



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A hill area of Lathitila forest in Juri upazila of Moulvibazar lies barren, a house is built at a cleared spot of a hill and callous people cut the bottom part of a big tree to cause its eventual death.



PHOTO: STAR

# Biodiversity under threat as settlers clearing forest

Environmentalists demand steps to save the 5631-acre Lathitila forest in Moulvibazar’s Juri upazila

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Lathitila forest in Juri upazila of Moulvibazar faces a serious threat as settlers continue clearing forest areas for fruit cultivation and fish farming there. The forest comprising 5631.4 acres of land is in an area covered with hillocks. During the Pakistan period, 30 landless families were allowed to live in the ‘forest village’ for taking care of the forest and each family got two and a half acres of land to grow crops for their living, said officials of the forest department. Now the number of settler families

has increased to 500. Visiting the spot recently, this correspondent found dwelling houses at Lalchhara, Rupachhara, Hayachhara and Champatila in the forest. Lemon, orange, banana and ginger are cultivated there. A few fish farms have also been made. There were remains of various species of dead or dying trees in Rupachhara and Champatila. “A section of people cut off the roots of forest trees, making them unable to take nutrients from soil. As the trees gradually die, various fruit trees are planted there to occupy the land,” said

a youth seeking anonymity. “They apply this technique, locally called ‘ringing’, as the forest department will file cases if the live trees are felled directly. Some forest officials are involved in the process,” he said. Forest department officials on different occasions assisted in the construction of houses, cultivating fruit and fish, and stealing trees in the forest, said several other local residents, also seeking anonymity. “Due to loss of habitat and food crisis, wild animals often come down to the locality. Owls were seen in Champatila even two or three years ago.

Now they are hardly visible as trees are not that available. There are occasional incidents of deer hunting in the forest,” said a local youth. “We use the ringing method to vacate areas in and around the forest so that fruit trees can be planted there. Many people are growing fruits or cultivating fish in the forest area for living,” said Abdur Razzak, a headman of ‘forest villagers’ in Lathitila. This correspondent saw a few hanumans at Champatila. Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon’s Sylhet chapter, said the forest is

gradually shrinking and its biodiversity faces threat due to human settlement and increase in commercial fruit cultivation. People living in the area have to be rehabilitated elsewhere to save the forest, he said. Abdul Mannan, range officer of the forest department in Juri upazila, said, “Nobody took our permission for cultivation of fruits and fish in Lathitila forest. Two or three months ago, I removed two houses that were built illegally.” He claimed that no forest department men were involved in harming the forest.

## BGB recovers body from Chuadanga border

Our CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday recovered the body of a Bangladeshi national, who was allegedly beaten dead by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Tuesday night, from Thakurpur border in Chuadanga’s Damurhuda upazila. The victim was identified as Mohammad Abdullah, 45, son of Golam Rasul of Thakurpur village in the upazila. Deceased’s younger brother Habibur Rahman said a BSF team from Murshidabad’s Maluapara camp chased Abdullah near border pillar No 89-90 when a group of Bangladeshi men were bringing in cattle from India through Thakurpur border on Tuesday night. BSF troops later caught Abdullah, but other members of the group somehow managed to flee the scene, Habibur said. Being informed by the villagers, BGB members recovered Habibur’s body from the border area inside Bangladesh territory yesterday morning and handed it over to Damurhuda police, who sent it to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital for autopsy, Officer in Charge of Damurhuda Police Station Sukumar Biswas said. Habibur claimed that Abdullah was later beaten dead by the BSF members, but BGB officials did not confirm it. Director of BGB 6 Battalion in Chuadanga Lt Col Sazzad Hossain said they were looking into the matter.

## Villagers make artistic high structure for Eid congregation

People in Sirajganj’s Ullapara built the unique eidgah as the ground gets flooded in monsoon

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPI, Pabna

People of Narashinghpara, Shukolhaat and Shuklai villages of Boropangashi union in Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj offered the Eid-ul-Azha prayer on a large artistic concrete platform, built through their own initiative for using as eidgah, at Shuklai village on Sunday. The Eid congregational prayer in the area was held on boats or roads for the last couple of years as the lone eidgah for the three villages goes under floodwater during the monsoon in

June and remains inundated for four to five months, said Afzal Hossain, president of the eidgah management committee. As a way out, the villagers took an initiative for constructing the eidgah venue on pillars, he added. “The locals bought 13 decimals of land at Shuklai village. After collecting Tk 20 lakh through subscription from the villagers in 2015, they started work for construction of the eidgah floor on pillars,” said Md Mostafa Zahangir, a respected villager.

“Eventually the fund rose to Tk 56 lakh as many others donated for the purpose. The construction of the special eidgah was completed in June this year and a large number of people of the three villages offered the Eid-ul-Azha prayer here on Sunday,” said Mostafa, also a Dhaka-based journalist and writer. The villagers have taken a good initiative to solve their problem by establishing a unique eidgah, said Md Abul Kalam Azad, member of Boropangashi union parishad.



The artistic concrete floor eidgah built on pillars at Shuklai village in Sirajganj’s Ullapara.

PHOTO: STAR



Locals caught this runaway buffalo, after weakening it with the help of tranquillizer, at a marshy land of Tangail’s Bhuapur upazila on Tuesday and later handed it over to the owner, Arifur Rahman of Jugihati village in adjacent Ghatail upazila. The day before, the buffalo fled after injuring 11 people of the village when Arifur aided by others was trying to slaughter it as a sacrificial animal on Monday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Siblings among 4 drown in 3 dists

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Four people, including two siblings, drowned in different upazilas of Shariatpur, Thakurgaon and Gazipur on Tuesday. Our Faridpur correspondent reported that: Two siblings drowned at Noapara Munshikandi village in Shariatpur’s Naria upazila on Tuesday noon. The deceased are Sharif Bepary, 17, son of Abdul Haque Bepary, and his nine-year-old sister Mahfuza Akter. Noapara Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Rashed Azgar said the siblings went to take bath in the nearby Padma river around 12:30pm and drowned. On information, separate teams of police and divers went to the spot and recovered the bodies from the river

around 7:15pm. Deceased’s father Haque said he along with his family lives in Dhaka and came to the village to celebrate the Eid. Our Thakurgaon correspondent adds: A seven-year-old boy drowned in a pond in Sadar upazila on Tuesday afternoon. The deceased, Al Shahrier Alok, son of Saddam Hossain of at Dakkhin Jagannathpur village, was a Class II student at Sonali Shoisshab School. Neighbours said Alok and one of his cousins went to collect Kadam flower from a tree on the bank of a pond nearby their house. At one stage, while climbing the tree, the minor boy lost his grip and slipped into the pond water and drowned. Family members rescued him and took him to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital where the doctors declared

him dead. Away in Gazipur, a college boy drowned after falling from the roof of an engine boat in the Turag river on Tuesday night, reports our correspondent. The victim, Rajib Mia, 19, son of Abul Mia of Kumarjani area in Tangail’s Mirzapur upazila, was an Intermediate second year student at Mirzapur Government Degree College. Although divers conducted separate search operations but failed to recover the body as of filing this report around 7:00pm. Deceased’s friend Amir Hamza said Rajib fell from the roof of an engine boat, carrying 49 people from a picnic at Mirpur Botanical Garden in the capital, while they were returning around 9:00pm and drowned due to heavy current.

## 3 die, 5 missing in Jamuna capsizes

STAR COUNTRY DESK

At least three people died and five others went missing in separate boat capsizes in the Jamuna river in Sirajganj and Bogura yesterday and the day before, report our correspondents. A woman drowned and two others went missing as a boat carrying a bridal party capsized in the Jamuna river in Sirajganj’s Kazipur upazila yesterday. The deceased Renu Begum, 60, was wife of Javed Ali of Jamuria village Sarishabani upazila of Jamalpur. Kazipur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Jahid Hasan Siddiquee said the incident occurred when a boat from Jamuria village was going to Bishurigasa village in Kazipur capsized in the Jamuna river yesterday due to strong current, leaving Renu drowned and two others missing. Away in Bogura, two women died while three others went missing when a boat capsized in the Jamuna river in Sariakandi upazila on Tuesday. The deceased are Johura Begum, 30, wife of Yousuf Ali of Jamalpur, and Amena Begum, 55, wife of Monser Ali of Bogura’s Sariakandi upazila, Sub Inspector of Sariakandi Police Station Subrata Kumar Ghosh said. A boat, with 40 passengers on board, capsized in the river while going to Kalitola Ghat in Sariakandi upazila from Manikdair shoal, the SI added.

## Madrasa girl, couple saved from abduction bid

Four alleged culprits held in Patuakhali, Thakurgaon

STAR COUNTRY DESK

A madrasa girl and a couple were rescued from abductors in Patuakhali and Thakurgaon on Tuesday and yesterday. Locals rescued a madrasa girl from kidnappers and caught an alleged perpetrator from Kalikapur area in Patuakhali town around 11:30am yesterday, reports our correspondent. The alleged kidnapper, Md Zahid, 25, of Kalata area in the town and a labourer of a brick kiln, was handed over to police. When the girl, an eighth grader, was returning home from a nearby shop Zahid and two other youths forcibly took her into a battery-run auto-rickshaw after tying her mouth with a piece of cloth and started towards Patuakhali bus stand, said locals and police. The girl jumped from the vehicle at Chhhto Chowrasta. Hearing her cry, locals rushed in and caught Zahid while two others manage to flee. Locals brought the rescued girl to Patuakhali General Hospital and handed over Zahid to police. Farique Matobbar, father of the girl, said, “Some days back Zahid borrowed Tk 10,000 from me and a quarrel occurred with him over the matter. Afterwards he tried to kidnap my daughter.” Md Eusuf, sub inspector of Patuakhali Police Station, said lawful steps will be

taken if the victim or his family files a case. Our Thakurgaon Correspondent reports: Police arrested three people in front of Amader Bazar in Thakurgaon town on Tuesday afternoon while being abducted a couple. The arrestees are Hiru Biswas, 18, son of Gouro Biswas, Bidhan Das, 14, son of Bikash Das of Asrampara, and Mohammad Islam, 35, son of Abdul Mazid of Collegepara in Thakurgaon municipality. Chitto Ranjan Roy, inspector of Thakurgaon Police Station, told this correspondent Sourav Chandra Barman and his wife were waiting for a three-wheeler beside Thakurgaon Government Boys’ High School ground around 2:30pm to return home in Atwary upazila of Panchagarh when four or five people including Hiru Biswas and Islam forcibly dragged them onto an easy-bike (three-wheeler) and started running the vehicle fast. As the couple screamed for help, people stopped the bike in Amader Bazar area. Informed, police rescued the couple and arrested the trio while another abductor fled away. Sourav Chandra Barman filed a case with the police station accusing Hiru Biswas, 18, Bidhan Das, 14, Islam, 45, and Rudra, 18, SI Chitto Ranjan Roy said. “The arrestees were sent to jail on Wednesday through a Thakurgaon court,” he said.

### Doa Mahfil of Khondaker Muzammel Huq



Khondaker Muzammel Huq, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Grameen Bank, passed away on August 8<sup>th</sup> 2019. A Doa Mahfil will be held at his residence baad Asr on Friday August 16<sup>th</sup>, Building 39, Road 11, Dhanmondi. Friends and well-wishers are requested to attend.

**The family**

D-202