



Tobacco farming continues on the land belonging to the government-run Leprosy Hospital in Nilphamari for years, thanks to the callousness of the growers and negligence of the authorities concerned.

PHOTO: STAR

# Tobacco farming on govt hospital land

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Any health-conscious person visiting the government-run Leprosy Hospital in Nilphamari may notice an irony that a large chunk of land belonging to the hospital is being used for growing tobacco.

The piece of land, where tobacco is being grown, is right around the corner of the 20-bed hospital compound located in Notkhana village of Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

When medical science and physicians at home and abroad alike are advising all to refrain from smoking and consuming tobacco products, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) seems to remain oblivious to the fact that the harmful crop is being grown on the very land of a hospital that the DGHS owns and operates.

During a visit to the area, it was found that nearly seven to eight bighas of land between the hospital's staff quarter and its boundary wall is being used for tobacco farming.

Locals wishing to remain unnamed alleged

that two individuals named Ekramul Islam Kamrul and Tahauddin, both related to an influential leader of Awami League's Palashbari union unit, operate the farm by paying Tk eight to ten thousand per bigha of land in bribe to the civil surgeon's office in Nilphamari.

Asked by this correspondent, Ekramul said, "We've been growing tobacco and other crops on unproductive land of the health department for years, with the consent from the authorities concerned."

Nur Islam, a farmer in the area, said, "Since farming of tobacco pollutes the environment and its consumption causes illness, we had sent written complaints to the civil surgeon's office, requesting it to take action against the tobacco farm. Years went by, but there's still no action against it."

"Chemical fertiliser and pesticides used in the tobacco farm seep through into surrounding farmland and affect the fertility," said Faguna Barman, another farmer, who lives next to the tobacco farm.

He also said he tried protesting, but the

neighbouring farm operators are too powerful to care about the others.

Asked whether Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) could play a role in stopping tobacco farming, DAE Deputy Director Abul Kashem Azad said they observe World Tobacco-free Day on May 31 every year to create awareness on the harm tobacco brings on human health as well as on the environment.

When asked why the hospital authorities are allowing the tobacco farm on its property, Dr Khorshed Alam, consultant at the hospital, said he did not have any authority over the matter and the civil surgeon's office was notified of it before for necessary action.

After this correspondent raised the issue of allowing a tobacco farm on the hospital land in exchange for money, Civil Surgeon Ranjit Kumar Barman refuted the allegation, saying, "I had no information about any tobacco cultivation on the land belonging to the Leprosy Hospital. Since I'm aware of it now, I'll take action against the unlawful farming."

## Man arrested over acid attack on ex-wife, her sister

*Badly burnt victims under treatment at hospital*

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Police on Friday night arrested a man for throwing acid on his ex-wife and sister-in-law in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj in January.

Chandan Kumar Chakraborty, officer-in-charge of Madhabpur Police Station, said they arrested the man, Mominul Mia, 26, of Sayek village under Nasirnagar of Brahmanbaria, after raiding Dhormondol village in the upazila.

Mominul was made prime accused in a case that was filed over throwing acid on the two sisters -- Habiba Akhter, 20, and Ayesha Akhter, 10 -- during their sleep in their house in Purba Baghasura village on January 25.

Brother of the victims filed the case with the police station the next day.

According to the case statement, Habiba's face and Ayesha's hands and other parts of the body were burned in the acid attack. The attackers broke the window grille of the house before throwing the substance onto the victims.

Kader Mia, uncle of the two sisters, said Mominul might have done it out of anger as Habiba divorced him four months ago.

Habiba and Ayesha are now undergoing treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

## Ex-UP member killed in clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A former union parishad (UP) member was killed in a clash between two rival groups at Pailarkandi village in Habiganj's Baniachong upazila on Friday.

The deceased was Omar Ali, son of Raja Mia of the village, and former member of Pailarkandi UP.

Police and locals said there was a longstanding conflict between Omar and incumbent UP member Liton Mia over establishing supremacy in the area.

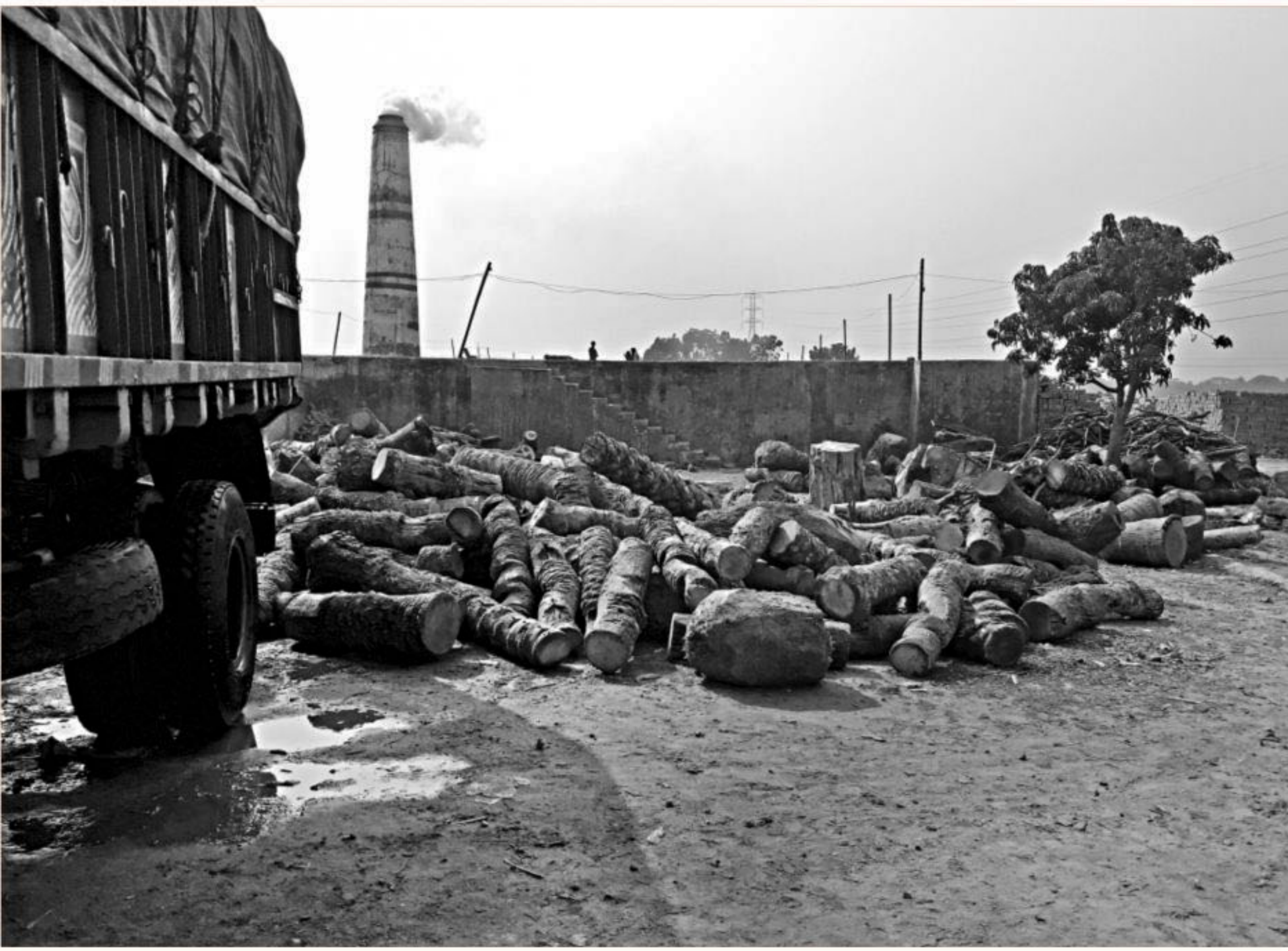
On Friday evening, the men of Omar and Liton attacked each other with lethal weapons, leaving at least 11 people from both sides injured over collecting money for organising a waz mahfil (religious gathering) in the area. The injured were taken to Habiganj Sadar Hospital where Omar died.

Police rushed to the spot and fired 10 rubber bullets and four tear gas shells to bring the situation under control and later arrested two men from the area, said Habiganj Model Police Station OC Mohammad Sahidur Rahman.



The main thoroughfare in front of Thakurgaon Government Boys' High School in the district town sees very thin presence of vehicles and pedestrians as hours-long drizzle during the ongoing winter paralysed life in the area yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Logs from date trees are kept for burning on the premises of a brick kiln in Jhenidah Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

## Date trees under threat in Jhenidah

*Being used as fuel of choice in brick kilns*

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Date trees are on the verge of extinction due to its random use in a number of brick kilns in the district.

If the situation goes unbridled like this, the trees will be extinct one day.

Jhenidah Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) could not give statistics of date trees. But huge numbers of date trees are being felled indiscriminately for burning bricks in the kilns.

Jahid Hasan, in-charge of Jhenidah District Nazir office, said there are 14 registered and 123 unregistered brick kilns in the district.

On a recent visit to a number of brick kilns, this correspondent found huge quantity of date tress piled up at each brick kiln premises. The trees are being used as fuel for burning bricks.

Monjurul Alam, a manager of Paul Brick Kiln in Sadar upazila, said they purchased the date trees at Tk 90 per maund.

Around 30,000 maunds are needed to burn one lakh bricks, he said, adding that a single brick kiln can produce three to four lakh bricks in each season.

Farmer Jahidul Islam of Mundia village in Kaliganj upazila said they sell date trees at a high price.

Date tree maintains ecological balance, said an environmental activist.

Abdur Razzak Nasim of Swadhin Jibon Paribesh Sangstha in Sirajganj said molasses prepared from date juice is more nutritious than sugarcane molasses.

Birds enjoy date juice. Farmers sell date trees for lack of awareness. The government should make the farmers aware about the importance of date trees, said Nasim.

Assistant District Magistrate of Jhenidah Sadek Hossain said they will look into the matter and take necessary steps in this regard.

## Thief suspect beaten dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

A middle aged man, suspected of being a thief, was beaten to death by villagers at Diakul village in Sadar upazila of the district on Friday night.

The identity of the deceased could not be known as of filing of this report around 6:00pm yesterday.

Three people came to the village on a trowler and entered the house of farmer Tofazzal Hossain on Friday night, police quoted the villagers as saying.

Suspecting them as cattle lifters, Tofazzal cried for help. Villagers encircled the house, caught one of the thief suspects and beat him dead on the spot.

Police sent the body to Jhalakathi Sadar Hospital for autopsy yesterday, said Sadar Police Station OC Shonit Kumar Gayen.

## College boy murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

The throat-slit body of a youth was found in a ditch at Munshirtaluk village in Ujirpur upazila of the district yesterday morning.

The deceased, Imran Hossain, 24, son of Sarwar Hossain of the village, was a degree examinee from Bhabanipur Taheruddin Degree College.

Police sent the body to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital for autopsy, said Ujirpur Police Station OC Shishir Kumar Paul.

Police quoted the victim's family members as saying that Imran had gone out of his house. After getting a phone call during the interval of Bangladesh Premier League cricket on Friday night.

## MURDER OF COLLEGE GIRL

## Boyfriend arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

Police arrested a youth for his alleged involvement in the murder of college student Benjir Jahan Mukta, 19, who was stabbed to death allegedly by her boyfriend in Barikaran area of Nalchhity last Sunday.

The arrestee, Sohag, son of Sobhan Mir of Nasnapara village, is a worker at a polythene factory in the capital, Jhalakathi Additional Superintendent of Police Jahangir Alam said.

Following a friendship on Facebook, the duo fell in love about a year ago and since then they were in touch over mobile phone.

"I gave her a smartphone so that she can contact me easily. I also used to send her Tk 3,000 every month," said Sohag at a press briefing in Jhalakathi on Friday.

Recently, Mukta was avoiding Sohag when the latter put pressure on her for

marriage, police said, quoting the arrestee.

Being suspicious, Sohag started to follow Mukta's activities and soon came to know that Mukta was chatting with different boys on Facebook at the same time.

"Finally, I decided to meet her and if she failed to give satisfactory answer I would kill her, Sohag said, adding that as per plan he bought a knife from Chawkbazar and boarded a Jhalakathi-bound launch on February 2.

"The next morning I met Mukta on her way to the college and at one stage of altercation I took away her cellphone," Sohag said, adding that Mukta again met him the same afternoon and was repeatedly asking me to return the mobile phone.

Being annoyed at her, at one stage, he stabbed Mukta in the neck with the knife, leaving her dead on the spot before fleeing the spot.



An under-construction bridge collapsed at remote Roambo village in Bandarban's Alikadom upazila over a week ago. Inset, workers remove remains of the broken part of bridge.

PHOTO: STAR