



A large ditch in front of Bati Government Primary School in Saghata upazila of Gaibandha remains a nuisance for students and teachers.

PHOTO: STAR

Large ditch on school premises poses nuisance

Erosion caused by rushing water makes the ditch wider

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Students and teachers of Bati Government Primary School in Saghata upazila have to face problem due to appearance of a large ditch in front of the school.

During the rains, the ditch remains full of water and students' attendance at the school sees a drastic fall as it becomes difficult to cross the spot.

Rushing water from a nearby canal causes erosion there, making the ditch wider.

It is essential to construct a bridge over the ditch to ease children's entrance and exit round the year, said a student's guardian.

"During the last rainy season, the deep ditch remained full of water and so, many guardians like me prevented the children from going to school," said Jahedul Islam, another guardian.

Abdul Mannan, headmaster of the school, said, "The school authority could not construct a bridge here as most of the ditch area is under the ownership of other people. The ditch cannot not be filled with soil either, because it is linked with the canal under a nearby rail bridge."

DEMAND FOR PRINCIPAL'S REMOVAL Class boycott on

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Students of Bagerhat Government Women College continued boycotting classes for the fourth consecutive day yesterday, demanding removal of the principal bringing allegation of corruption and irregularities against him.

They staged demonstration in front of the principal's office on the college premises.

The students are demonstrating since Wednesday to press home their demand.

They also alleged that the principal often misbehaved with the students and teachers.

The students also threatened to take to the highway if the principal is not removed by today.

Some students said the principal threatened resident students of the college hostel to cancel allocation of their seats if they join the protest programme.

Contacted, Principal Dr SM Rafiqul Islam refuted the allegations brought against him.

The principal said he called the meeting of the Academic Council yesterday to address the ongoing crisis of the college, but no teachers attended the meeting.

If the teachers and students do not attend classes regularly from today, he will inform the ministry concerned to take action in this regard, said the principal.

Meanwhile, supporting the students' movement, the teachers said if the principal is not removed within 72 hours, they will not attend any academic activities of the college.

Growing popularity of taro

Farmer Nuton Mondal in Dumuria upazila is in talks with a Korean buyer to set up a processing factory in Khulna

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

The mammoth 10 feet tall pani kochu (taro) plants are a sight to behold.

A farmer in Dumuria upazila of Khulna has achieved financial solvency for himself and quite literally changed the lives of hundreds of farmers across the country through pani kochu farming.

A fully-grown pani kochu plant can weight up to 30 kilograms and it gives a bang for the buck as the flowers, stems and leaves are all edible.

It was Nuton Mondal, a farmer of Ghona Motherdanga village under Rangpur union of the upazila, who popularised pani kochu farming.

He initially tried his hand out at paddy farming by leasing out five decimals of land. However, he was quick to make a loss as paddy prices were low at the time.

After all, he lacked experience as he had spent the previous 10 years working at a jute mill. He ultimately had to leave his job as he would frequently face respiratory illness for the jute dust.

He did not want to leave his land barren after his failed attempt in paddy, and so he first planted pani kochu in 2006, by collecting a few saplings from the roadside.

He dug a foot into the ground to plant the saplings, while each sapling was spaced three feet from each other.

These plants fare well in the shade and on mushy grounds and are sown in the months of December and January; it can be harvested in about three months.

In 2012, Nuton posted a picture of his pani kochu plant on Facebook and set a price of Tk 100 for each plant. He immediately got a good response.

There was no looking back for Nuton since then.

To further his expertise in market linkage and farming techniques, Nuton joined a Common Interest Group of farmers in 2015 under the National Agricultural Technology Programme phase -2 (NATP-2) of the agriculture ministry.

The 42-year-old said the application of proper techniques has helped.

"I already have orders for four lakh pani kochu saplings this season," he said, while tending to his field near the Daulatpur-Sahapur road, about 10 kilometres from Khulna-Jashore highway.

"The use of modern tools like Facebook and bKash has helped my business grow."

Last year, he recorded sales worth Tk 6 lakh, including stems worth Tk 1 lakh and saplings worth Tk 2 lakh.

This year, he is selling the stems for Tk 35 to Tk 40 a kilogram. Each plant sells for Tk 40 to Tk 100, depending on the size, each sapling for Tk 3, and each flower for Tk 1.

His biggest order of 63,000 saplings is from Gaziur Rahman, an expatriate who owns lands in Habiganj.

With help from Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Dumuria, Nuton sold over two million saplings across 50 districts, including Dhaka, Barishal, Barguna, Kushtia and Narail, until now.

In addition, he carries his produce by van to sell in kitchen markets in Khulna every day. "To eradicate unemployment, the youth could easily take up pani kochu farming," he said.

"My dream is to help train as many

farmers as possible in pani kochu farming, as it is more profitable than paddy or other vegetables. There is an export potential for this crop as well."

It has huge demand in South Korea, as the plant is used in their cuisine.

Nuton is currently in talks with a Korean buyer to set up a processing factory in Khulna, which will present an opportunity for local farmers.

"To export a kilogram of pani kochu, I need to process 20 kg of raw pani kochu. As such, buyers are giving a target of 5,000 kg a day."

Seeing Nuton's success, about 1,000 farmers from at least seven villages adjacent to Dumuria, including Ghona Motherdanga, Rangpur, Soluya, Bandha, Dhanibunia and two villages Balabunia

and Khalashibunia under Batiaghata upazila, have started growing pani kochu after buying saplings from Nuton.

Pritish Mondal, a farmer of Ghona Bandha village in the upazila, told The Daily Star, "I earned Tk 60,000 from selling the pani kochu stems from one bigha of land last season. In the upcoming season, I expect to double that amount."

Dumuria Upazila Agriculture Officer Mohammad Mosaddek Hossain said pani kochu farming is easier than farming other crops, as it requires less nurturing and pesticides. The plants can be harvested within three months and give yield for six months, he added.

"Nuton is an idol to all farmers in the area."



Nuton Mondal tends his pani kochu field beside Daulatpur-Sahapur regional road in Khulna's Dumuria upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Two girls raped

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Two men have been arrested on charge of raping a schoolgirl and a speech impaired girl in Dinajpur and Kishoreganj districts.

Police arrested a youth on charge of raping a 15-year-old girl, who is now three-month pregnant in Dinajpur's Birganj upazila on Friday, reports our correspondent.

The arrestee is Aminul Islam, 28, son of late Hasim Uddin of Majhpara village in the upazila.

The victim was sent to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital for medical test yesterday.

Father of the girl filed a case with Birganj Police Station.

Alan Chandra Roy, sub-inspector of the police station, and also the investigation officer of the case, said the alleged rapist is the neighbour of the victim.

Aminul raped the seventh grader and threatened her not to reveal it to anyone. He raped the girl several times by intimidating her.

As the parents noticed physical change in the girl recently, she told them what happened to her.

The arrestee was produced before a court that sent him to jail yesterday, said Shakila Parvin, officer-in-charge of Birganj Police Station.

Police were investigating the incident, said the OC.

In Kishoreganj, a man was arrested on charge of raping a speech impaired girl at Mollapara Bogadia village in Sadar upazila the same day, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

The arrestee was identified as farmer Anjan Mia, 38, son of Muslim Mia of the village.

The victim's mother lodged a case with Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station accusing Anjan on Friday night, police said.



Local administration yesterday brings out a colourful procession in Thakurgaon town to mark 48th National Cooperatives Day. The District Cooperative Department organised the programme in association with the district administration.

PHOTO: STAR

PRIME MINISTER'S RELIEF AND WELFARE FUND 'Forger' arrested for encashing Tk 2.20 lakh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Parbatipur police on Thursday arrested a member of a forgery gang that cashed out Tk 2.20 lakh worth of cheques issued by the prime minister's relief and welfare fund.

Police said they also recovered the money the same night.

The arrestee, Israful Islam, 40, son of Abdul Mabud from Uttar Salandar village in Parbatipur upazila, is a night guard of social welfare department in Parbatipur.

Police made the arrest after a case was filed against Israful and five others with Parbatipur Police Station. He was sent to jail on Friday after police produced him before the court, said Mokhlesur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of the police station.

The other five accused are Aminul Islam, 35, son of late Chan Mia of Uttar

Salandar; Sumon Mohanta, 25, son of Birendra Mohanta of Poddarpara; Hasan Ali, 50, son of Azimuddin of Boro Hariapur; Shakhawat Hossain Bhola, 60, son of Shakhawat Hossain; and Tahidul Islam, 28, son of Abdul Majid of Sardarpara under the same upazila.

Prof Shah Md Sadiqul Islam, one of the five recipients of the cheques, filed the case after police found evidence of forgery against the accused, said police.

In early October this year, the Prime Minister's Office sent out total five cheques to the office of the deputy commissioner (DC) in Dinajpur for five recipients -- Prof Shah Md Sadiqul Islam of Bhabanipur Degree College (Tk 1 lakh), Upendranath Roy (Tk 50,000), Abul Kashem (Tk 30,000), Abdul Khaleq Kazi (Tk 20,000) and

Hasan Ali Razu (Tk 20,000).

Within a few days of the same month, before the recipients were notified of the arrival of the cheques at the DC office, the accused collected all the cheques from the DC office by producing false documents.

Beginning from October 10, the fraudsters swiftly encashed the cheques on different dates after opening five bank accounts with Parbatipur branch of Agrani Bank Limited by producing false documents.

The arrestee, Israful, was the introducer for opening all the five bank accounts, said police.

OC Mokhlesur said employees of both the DC office and the branch of the bank are being suspected for their involvement in the forgery.

The case is being investigated thoroughly and they were working on to arrest all the accused, he added.