

10 motorbike riders fined

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Ten motorbike riders were fined for not possessing driving license and insurance by a mobile court yesterday. The court fined them in a drive in Bakshiganj upazila town of the district. The mobile court led by Executive Magistrate, also Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Abu Hassan Siddique pronounced the verdict, said Sub-Inspector of Bakshiganj Police Station Anwar Hossain.

Rider Lavlu Mia, 20, of Sribardi upazila in Sherpur was fined Tk 500 while two others were fined Tk 200 each. The rest seven, hailing from Bakshiganj and Dewanganj upazilas of Jamalpur were fined Tk 300 each.

3 'outlaws' held with arms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police arrested three alleged outlaws from Joharpur bazar area in Bagharpara upazila of Jessore yesterday.

They also seized one gun, a pipe gun and two bullets from their possession.

The arrestees are Jewel Shikder, 26, son of Shawkat Ali of Joharpur village, Monirul Islam, 24, son of Surman Molla of Betalpara village in Bagharpara, and Moslem Ali Sheikh, 53, son of late Tarachand Sheikh of Bakchhara village in Satkhira. Samedul Haque, sub-inspector of Bagharpara Police Station, said on secret information, a police team raided the area and arrested the trio while they were preparing for committing robbery around 3:00am.



To collect earth for brick kilns, workers cut topsoil of a farmland at Bonga-Kalsimati village in Bogra's Sherpur upazila, and right, an excavator is used to do the same at Pushainagar in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar.



PHOTO: STAR

Brick kilns threaten soil fertility

Topsoil cutting damages fertility of land, restricts crops yield in Bogra

Farmland fertility in Hakaluki Haor area under threat as farmers sell topsoil

MAMUN-UR-RASHID, Bogra

Fertility of the croplands sees gradual decline in the district due to the rampant cutting of topsoil by the land owners, soil traders and brickfield owners.

This is not only reducing the production of crops but also damaging the ecological balance and the environment. The district has been losing large areas of croplands every year due to this.

Additional Deputy Director (ADD) of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Bogra Abdur Rahim said land owners cut the soil of the upper part of the croplands and sell it to the brick-kilns in the district.

Around six-inches of the upper part of the land provide the nutrients to the

crops and help the plants to grow, the ADD said, adding that crop production has decreased as the plants do not get the nutrients due to soil cutting.

Residents of Bonga and Kalsimati villages in Sherpur upazila said some land owners have been selling the topsoil to brick-kiln owners, threatening vast areas of croplands, houses and educational institutions.

Jamal Fakir, Abbas Uddin and Mohor Ali said the soil buyers are very influential and anyone who protests is threatened with cases or attacks.

Soil traders Momotaz Mia, Kamrul Ali and Jaharul Islam said they buy the soil and supply it to the brick-kilns, and no one can stop the business in the district.

Fertility of the land can be regained after around 15 years by using organic fertilizers in the land from where the soil has been removed, said ADD Abdur Rahim.

MINTU DESHWARA with ANDREW EAGLE

Farmland fertility in the area of Hakaluki Haor is under threat as struggling farmers sell their topsoil to local brick kilns. In at least the four upazilas of Moulvibazar district the sale of topsoil continues unabated, without any action taken by government authorities.

"I used to expect about 10 maunds of paddy from my half bigha of land," says farmer Fahadul Islam from Dildarpur village in Kulaura upazila. "Then two years ago I sold the topsoil to a brick kiln and since then the yield has halved."

"I sold my topsoil to a brick kiln," says Rajab Ali, 60, a farmer from Begbanpur village in Kulaura. "I did it when I faced a financial crisis." According to farmers, the area's brickfields seek out topsoil every year.

"Topsoil is the main raw material for bricks," says brickfield worker Moyna Mia from Bhuhai village in Kulaura.

"Brickfield owners collect topsoil to a depth of two to four feet from farmlands, to make quality bricks."

"Yes, we purchase topsoil," agrees Md Mustafizur Rahman, the owner of company Sapla Brick, a brickfield enterprise in Kulaura upazila. "We need the topsoil for brick manufacture, and we pay proper prices to the farmers for it. We have never faced any objection from the agriculture department."

"The soil that is used in brick manufacture is the fertile top soil," says Sylhet branch general secretary of non-government organisation Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, Abdul Karim Kim. "Continuous use of this soil in kilns leads to a fertility deficit in arable lands and with the passage of time these lands can lose their agricultural value entirely." He urges the authorities to take immediate measures to stop the harmful practice.

"If lands lose their topsoil, paddy production reduces by half," says Moulvibazar's deputy director of the department of agriculture extension. He says he will take necessary steps to prevent topsoil loss.

10 injured in land feud

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 10 people were injured in a clash over a piece of disputed land at Char Balaikathi village in Sadar upazila yesterday.

Of them, seven were admitted to Patuakhali General Hospital while the rest given first aid.

The injured include Kalpana Begum, 26, Sahid Begum, 40, Nizam Shikder, 55, Rasel Sikder, 24, Reaz Shikder, 25, Mozammel Shikder, 53, and Basir Uddin, 42, of the area. Locals said there was a longstanding conflict between Nizam Shikder and Salim Hawlader over the land.

Nizam Sikder along with his men started to build a house on the disputed land yesterday noon.

Hearing the news, the supporters of Salim rushed to the spot and engaged in a clash with the rival men.

At one stage, both groups attacked each other with lethal weapons, leaving 10 people from both sides injured.

Preparation to file a case was going on in this regard, SM Tariqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station said around 7:00pm yesterday.

Stern action will be taken against the culprits after investigating the matter, said the OC.



No chance for school, partners in fishing

S DILIP ROY with ANDREW EAGLE

The ideal childhood: carefree, with supportive family, and about the only matter deserving full concentration being schoolwork. Sadly, the ideal childhood is still a far cry from the reality experienced by many Bangladeshi children.

In remote Char Falimari village, set on a river shoal in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, three eleven-year-olds, Mizan Islam, Sohel Rana and Delowar Hossain don't go to school. Their families can't afford to send them. But despite the absence of ideal circumstances, the three decided to make the most of their situation. They've formed an informal, three-member fishing cooperative; collectively they earn a daily income to contribute to each of their struggling families.

"I was admitted in a primary school," says Mizan, "but I had to say farewell to my classes due to our family's poverty. I still dream of studying but it's not possible for me."

Three years ago, Mizan and his two friends, all of whom left school after class two, each collected Tk 6,000 from their families. With the Tk 18,000 they made a skiff and bought fishing nets. Nowadays they spend each day on the Dharla River catching fish together, and it's something they enjoy.

"We've been fishing since we were very young," says Mizan, "and more recently we've become skilled at navigating the skiff in the river too." Through fishing, the three partners each earn an income of up to Tk 300 per day.

"We leave for the river early in the morning," says Sohel, "and arrive home again around noon. Sometimes we even go night fishing, up to seven kilometres from our village." He notes that the three friends like working together and that all of them are happy to be earning money to help their struggling families.

"Fish traders buy our catch from the riverbank," says Delowar, the third member of the team. "There's never a need to go to the market."

"Among us there is no captain," he explains, "We respect each other. We are always together, day after day." He says the hardest part of their enterprise might be facing the cold of winter. "When out on the river of a winter morning, we really shiver."

"It's true I didn't provide for my son to study at school due to our poverty," says Sohel's father Nazrul Islam. "Even so, I never wanted to see him catching fish in the river. But my son's income does help to maintain our family and, as my wife is unwell, to buy the daily medicines she needs."

Mizan's father Nur Islam likewise says he wanted his son to study. "But my son was never comfortable at school," he says. "Now Mizan with his two partners have taken on the challenge of fishing to help alleviate our poverty, and they are doing well at it."

The partnership has made an impression in the village. "The three of them are inspiring," says neighbour Ashraf Ali, 48, also a fisher. "From them we can see how to live with hardship and still smile. They set an example of honesty, love and friendship. There are many children in the village but those three are exceptional."

Understandably, local primary school teacher Sufia Begum is less impressed. "I tried several times to bring the three of them back to school but I failed," she says. "They are determined to earn money catching fish. We do conduct door-to-door campaigns to raise awareness among guardians of the importance of sending their children to school."

Latifur Rahman of the district's fishery office says that while his department provides input support to ancestral fishers it has no project to educate fishers' children.

For now, the three children are occupied by the river. They dream to build more skiffs and make more nets to expand their enterprise. They believe their strong partnership will bring about such future opportunity.

Act of vengeance! Ensure right to water

Criminals cut 370 trees in Mymensingh Sadar upazila

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Criminals cut down around 370 saplings of different wood trees at Paralakkhir Algi village in Char Sirta union of Mymensingh Sadar upazila early Tuesday.

The tree garden owner, boatman Khalilur Rahman Liton of the village said he planted the saplings of mahogany and acacia trees on his 52-decimal land in 2015, spending over taka one lakh, managed mostly through loans from NGOs.

"Miscreants cut down the young trees in a planned way to cause serious loss to me," said Liton, father of four children.

"Rezaul Karim and his four brothers of adjacent Bhatiara village had been demanding Tk 130,000 from me over a piece of disputed land for long.

"On Sunday, they threatened me that the garden would be destroyed soon if the demand is not met," said Liton.

"Earlier in last year, they made similar threats and I lodged a general diary with Kotwali Police Station against them," he added.

Informed by Liton, a team from Kotwali Police Station led by Sub-inspector Mohammad Moniruzzaman visited the spot yesterday and asked Liton to file a general diary.

Termining the incident a heinous act, the SI said, "We are investigation the matter. If the accused are identified, a case will be filed."

Liton did not file any general diary and none was arrested as of yesterday afternoon, he added.

Speakers tell conference on 'Water Democracy' in Kuakata

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A two-day conference titled "Water Democracy" started at Hotel Nilanjona in Kuakata under the district yesterday.

Speaker at the conference organised by ActionAid Bangladesh urged preparing proper guidelines to save rivers and ensure water rights of people from all sections of the society.

The programme focused on issues like 'Water governance in South Asia', 'Water and ecosystem', 'Water and livelihood', and 'Women and water'.

"Like voting rights, water right should be given due importance as it is directly connected with life. We need water-based urban development plan and research as Bangladesh is a riverine country," Prof Dr Imtiaz Ahmed of the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, said at the conference.

Emphasising environmental, economic, political and social aspects of water, Dr Ainun Nishat, professor emeritus of BRAC University, said knowledge from locals should be taken into serious consideration while planning on water.

Role of women should be increased in water management system as they have

practical knowledge on the issue, the noted water expert said.

"Urgent steps should be taken to save water from pollution and address the problems of salinity rise, threat to biodiversity and livelihood of people near river areas.

"While building bridges on rivers, care should be taken so that the process does not make the water courses narrow," he said.

Unplanned construction of dams and embankments on rivers adds to the problem of already shrinking sweet water sources at home and abroad, speakers said.

Shamsur Ali, manager, Land and Water Rights Department of ActionAid Bangladesh, presented the keynote in the opening session with Farah Kabir, Country Director of the organisation, in the chair.

M Inamul Haque, chairman of Institute of Water and Environment, Nazrul Islam, program director of Asia Foundation, Dr Md Nurul Alam, deputy director of Department of Bangladesh Haor and Wetlands Development, Sabitri Pokharel, adviser of Mahila Adhikar Manch in Nepal, Rahima Sultana Kazol, executive director of local NGO AVAS, addressed the programme.



Criminals cut down around 370 young trees at Paralakkhir Algi village in Mymensingh Sadar upazila early Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

Farmer killed in Naogaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A farmer was allegedly suffocated to death while he was irrigating his cropland in Atrai upazila of Naogaon yesterday.

The farmer was identified as Labir Uddin, 53, of Darshana village in the upazila.

Police arrested Md Russel 30, son of Kuddus Pramanik of the village, in connection with the incident.

Police, quoting Labir's family members, said Labir was irrigating his paddy field from a nearby pond when Russel asked him not to use the water. They locked in an altercation over the issue. At one stage, Russel got angry and filled Labir's mouth with mud and suffocated him to death.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Naogaon General Hospital for autopsy, said Officer-in-Charge of Atrai Police Station Badruddoja.