



The disputed waterbody, known as Dorgar Pukur, at Gazirchat in Savar's Ashulia.

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## Century-old waterbody in Ashulia under grabbers' grip

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

The fate of a century-old 6.12-acre pond, locally known as Dorgar Pukur, at Gazirchat in Savar's Ashulia seems uncertain due to conflict over ownership. The authorities of Gazirchat AM High School and College for decades claimed that the pond belongs to the institution while the upazila administration termed the pond area as a government-owned khash land and made several failed attempts to lease it out since 2008. During a recent visit to the site, this correspondent learnt that Moinul Islam Bhuiyan, joint convenor of Ashulia thana unit Jubo League, also a member of Swanirbhar Dhamshona Union Parishad, have been cultivating fish in the pond for the last one year. Some poor people built tin-shed

houses on the west bank of the pond and a cemetery is also being made there. Several locals said once they used the pond water and caught fish there, but influential people have been cultivating fish in the waterbody without any authorisation for years. According to Cadastral Survey and State Acquisition records, the pond belonged to a Zamindari estate owned by Gouri Prashad Ray Chowdhury. "In Bangla year 1354 (1947 AD), three heirs from the Zamindar family permanently handed over the pond's 461 decimals land to the school and 165 decimals to one Altab Uddin Mridha. Later Altab handed over the land to school," said Anamul Hoque Monshi, president of the school and college governing body. "The Revisional Survey (RS) and

Bangladesh Survey (BS) also recorded the pond's land in the name of our school. Once the school earned money by leasing the pond, but in 2008, the upazila administration claimed the pond as a government khash pond. "Officials tried to lease out the pond, but failed as we filed complaints with the upazila and district administrations. Meanwhile, local influential people started occupying the land. Jubo League leader Moinul Islam Bhuiyan built a tin-shed house on the pond bank and continued cultivating fish in the waterbody for the last one year," said Anamul. Mohammad Mozaffar Hossain, principal of Gazirchat AM High School and College, said, "We demand that the authorities concerned help us get back the pond land as we have a plan to shift the

college section to the land." Moinul Islam Bhuiyan said he has leased the pond from the government for three years. But Tajwar Akram Sakapi Ibne Sazzad, assistant commissioner (land) of Savar (Ashulia Circle), said the lease process has remained suspended following a petition from the school committee. "We will visit the spot and make an occupiers' list and will conduct drive to remove them," he said. Asked about the institution authorities' claim, Ibne Sazzad said, "Based on RS and BS records, they are claiming ownership of the pond land. We will look into the matter." Jubo League leader Moinul, arrested in a land grabbing case filed by a woman in last October, is now in bail.

## BARGUNA RIFAT MURDER

# Charge framing hearing of 10 accused Jan 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A Barguna court yesterday fixed January 1 for hearing on charge framing against 10 of the accused, above the legal age of 18, in the sensational Rifat Sharif murder case.

Out of the total 24 accused in the murder case, 14 are juveniles and they are being tried at Barguna juveniles court. They are currently in Jashore juvenile correction facility.

Judge Md Asaduzzaman of the Barguna District and Sessions Judge's Court fixed the date around 10:00am after hearing concluding statements from the prosecution and the defence.

Advocate Mojibul Haq Kislui, lawyer for the prosecution, said the court fixed the new date for further hearing and also for the delivery of order in this regard.

Earlier, on November 18, the Barguna juveniles court fixed January 8 for hearing on charge framing against the 14 juveniles accused in the case.

The 10 accused of legal age are Rakibul Hasan Rifat Faraje, 23; Al Kaiyum alias Rabbi Akon, 21; Mohiminul Sifat, 19; Rejwan Ali Khan alias Tiktok Redoy, 22; Md Hasan, 19; Md Musa, 22; Aysha Siddika Minni, 19; Rafiul Islam Rabbi, 20; Md Sagor, 19; and Kamrul Islam Saimun, 21.

Out of them, eight were brought to the courtroom yesterday from Barguna jail. Slain Rifat Sharif's wife Aysha Siddika Minni, who is now on bail, came to the court with her father. Arrest warrant was issued for Md Musa as he is still absconding.

The same court also rejected bail prayers of two accused -- Mohiminul Islam Sifat, 19 and Md Sagor, 19 -- after hearing arguments from both sides, the lawyer added.

On June 26, Rifat Sharif, 25, an internet service provider, was hacked to death in broad daylight in front of his wife Minni in Barguna town.

In a CCTV footage, Minni was seen screaming and trying to save her husband from the attackers. Police arrested Minni on July 16. The following day, a Barguna court placed her on a five-day remand. Three days later, the court recorded her statement under section 164.

On August 29, the High Court granted bail to Minni on conditions that she would not speak with the media and she would remain in the custody of her father.

On September 1, police pressed charges against Minni and 23 others for their alleged involvement in the murder of Rifat Sharif. Of the accused, 10 are over the legal age of 18 while 14 are juveniles.

The name of the prime accused Sabbir Hossain Nayan alias Nayan Bond was excluded from the charges as he was killed in a "gunfight" on July 2, six days after Rifat Sharif was murdered.



## Tobacco farms on rise as growers get lucrative offers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

With assurance of good prices from tobacco companies, Lalmonirhat farmers are dedicating more land this year to the cultivation of the harmful crop to cover up the losses they incurred from paddy in the last cropping season. Six tobacco companies, including two multinationals, are tempting farmers with incentives including free seeds, fertilisers and technical support. The multinational companies even cover health expenses of the farmers on their list. Afzal Hossain, 67, a farmer of Saptibari village in Aditmari upazila, said he has prepared tobacco seedbed on one acre of land for cultivating tobacco on five acres of land this year. Last year, he produced tobacco on three acres of land. "As I didn't get fair price from farming paddy during the last season, I have used more land for tobacco this year," he said, adding tobacco company assured him that all of his produce would be purchased at fair prices. Afzal's wife Ambiya Begum, 58, said, she along with her husband take care of the tobacco seedbed, hoping to earn a good amount this year. "Tobacco company's representatives always visit us to provide technical support on seedbed maintenance and care," she said. Azahar Ali, 65, a tobacco grower at Madanpur village in Aditmari, said "I received tobacco seed free of cost, and I will even get free fertilisers from the tobacco company." Taher Ali, 62, a farmer at Sarpukur village in the same upazila, is also planning to increase his production this year. "As tobacco company promised to purchase our tobacco, we are cultivating it on more land," he said.

Unlike last year, Taher is using three instead of two acres of land this year to sow the saplings from the seedbed he had prepared on 30 decimals of land. Sekandar Ali, a high schoolteacher of Saptibari village, explained the attraction of tobacco farming. He said, about six to seven maund (approximately 261 kilogram) of tobacco can be produced in 0.4 acres of land and a farmer can earn Tk 20,000 to Tk 24,000 from selling that yield. "In most cases, family members including children do the farm work in tobacco fields, so labour cost is zero. As a result, they earn profit by cultivating this harmful crop," he said. Because tobacco is being cultivated at all the fields adjacent to Sekandar's, he too had to choose that crop instead of planting spice and vegetables on six acres of his land. "Tobacco plants require a lot of fertilisers and insecticides. If I cultivate anything else in my field, all the insects from the adjacent fields will come to mine," he claimed. Sources at different tobacco companies in Lalmonirhat informed this correspondent that they have targeted about 20 thousand farmers for farming tobacco on 30,000 acres of land this year. Last year, around 15 thousand farmers produced the crop on 25,000 acres of land in Lalmonirhat, according to the sources. The company high-ups directed the local agents of the company to increase the number of farmers, they claimed, adding that the targeted farmers are provided with cards by the companies, and the identified tobacco growers enjoy different facilities including health expense coverage from the companies. According to Department of Agricultural

Extension (DAE) in Lalmonirhat, tobacco was cultivated on 13,000 acres of land in five upazilas of the district in 2014, 18,000 acres of land in 2015, 23,000 acres in 2016, 15,000 acres in 2017, 25,000 acres of land in 2018. DAE officials are concerned that this year the production is likely to rise further. Aditmari upazila Agriculture Officer Ali Noor said they only conduct awareness campaign to discourage farmers from farming tobacco but never pressure farmers to stop cultivating the crop. "Farmers are not interested to respond to our request, as they are trapped in the attractive offers of the tobacco companies," he said. He suggested, "If tobacco companies stopped working in the field motivating the farmers, and stop ensuring tobacco marketing facilities, the farming of this poisonous crop could be decreased gradually." Meanwhile, a policy drafted in 2017 by the health and family welfare ministry to rein in tobacco production and minimise its negative impact on public health and the economy, is at the final stage, said a health ministry official seeking anonymity. Smoking kills nearly one lakh people every year in Bangladesh. It alone causes an estimated economic loss of Tk 16,000 crore per year, equivalent to about 1.4 percent of gross domestic product, according to the World Health Organisation. The draft policy wants to restrict tobacco companies from providing tobacco growers with subsidies, loans or other supports, and plantation and processing of tobacco products within 500 yards of homesteads, and its cultivation within 150 yards of the slopes of rivers, canals and lakes.

## Mizanur and his innovations

PROMITI PROVA CHOWDHURY WITH MOHSIN MILON

With institutional education up to grade eight, 48-year-old motor mechanic Mizanur Rahman is now quite the story of his town Sharsha in Jashore. His creations, ranging from bracelets to mini ambulances, have created quite a stir in both inside and outside Jashore as well as brought him national level accolades. Mizanur was born to a farmer in 1971 at Amtala Gatipara village under Sharsha upazila. Eldest among three brothers and two sisters, Mizan started working as a motorcycle mechanic in 1988 and now owns a workshop "Bhai Bhai Engineering" at Sharsha Upazila Bazar. Mizan's latest creation is a bracelet aimed to save children from drowning. The bracelet, worn in any part of the body, will ring a loud alarm if comes in contact with water. It has two parts: one will be attached to the child while the other will remain with the guardian. The guardian will be notified instantly when the alarm rings.

One invention that Mizan is most content about is special wheel chairs that he has made for the disabled. "The person sitting in the battery-run chair can easily control it by moving the joystick. These chairs come at around Tk 50,000," said Mizan. "I made the chair in 2010 and since then 15 people have bought it. Solar panels are attached to the chair so they run without battery under sunlight." Mizan's another noteworthy creation is "mini ambulance". These small sized ambulances are fit for rocky roads of villages. They can be used to reach remote areas. The Prime Minister's Office has already acquired two under its A2I project, according to Mizan. His product, "automated irrigation machine" can be operated from anywhere with a cell phone. The machine is coming handy to the farmers of Sharsha. His recent most creation was "environment safety machine." This one is mainly for keeping the environment clean.



Mizanur Rahman with his innovative mini ambulance, suitable for use in village roads.

PHOTO: STAR

"The price is between Tk 300-500. Two villagers, who have toddlers, have already bought the bracelets," Mizan said. His first creation saw light in between 1992 and 1994, he recalled.

It was an engine that could run without fuel. It burnt smoke and generated fuel thus helped lessen environmental pollution.

Next, he came up with an automated fire extinguisher. This one, if connected to the water motor of a building, sends a signal to the nearby fire station within five seconds into a fire incident.

His next invention was a car with solar panel on the roof. The car, which has four seats, can run without burning fuel on sunny days, said Mizan. "The price is also very reasonable. It is between Tk 1,20,000 and Tk 1,50,000. So, people with low income can also afford it," he added.

The invention, which is called "Deshiyo Projukti Motorcar" in Bangla, brought him an award in 2016. He won the first prize at a national level competition arranged by the National Museum of Science and Technology.

After that, he made "fireproof jacket" and "fireproof helmet". These are protective gears for anyone caught in fire, be firefighters or those trapped.

"It is like a broom and has a button. If you push the button, the broom comes out like an umbrella and it can clean dirt from a spot about six feet away from you. It can lift up to five kilograms of waste. People who have backaches can use this device with ease," Mizan described.

This year, Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research handed a crest and Tk 25,000 to Mizan for two of his products -- the mini ambulance and the safety bracelet for children.

With a view to curb environmental pollution, Mizan is currently working on a device which is expected to absorb smoke and dust.

Mizan has so far bagged 45 certificates at upazila, district, divisional and national levels. He runs a science club at Sharsha Bazar Pilot School where most of his products have been kept.

"People from different districts come to visit my workshop every day. But because of financial constraints, I cannot market my goods at a larger scale," lamented Mizan, who lost his parents long ago and has a wife and a son.

"In my childhood, I could not continue studies due to poverty. But I grew this obsession for building things using different tools and machines. I am not worried about buying a land or home. All I want is to keep innovating things in order to serve my society," said Mizan with a call for financial aid.



Farmers cultivating tobacco on huge land after getting lucrative offers from tobacco companies in Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: STAR