

Sirajganj ex-BNP lawmaker lands in Jail

Bail prayer rejected in six cases

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Sirajganj court on Wednesday sent former BNP lawmaker M Akbar Ali to jail, rejecting his bail prayer in six arson and vandalism cases.

Earlier, Akbar Ali, a member of BNP central committee, surrendered to the district Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court, seeking bail in 13 arson and vandalism cases but the court granted his bail prayer in seven cases, said his lawyer Rafique Sarkar.

Akbar Ali, who was elected lawmaker from Sirajganj-4 constituency in 1991 and 2001, is also the president of Ullapara upazila unit of BNP.

Hanging body found in Jashore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police recovered a body hanging from a mango tree at Krishnabati village in Monirampur upazila of Jashore on Wednesday night.

The deceased was identified as Anil Biswas, 75, son of Bola Biswas of the upazila.

Sunil Biswas, a relative of the deceased, said Anil was not available at home from noon on Wednesday. Relatives and neighbours searched for him and found his body hanging from a tree near his house at around 9:30pm and informed police.

Monirampur Khedapara camp police in-charge SI Rabiu Islam said they are investigating the incident. The body was handed over to Anil's relatives, the SI added.



Labourers cutting off topsoil from a farmland for manufacturing bricks in the brick field at Purbo Nawdabansh village in Nawdabansh union under Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: STAR

Farmlands lose fertile topsoil to brick fields in Lalmonirhat

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The topsoil of vast areas of farmlands in the agriculture based northern district is being used for manufacturing bricks, which is having a harmful impact on agriculture and the environment.

Farmers are aware in this regard, but they are forced to sell the topsoil of their farmlands to brick kiln owners.

Around 40 brick kilns have been set up in farmlands of five upazilas in the district, violating the government rule, and they all use the topsoil of the farmlands to make bricks.

Collection of topsoil from farmlands surrounding brick kilns begins after harvesting of Aman paddy and continues for around one and a half months.

Rangpur Department of Environment (DoE) acting Assistant Director Mezbah Ul-Alam told this correspondent that

lifting of topsoil has a bad impact on the environment as farmers apply too much chemical fertiliser and pesticide on the crops in these lands. "Chemical fertilisers and pesticides flow into nearby waterbodies from farmlands and pollute the water," he said.

"With the hope of getting expected production of crop from land without topsoil, I applied overdose of fertiliser and pesticide, but the result is not as expected," said Sudhir Chandra Roy, 48, a farmer of Purbo Nawdabansh village in Hatibandha upazila. "I am very disappointed with the productivity on four bighas of land after selling the topsoil," he said. "I used to harvest three crops per year, but now I get one crop in a year," he said, adding that he was forced to sell the topsoil three years ago.

Delowar Hossain, 62, a farmer of Dhawla village in Kaliganj upazila, is

also suffering since he sold the topsoil from his four bighas of farmland five years ago. "I have to remove excess stagnant water while growing paddy, otherwise weeds prevent the growth of paddy. The land has become uneven and less fertile since I sold the soil," he added.

Lalmonirhat Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Deputy Director Bidhubhushon Roy told this correspondent that around 3,000 bighas of farmlands lose their topsoil every year for manufacturing of bricks. "We can only build awareness among farmers for not selling topsoil but we cannot take legal action against the owners of brick kilns," he said. "Topsoil is the portion of soil that can be turned over by a ploughshare. Generally, top soil contains all the nutrients and organic materials that crops need to grow," he added.

Rejecting the allegation of creating

pressure on the farmers to sell topsoil, Lutfar Rahman, a brick kiln owner in Hatibandha upazila, said, "We purchase topsoil from the farmers as we need it for manufacturing bricks. We never face any objection from the agriculture department regarding the matter. Farmers are interested in selling topsoil from their farmlands."

Mamunur Rashid, Agriculture and Environment Coordinator of non-governmental organisation RDRS Bangladesh, told this correspondent that large-scale use of topsoil from farmlands for manufacturing bricks badly affects agriculture and harms the environment. He urged the authorities concerned to take immediate measures for stopping the harmful practice.

Farmers in the district urged the government to take steps for protecting topsoil from the clutches of brick kiln owners.

Piren Slan's death anniv observed

The Garo rights activist was killed 15 years ago

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

People of Garo community in Madhupur upazila yesterday paid their homage to the anti-Eco Park movement's slain indigenous leader Piren Slan on the occasion of his 15th death anniversary.

Different organisations of Garo students arranged various programmes including candle lighting and placing wreaths at the grave and memorial plaque of Piren Slan in Jalabada area, special prayer and discussion meeting.

The organisations include Bangladesh Garo Student Association (Bagachas), Garo Student Federation and Bondoria Mirkababu Youth Organisation.

Members of Bangladesh Garo Student Association led by its central unit President Jhon Zeta and General Secretary Alik Mree also met with Utpal Nokrek, who became lame due to firing of the foresters during the movement, and expressed their gratitude to him for his contribution.

The Garo student leaders said although Piren Slan sacrificed his life for protecting existence of Madhupur Garos, the rights of the indigenous community could not be realised so far.

Mentionable, indigenous youth Piren Slan of Joynagachha village was killed and 25 agitating indigenous people, including women and children, were injured when police and forest guards opened fire on an anti-Eco Park procession in Jalabada area of Madhupur on January 3, 2004.

Two garment workers rescued from abductors

Eight alleged perpetrators arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-14) rescued two abducted garment workers from Trishal upazila on Wednesday night.

At a press briefing yesterday, Rab-14 commander Maj Shiblee Sadique said garment workers Rakibul Islam Rakib, 26, and Mina Khatun, 30, were abducted from Trishal Bus Stand area on Tuesday evening.

They were kept at an abandoned house near Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Trishal and the abductors demanded Tk 10 lakh as ransom from the victims' families.

Later, family members of the victims informed Rab. Rab raided the area around 9:00pm on Wednesday and rescued the

abducted garment workers.

Rab also arrested eight members of the gang, including its leader Rubel Mia, 27. The other arrestees are Shahidul Alam, 35, Mozammel Haque, 25, Shuvo Mia, 40, Khalil, 26, Noor Mohammad, 20, Babu, 23, and Mizanur Rahman, 25. They hail from different areas of Trishal.

During interrogation by Rab, they confessed their involvement in the abduction. They were handed over to Trishal Police Station yesterday and a case was lodged.

The arrestees are being interrogated at the police station, said Trishal Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Azizur Rahman.

The interrogation was continuing as of filing of this report at 5:00pm.

4 trafficked boys return home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Four Bangladeshi boys, who were trafficked to India two to three years ago, returned home through Hili border check-post in Hakimpur upazila of the district yesterday.

The returnees are Zafar Isqbal, 12, son of Jamal Hossain of Laksham upazila in Cumilla, Mehdi Hasan, 17, son of Hasan Mahmud of Melandah upazila in Jamalpur, Rabiu Islam, 16, son of Abu Bakar Siddique of Chakoria upazila in Cox's Bazar, and Jahan Mardi, 18, son of Mojibar Mardi of Joypurhat Sadar upazila.

In Charge of Hili Immigration Post Abdus Sabur said the four boys were trafficked to India through different borders about two to three years ago.

BSF members and Indian police later caught the boys from different areas and sent them to a correction centre in Balurghat under South Dinajpur district in the Indian state of Assam.

After completion of the necessary legal process between the two neighbouring countries, Indian Immigration Police handed them over to their Bangladesh counterparts yesterday, Sabur said.



Shirina, left, at her vegetable field at Maynakuti village in Rangpur Sadar.

Shirina, a role model for female farmers

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Housewife Shirina Begum, who set an example of producing bumper crops, especially vegetables, on small land, has now become a role model for many female growers at her native Maynakuti village in Rangpur Sadar upazila.

Seeing her success, around 120 women of the village are now engaged in crop farming and are getting regular suggestions from Shirina on farming of various crops.

Although thirty-five-year-old Shirina, who married Rashedul Islam about 18 years ago, used to help her husband in crop farming after their marriage, she could not engage fully due to other household works.

After her husband Rashedul had a brain stroke and lost his physical and mental balance in 2014, she fully engaged herself with crop farming to maintain her four-member family.

Besides her ailing husband, she has to bear the responsibility of her college going daughter Towfika Akther Prity and son Towhidul Islam, a Class VI student.

In a bid to support her family, she first started crop farming on only 50 decimals of land belonging to her husband and then took lease of another 100 decimals from two neighbours Sirajul Islam and Rezaul Karim for Tk 45,000 per year and started to produce vegetables and vegetable seeds there.

In 2015, she enlisted with Geodata Based Information Services

(GEOBIS), a project of Lal Teer Seed Ltd, for advisory services.

After the enlistment, she started receiving advice through her mobile phone on proper cultivation such as right sowing techniques, how to treat the soil, transplanting, preventing pest attack and harvesting the produce.

She subscribed to the SMS service of GEOBIS so that she could receive weather forecast report. It also connected her with the Call Centre Service to listen to the expert's advice.

"Prior to enlisting as a beneficiary of GEOBIS I had a little profit, but now I am getting a good profit every season," Shirina said.

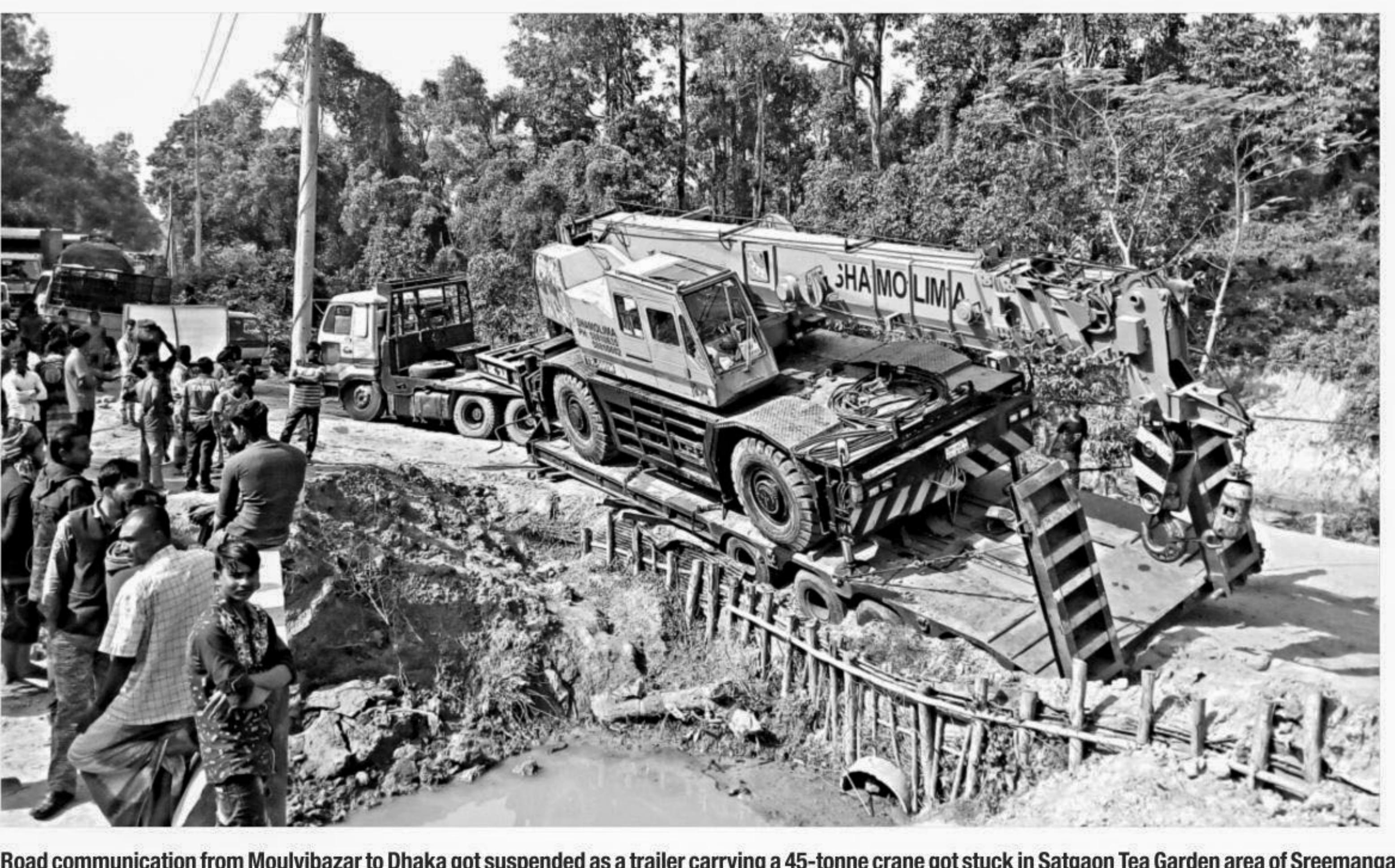
"I cultivated paddy on 75 decimals of land, brinjal on 15 decimals, bitter gourd on 50 decimals and bottle gourd on 10 decimals. I am getting Tk 15,000 profit every month," she said, adding that she is now able to support her sick husband and two children.

Under her leadership, many women growers of her village are now receiving advice on cultivation of different crops and getting weather alert.

Shamina Begum, 38, of the village, said she started crop farming after seeing Shirina's success.

"Shirina first showed us the way of earning through crop farming, especially vegetables, and we are self-reliant now," another woman Morshed Begum, 42, said.

"I am getting a good profit from selling vegetable seeds to Lal Teer Seed Ltd. I hope our children will bring a bright future for the family," Shirina said.



Road communication from Moulvibazar to Dhaka got suspended as a trailer carrying a 45-tonne crane got stuck in Satgaon Tea Garden area of Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar around 2:00pm yesterday. The communication later resumed after the authorities removed the barrier in the evening.

PHOTO: STAR