

DECREER CHAR ON PADMA

Where influentials control shoal land

They are sub-leasing land at high prices denying landless and poor farmers

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Once upon a time, local influential people used to hire musclemen to take control of shoal land in rivers. There were fights between rival groups, and the winner would take the land and use those for agriculture.

Decades later, the practice somewhat still remains the same, only muscle power has been replaced by political influence.

Decree char, a Padma shoal under Lakshmikunda union in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila, is one such case.

With over 5,000 bighas of land, the shoal is the biggest in the district where a number of cash crops, including banana and vegetables, are cultivated.

Local influentials, with blessings of the ruling political party, have long been controlling the shoal's "Khas" land by taking lease from local administration and then allowing farmers to cultivate the land in exchange of money.

As per rule, landless people are supposed to have the priority to get allotment of "Khas" land. However, at

groups have to be managed to cultivate the land, he added.

However, farmers said only influential people and comparatively solvent farmers get privilege to cultivate the shoal land while landless and poor ones have no access.

"A group of influentials with blessings of ruling party leaders have been controlling crop cultivation in shoal land and we have to pay Tk 10,000 to Tk 30,000 for each bigha to cultivate for a year," said Selim Mollah, a farmer from Alhaz Market area in the upazila.

"I have taken a Banana cultivation project on 200 bighas of shoal land, taking sub-lease of 80 bighas from the lease-holder's



Farmers cycling to work at dawn while some carrying crops on vehicles or boats. In hindsight, these images paint a positive picture. However, beneath this lies a dark reality. Some local influential persons has subleased land in the Decree Char to only well-offs and prominent locals, depriving landless and poor farmers. The land meant for the destitute farmers can now only be accessed by wealthy individuals, as per allegations.

PHOTO: STAR



Decree Char, the rule has been violated for decades.

The local administration shoal area leased out 1,158.28 acres of the shoal area under Talbaria Mouja to two people.

One of them, Nazmul Islam, brother in law of then local lawmaker, got lease of 1,040 acres of shoal's land paying Tk 8.20 lakh lease money for one year.

Confirming the matter, TM Rahsan Kabir, assistant commissioner (land) in the upazila, said the lease order was issued on April 12 last year through an open quotation.

According to the lease agreement, there is no scope to issue sub-lease of the shoal land or to harm the land, but Nazmul has been doing it anyway.

Contacted, Nazmul claimed he is doing everything by the book.

"It is not possible for me to cultivate the vast shoal land alone, so local farmers are engaged in cultivation and are being benefitted," Nazmul said.

There are different rival groups with their eyes on the shoal land, and all these

men by paying Tk 20,000 to Tk 25,000 per bigha for a year," said a farmer wishing anonymity.

Farmer Abdul Halim from Niamotullapur village under the upazila, and several others, echoed.

Some local influentials, including Shamsul Alom Shopon, Alom Badsha, Habib and few others backed by the ruling party, have allegedly been involved in controlling the land and making decisions as to who gets to cultivate there.

There are allegations that they are also involved in encroaching shoal land.

Contacted, Shamsul Alom Shopon said, "The shoal land is leased yearly from the land office by paying revenues to the government. The leaseholder has put us in charge to manage the farmers who are interested in cultivating shoal land," Shopon said.

Some encroachers are engaged in developing commercial projects illegally on the encroached shoal land, many alleged.

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Madrasa teacher sent to jail on rape charges

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A Noakhali court yesterday sent a madrasa teacher to jail on charges of raping four boys in Chatkhil upazila of Noakhali.

The accused, Saiful Islam, 26, is a teacher of Nurani section (grade-II) at the madrasa in Chatkhil municipality, said Md Imdadul Haque, officer-in-charge of Chatkhil Police Station.

Police arrested the teacher from his home in Shankarpur village last night after the mother of a victim filed a case against him under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act with the police station.

The OC said the parents of four victims came to the police station on Thursday, but the mother of one victim filed the case as the teacher allegedly raped her son on Wednesday night inside the madrasa.

The victims are between 10 and 12 years old, he said.

After his arrest, the teacher was produced before the Noakhali Chief Judicial Magistrate Court yesterday afternoon. The court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Mohammad Emdad sent him to jail.

Climate change must be dealt with conviction

Says Inner Wheel President Trish Douglas

UNB, Dhaka

Climate change and violence against women must be dealt with conviction, International Inner Wheel president Trish Douglas told UNB News in an interview on Thursday.

Trish is visiting Dhaka to join a three-day programme marking the centennial celebration of the Inner Wheel Club, an international voluntary organisation. The club's District 328 launched the event.

Environmental pollution, especially plastic contamination, should be seriously handled worldwide to deal with the dangerous effects of climate change, she said.

While the top four carbon polluters in the world are China, the US, India, and the European Union, a country like Bangladesh has to bear its burden despite not being responsible for it, she added.

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"If you look at the United Kingdom, plastic is polluting everything there. Our seas are choking, dolphins and fish are dying. If we don't stop now, we will really have a lot of problems," said Trish.

"Let's get back to glass bottles. Because we can reuse glass bottles, but plastic, we cannot," she said.

Trish urged every Inner Wheel Club across the world to start a campaign against climate change.

"In China, they have never seen rain like this in 135 years. The world is drowning because the monsoon is longer and more intense. The UK is having horrendous storms... Turkey is having a terrible heatwave; that's unbelievable! We are killing ourselves. We are killing the planet," she said.

"About violence against women, my stand is very strong. No way it should be allowed to continue," she asserted.

She also highlighted the issue of women's health and their safety and security in society.

The Inner Wheel was founded in 1924 by Margarette Golding in England.

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Mother, son found dead at home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Police recovered the bodies of a mother and her son from their residence in Chatmohar upazila of Pabna yesterday morning.

They were strangled by the killers sometime between Thursday night and early yesterday, said police.

The deceased - Laboni Khatun, 35, and her eight-year-old son Md Riyad Hossain - were residents of Dighulia village.

Laboni's husband, Abdur Rashid, is an expatriate in Malaysia, said local union parishad member Md Nannu Miah.

Laboni, her son, and mother-in-law used to live in the house. The mother-in-law first noticed the bodies inside the house early in the morning, Nannu told The Daily Star.

"Hearing screams, neighbours and locals rushed in and saw the bodies. Then, they informed the police," he said.

"The woman's body was lying on the floor, while the boy's was found hanging," said Md Habibur Islam, assistant superintendent of police in Pabna.

"We are trying to trace the killers," he added.

Two-year-old dies after being run over by three-wheeler

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A two-year-old child died after being run over by a battery-run three-wheeler near the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur's Sreepur upazila yesterday morning.

The child, Ruman, was the son of Nazim Uddin of Suintia village under Sadar police station of Jamalpur district.


Ruman was run over around 10:00am, Shah Kamal, officer-in-charge of Sreepur Police Station, told our Gazipur correspondent.

Locals said Ruman's parents lived in a rented house in Sreepur's Lichu Bagan Road area. They said Ruman suffered head injuries when a speeding battery-run three-wheeler ran him over.

The locals took him to Sreepur Upazila Health Complex, where the duty doctor pronounced him dead.

The dead body of Ruman has been handed over to the family, the medical officer of the emergency department of the health complex said.

The body was handed over without an autopsy as per the family's request, OC Shah Kamal said. The driver of the battery-run three-wheeler fled after the accident.



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