

Hill cutting spree in Sreemangal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Illegal hill cutting, for either residential or commercial purpose, defying environmental laws continues unabated in different areas in Sreemangal upazila of the district.

Local people said some influential people and unscrupulous businessmen are involved in razing the hills.

They said Bishamoni village, Mohajirabad village, Radhanagar village, Mirzapur village and Husnabad area are more vulnerable to landslides as illegal hill cutting adjacent to those areas has been continuing for nearly a month.

Many residents of Bishamoni village alleged that one Monir Mia, a local influential person, has been cutting hills near Noven Resort area in the dark of night.

Refuting the allegation, Monir said some people are trying to tarnish his image by bringing such false allegation.

Green activists said thousands of people living in the area are exposed to hill slides in the rainy season due to illegal levelling of hills in most unplanned ways.

Villagers alleged that some local influential people in cooperation with a section of dishonest government officials are involved in hill cutting.

According to local residents and environmentalists, plundering of earth from hills poses a serious threat to nearby houses and business establishments as well.

Salaudin Ahmed, chairperson of Pahar Rakkha O Unnayan Society, said indiscriminate destroying of hills in Sreemangal area is creating a serious threat to biodiversity.

Nearly 30 percent of the hills in Sreemangal are already destroyed, he said, adding that a section of opportunist businessmen and politicians in cooperation with each other are destroying the hills.

Local administration cannot take proper legal steps against them due to their political backing.

Sreemangal Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mobashsherul Islam said they have raided the areas but did not find anyone on the spot as most of the hills are being cut in the dark of night.

"We have already sent a letter to the Department of Environment (DoE) mentioning names of those involved in the illegal hill cutting," the UNO added.

Moulvibazar Deputy Commissioner Tofayel Islam said, "We have sent a list of those involved in illegal hill cutting to DoE, but are yet to get any reply."



Due to illegal hill cutting, many families living in the slopes of the hills at Bishamoni village in Moulvibazar's Sreemangal upazila are exposed to mudslides during the rainy season. Inset, cutting of hills goes unabated, violating environmental laws.

PHOTO: STAR



34 shops gutted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 34 shops were gutted by a fire at Baherchar bazar in Rangabali upazila headquarters early yesterday.

Locals said the fire originated at a grocery and soon engulfed the adjoining shops around 1:30am.

Locals doused the flame after four hours of frantic efforts as there is no fire service in the remote area.

The shop owners claimed that the loss caused by the fire could go up to Tk 3.5 crore.

Local lawmaker Md Mahbubur Rahman visited the spot in the morning and said he will give Tk 7,000, three bundles of CI sheet and 30 kgs of rice to each victim as soon as possible.

Attack on Rabi Das community: 20 sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

One Sunil Rabi Das filed a case yesterday on charge of attacking the houses of Rabi Das community in Gouripur upazila of the district early Monday.

Some 20 people including four named ones -- Billal Hossain, 22, Rubel Mia, 23, Apu, 21, and Mahbubur Rahman, 22, were made accused in the case, Delwar Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Gouripur Police Station, said, adding that police will take action against the culprits.

"A group of local youths attacked on our houses in Gobindapur Bazar area of Moilakanda union under Gouripur early Monday," Sunil said.

"We recently started extending our dwelling houses for well accommodation of some 15 members but some local youths asked us not to extend the houses on the land without their permission," alleged Sunil.

"Around 2:00am on Monday, the youths ransacked our houses and looted construction materials including concrete pillars, tin and wood," he said.

Shamsul Alam, a ward member of Moilakanda union, said the community has been living on the land for one and a half centuries and the youths might have made the attack as they did not get any 'financial gain' from the community.

10 injured as AL factions clash

UNB, Jhenidah

At least 10 people were injured yesterday in a factional clash between two groups of ruling Awami League (AL) men over establishing supremacy at Ibrahimpur in Shailakupa.

Shailakupa Police Station OC Alamgir Hossain said the clash occurred around 9:00am between the supporters of Umedpur Union Parishad chairman, also union AL president, Sabdar Hossain Molla and Mizanur Rahman, union Swechhasebak League president, leaving 10 people injured.

Police held three people from the spot, he added.

Rape victim's father seeks further investigation

Earlier medical report found no rape evidence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Father of a rape victim in Baraigram upazila of the district has demanded that a higher medical team examine the earlier medical report that said no evidence was found about the rape.

"On January 24, Mahabur Rahman, 16, son of neighbour Chand Pramanik, raped my nine-year-old daughter at his house," the victim's father said at a press conference on Saturday.

"The girl told the matter to her mother and we brought her to Baraigram Upazila Health Complex. I lodged a case with Baraigram Police Station on February 4," he said.

Police arrested the culprit and during primary investigation, he confessed to

committing the rape, said Shahriar Khan, OC of Baraigram Police Station.

"Dr Shikha Rani, resident medical officer of Baraigram Upazila Health Complex, in the medical test report mentioned that no evidence of rape was found on my daughter's body," said the victim's father.

Investigation officer of the case, sub-inspector Md Tahasinuzzaman of Baraigram Police Station, said, "The victim has given her statement to the court, saying that she was raped. We will send the items of evidence for DNA test in Dhaka and the victim will be sent to Natore Sadar Hospital for further medical test if we get order from the court."

Dr Azizul Islam, civil surgeon of Natore, said, "We will take steps after getting the court order as it is an under trial case."

Santal's body exhumed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The body of a Santal man was exhumed at Singtajari village in Gobindaganj yesterday following a court order.

After inquisition, the body of Ramesh Tudu was sent to Gaibandha Hospital morgue for autopsy to know the cause of his death.

Ramesh was buried under police protection without post mortem while bodies of two other indigenous people were buried after autopsy.

Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) Additional Police Super Anwar Hossain said the incident of attack, ransacking, arson and firing by police and mill owners occurred in 2016 over grabbing land at a prawn farm at the indigenous village in Gobindaganj.



A farmer spreads fertilizer on his tobacco field at Itakhola village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila. Inset, two farmers tend tobacco plants at a field of Udoypur village in Jhenidah Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Tobacco cultivation with govt subsidised fertiliser!

The harmful crop farming falls in Jhenidah

STAR COUNTRY DESK

The government subsidised chemical fertilisers meant for encouraging cultivation of different food crops is also used for tobacco farming as there is apparently no restriction on selling it to the growers of the harmful crop.

Meanwhile, tobacco cultivation sees a gradual decline in Jhenidah.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reports: The availability of subsidised fertilisers for tobacco farmers serves as counterproductive to the government's agriculture and health departments' motivational programmes against the cultivation and use of tobacco.

In the ongoing rabi season from October to March, the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) has set a target of Boro paddy cultivation on 84,279 hectares and other crops like potato, maize, wheat, mustard, vegetables and pulses on around 60,000 hectares of land in Nilphamari, said Keramat Ali, additional deputy director of DAE.

"To meet fertiliser requirement throughout this season, the government has allocated 5,881 tonnes of triple super phosphate (TSP), 9,018 tonnes of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), 8,530 tonnes of murate of potash (MoP) and 29,211 tonnes of nitrogenated urea," he said.

The government is giving 35 percent to 40 percent subsidy against the fertilisers and accordingly reduced price of a kg of TSP stands at only Tk 22, DAP at Tk 25, MoP at Tk 15 and urea at Tk 16, said Abdul Wahed, district unit president of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA).

"Tobacco has been cultivated on 3,560 hectares of land in the district this year and availability of subsidised fertiliser is partly responsible for its cultivation in such a big area," said Atowar Rahman, coordinator of local non-governmental organisation 'Camp' that launches campaign against tobacco.

"Fertiliser dealers welcome tobacco farmers, as they buy it for ready cash unlike poor farmers of other crops who purchase fertiliser on credit and pay after the crop harvest," said Saiful Islam, 45, a tobacco farmer of Borovita village in Kishoreganj upazila.

Investigation by this correspondent found that several tobacco companies are engaged in motivating farmers to cultivate the crop in the area.

"We sell fertiliser to anyone coming to buy it as there is no restriction," said Taposh Saha, BFA's district unit secretary.

Abul Kashem Azad, deputy director of district DAE, said, "A section of tobacco farmers procure

fertilisers from dealers who bring it from other districts where it is surplus."

Our Jhenidah Correspondent adds: Tobacco farming in the district sees a gradual decrease, despite financial and other supports by tobacco companies for its growth.

The tobacco cultivation area in Jhenidah was 700 hectares in 2015-16 fiscal year, 660 hectares in 2016-17 and 477 hectares this year, said sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

However, in Sadar upazila, tobacco farming increased to 150 hectares from last year's 110 hectares and in Harinakundo upazila, to 145 hectares from last year's 95 hectares, they said.

Several farmers of Sadar upazila said tobacco farming in the area has increased with the help of British American Tobacco Company.

"The company provides loan before tobacco cultivation and ensures cash payment after its harvest. They also provide fertilisers and other medicines during the cultivation period," said Lutfur Rahman, a tobacco grower of Jorapukur village.

Abdul Aziz of Pobohati village said he has cultivated tobacco on 3.5 bighas of land at a cost of Tk 1.75 lakh and expects to get Tk 3.50 lakh by selling the produce this year.

Flower industry shows promise in Gaibandha

K M REZAUL HOQUE with ANDREW EAGLE

After passing his Secondary School Certificate in 2009, Liton Sarker from Purbo Chaporhati village in Gaibandha's Sundarganj upazila struggled to find his place in the world. Despite knocking on many an employer's door, he found no job. It was only when he decided to grow flowers on his father's small plot that not only the field but also his life began to bloom. Now a successful flower farmer, Liton is an inspiration to others.

Unemployment was miserable," Liton recalls. "It plunged me into a state of deep disappointment. At home and within my friend circle I was disregarded. I lost all hope."

"My father only has two decimals," he explains. "It's not enough land to meet the food requirements for our family. We were trapped in poverty with no way out; and because of that I couldn't continue my education either."

"With nothing else to do I started a nursery, growing timber and fruit tree saplings," Liton says. "The profit margins were low and earnings were poor, which was especially frustrating because there was a lot of work involved in looking after the saplings. Eventually I gave up."

Then, three years ago, Liton went to visit relatives in Jessore. The change in scenery brought a new idea: to try growing flowers.

Starting with marigolds and hybrid roses on 60 decimals of leased land, Liton got to work. Before long, his garden was noticed by flower traders. Soon he was earning a monthly profit of Tk 12,000.

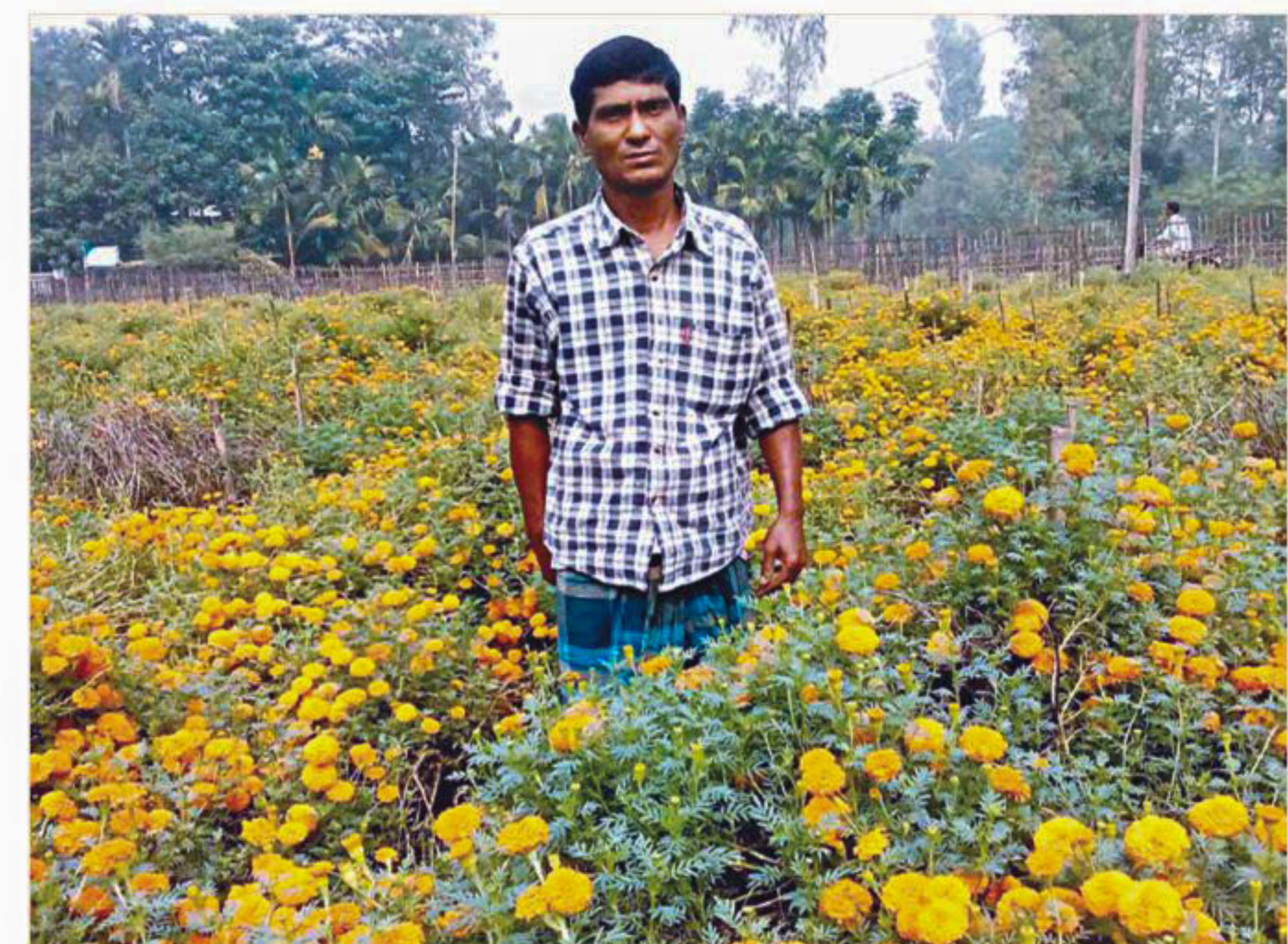
"I've had no training," Liton says. "I learnt from trial and error. Flowers do well with intensive labour, pesticides and fertiliser." He has since established a second garden on 62 decimals in Dharmapur Bazar.

Liton's efforts have encouraged others, bringing a new farming industry to Sundarganj. "I'm not an expert but I share what knowledge I have," Liton says. "If I ever have the chance to be trained I'm sure I could do even better."

"The soil in Sundarganj is favourable for floriculture," says the upazila's agriculture officer Rashedul Islam. "Every year the number of flower gardens is increasing as people realise the profits that can be made."

It's a nascent local industry buoyed by steadily rising demand. There are not less than seven florist shops in the area of Sundarganj Bazar which trade in flowers year-round.

"Demand for flowers is always there," says one florist, Farman Mia. "Flowers are needed for religious ceremonies including weddings. Of course, demand peaks on national holidays including Pehela Baishakh, New Year's Day and Valentine's Day."



Flower grower Liton Sarker at his land in Purbo Chaporhati village of Gaibandha's Sundarganj upazila.

PHOTO: STAR