to a nearby brick kiln. Since then his land's fertility has been reduced. "When my neighbours sold their topsoil to the kiln owner," Barman says, "I was coerced into selling mine too." Idris Ali, 57, a farmer from Dhairkhata village in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila has also suffered due to the kilns. "Since I sold my topsoil," he says, "I have to remove excess stagnant

water while growing paddy; otherwise I have a problem with weeds preventing rice growth. The land has become uneven and less fertile since I sold the soil last year." Majnu Miah, 52, of the same village sold his topsoil from four bighas of land twelve years ago but he still doesn't get optimal crop results from the land. Like Barman where once he could harvest three crops per year nowadays it's only one, for which he has to apply large amounts of fertiliser to compensate for the topsoil loss. Sources from the agriculture extension department in Lalmonirhat advise that around 4,000 bighas across the district have been damaged by the selling of topsoil to the estimated 31 brickfields. Farmers meanwhile are reluctant to protest the

activities of the kilns due to fear of harassment by brickfield owners who wield considerable economic and political clout. Nonetheless they hope government officials will implement laws protecting agricultural land from being degraded through topsoil removal. The Rajshahi divisional coordinator of the Bangladesh environment lawyers' association says in using topsoil to produce bricks, all of Lalmonirhat's kilns are violating the law. "Many farmers have appealed to us for help," he says, "with mango, areca nut and coconut plantations severely impacted." The agriculture extension department's deputy director in Lalmonirhat, Safayet Hossain, says brickfields should be removed from agricultural land. "Otherwise," he warns, "fertile land will be made infertile per-

manently which can seriously threaten our food security." For the moment, farmers have no choice but to manage their degraded lands as best they can. Mazu Miah, 62, from Chandanpat village in Aditmari upazila is another farmer who tries to compensate with extra fertiliser. "But where prime land produces up to 20 maunds of paddy per annum," he says, "We can't get more than 14 without topsoil." His neighbour Syed Ali, 48, is, for the time being, luckier. His fields yet have their topsoil; but he's worried. "I know my topsoil is the next target," he says. "For the last two years the kiln owner has tried to make me sell it and with the topsoil of adjoining lands already lifted I'm not sure for how long I'll be able to protect mine.



PHOTO: STAR
Alleged land grabbers demolished this 150-year-old grave at Chha-Anipara Rakhain village in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district on Monday night.

Land grabbers demolish Rakhain graveyard

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A gang of land grabbers demolished a 150-year-old graveyard of Rakhain community at Chha-Anipara in Tiakahali union under Kalapara upazila of the district on Monday. At least 100 Rakhain

people including Fathau Madbor, the then community leader, were buried at the graveyard set up 150 years ago, said Ching Damo Rakhain, son of community leader (locally called as Madbor). A three-foot high grave of Fathu was totally demol-

ished with hammers, he said. The gang also cut down all branches of an old banyan tree of the graveyard, said Ching Damo. He also demanded immediate legal steps against the criminals. Lufu Master, chairman for Patuakhali Rakhain

Bouddha Bihar, said a local gang continued committing such crime to grab their land. Punitive action will be taken against those responsible for the offence after investigation, said Md Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Kalapara Police Station.

NILPHAMARI

264 pry schools run without regular headmasters

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The posts of headmasters at 264 government primary schools in the district are lying vacant, much to the disturbance in schooling and office work. Of the 939 government primary schools in the district, 675 have regular headmasters, said sources of the office of district primary education officer (DPEO). In absence of regular headmasters, assistant teachers are working as in-charge headmasters at 31 primary schools in Kishoreganj upazila, 82 schools in Jaldhaka, 45 in Dimla, 50 in Domar, 47 in Sadar, and 9 in Saidpur upazila. Most of them lack experience and their colleagues sometimes show reluctance

to follow their instructions, said stakeholders. Nazrul Islam, acting headmaster of Sit Razib Government Primary School, said six teachers including a regular headmaster are needed to impart lessons properly to 350 students of the school. "As the post of regular headmaster is vacant, I'm working as acting headmaster. Often I've to remain outside the school for programmes in upazila and district offices. Then four assistant teachers find it difficult to manage all the classes," he said. The absence of a regular headmaster hampers coordination among the teachers, said Dulal Hossain, a member of the school management committee. Saidul Islam, acting headmaster of Bahalipara

Government Primary School in Sadar upazila, said only six teachers are working there against the need of eight persons for 500 students. Only 27 new headmasters for primary schools were appointed directly through written and viva voce examinations in 2012 and since then no initiative was taken to appoint regular headmasters in the district, sources said. As per government rules, 65% headmasters are appointed through promotion of senior teachers and the rest 35% are directly appointed, said teachers and officials. But due to various complexities in promotion system and lack of initiative for direct appointment, the headmaster posts of

264 schools have remained vacant for one to five years. Students Rimon, Prianka and Adib of Beradanga Government Primary School in Sadar upazila said their classes are not held regularly due to shortage of teachers. Abdur Rashid, president of district unit of government primary school teachers' association, said they had raised the issue in the headmasters' monthly meetings in presence of high officials on several occasions but to no result yet. Admitting the problem, District Primary Education Officer Dilip Kumar Bonik said his office had brought the matter to the notice of higher authorities and they are waiting for a government decision.

Pabna Jubo League leader shot

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A local Jubo League leader was shot allegedly by his rival partymen in Pailanpur area of the district town on Monday. The injured is Sharif Hossain alias Hazi Sharif, organising secretary of the district unit of Jubo League. He was admitted to National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor) in Dhaka. Police and locals said when Sharif was coming to the town from his residence around 10:00pm, a gang of 5/6 opened fire, leaving him seriously injured. He was rushed to Pabna Medical College Hospital and then shifted to Nitor as his condition deteriorated. Sharif came under attack by the men of another Jubo League leader Badal Hossain over previous enmity of capturing an 'easy bike' stand in the town, suspected Officer-in-Charge of Pabna Sadar Police Station Md Abdulla Al Hasan. No case was filed in this connection as of filing of this report around 6:00pm yesterday. Angry Jubo League men brought out a procession in the town yesterday noon, demanding immediate arrest of the attackers. Following the incident, a number of shops in the area remained closed. Apart from this, movement of three-wheelers and battery-run auto rickshaws remained stopped.



PHOTO: STAR
Schoolchildren accompanied by locals bring out a procession yesterday demanding punishment of the killer of Rafiqul Islam, a 10-year-old schoolboy, at Shahganj Bazar in Gouripur upazila under Mymensingh district.

Schoolboy hacked to death in Gouripur, killer held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A schoolboy was hacked to death at Gagla village of Achintapur union in Gouripur upazila of the district on Monday night. The deceased was identified as Rafiqul Islam, 10, son of day labourer Osman Gani of the village, and a student at Shahganj Government Primary School in the village. Victim's mother Rumela Khatun lodged a case with Gouripur Police Station, accusing Shah Alam, son of Abdul Hekim of adjacent Nazirpur village. Quoting the case statement, Md Akhtar Morshed, officer-in-charge of Gouripur Police Station, said Shah Alam had been pasting posters for Suraiya Akhtar, a female member

candidate for reserved seat from Ward No-3 in Achintapur Union Parishad. Shah Alam engaged Rafiqul to assist him in pasting the posters for Tk 100 per day, police said. Rafiqul had been working for four days but Shah Alam did not pay him for the work. They had an altercation as Rafiqul refused to work for Shah Alam and demanded his dues. Following the altercation, Shah Alam allegedly hacked Rafiqul when he was returning home from local Shahganj Bazar, leaving him critically injured. Rafiqul was rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where the on-duty doctors declared him dead at around 9:30pm. As they came to know

about the murder, fellow students brought out a protest procession in the area yesterday and attacked Shah Alam's house. At one stage, the students torched the house and Shah Alam came out to flee the scene. The agitated students caught him after a long chase and handed him over to the police after beating him up, said the OC. Shah Alam confessed to his involvement in the killing, the OC said. Police produced him before a Mymensingh court yesterday afternoon that recorded his statement under Section 164 and sent him to jail. Fellow students yesterday formed a human chain and then took out a procession at Shahganj Bazar, demanding capital punishment to the killer.

Man sued for beating up 2 siblings

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A man was sued at Nazirpur upazila of the district for beating up two children of a family on Monday. Nazirpur Police Station sources said that Dipu Sheik, 13, and his brother Abu Sheik, 10, sons of Atikur Rahman of Hoglabuniya village and students of two local schools, went to catch fish in a nearby paddy field around 11:30am on March 20. Seeing them in the paddy field, owner Panna Sheikh beat them up mercilessly, saying that they damaged the paddy. Next, Panna kept them confined inside a dog's cage for around 30 minutes at his house. He let the boys go after a request by a neighbour. Victims' father filed a case with the police station, accusing Panna, on Monday. Panna went into hiding after filing of the case. "We are trying to arrest Panna," said Md Nasir Uddin Mollik, officer-in-charge of the police station.



PHOTO: STAR
Locals including a large number of students form a human chain in Pirojpur town yesterday demanding punishment to the criminals who killed Sohagi Jahan Tonu, a student of Comilla Victoria College, on March 20.