



A fake 'bill book' issued to a gas consumer in Ghatihata area of Brahmanbaria. Inset, pipes confiscated from different areas are brought to the Bakhraabad Gas Distribution Company Limited office, in Ghatura of Sadar upazila, on a tractor wagon.

PHOTO: MASUKHRIDYO

## ILLEGAL GAS CONNECTIONS

# Racket pocketing crores of taka a month

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

An illegal gas line racket in three upazilas of Brahmanbaria has been plundering natural gas worth crores of taka from gas supply lines each month.

The organised criminals are so reckless that they are even issuing "demand notes" and "bill books" to their clients, mentioning the name of Bakhraabad Gas Distribution Company Limited (BGDCL), and collecting "monthly gas bills" in bank accounts they opened with different banks.

The racketeers include public representatives including a chairman of a union parishad and several local political leaders, alleged locals.

They said in Brahmanbaria Sadar, Sarail and Ashuganj upazilas, the crime syndicate so far "sold" at least 15,000 illegal connections and they usually collect Tk 60 thousand to Tk 90 thousand

for each connection, based on the distance of a consumer's house from the main line.

However, sales division officials at Bakhraabad Gas Distribution Company Limited (BGDCL) said the number of illegal connections in those upazilas would be around 5,000 and they traced 54,031 feet of illegal gas line in those areas.

Most of the illegal connections BGDCL found were in Suhilpur and Budhal unions under Sadar upazila, the officials said, adding that BGDCL has 24,000 valid residential gas connections in the three upazilas.

Locals requesting anonymity, apparently for security reasons, said the key figures in the illegal gas line racket include Suhilpur Union Parishad (UP) Chairman and Jubo League's Sadar upazila unit Joint Secretary Azad Hajari Angur, a member of the same UP and Jubo League's Organising Secretary of the same unit Mohsin Khandaker, Belal

Mia from Bakail village in Suhilpur union, Kazi Pabel and Kazi Manzu from Ghatura village in the same union, and Sahed Mia from Madhhayapara of Brahmanbaria town.

Engineer Zahidur Reza, deputy general manager of BGDCL in Brahmanbaria, said they disconnect illegal connections routinely and last year alone, with assistance from the local administration, they so far confiscated 17,953 feet of gas pipes that were laid illegally.

The gas line racket is so powerful that they are often attacking BGDCL officials during disconnection drives, he said, adding that on Monday, they handed over two people to police for attacking four BGDCL officials during a drive in Kalishima area of Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila.

The pace of disconnecting and confiscating illegal pipes by BGDCL is not fast enough as the gas line racket

lays kilometres of illegal pipeline in one night. As such, the number of illegal gas connections are on the rise, said locals.

Requesting not to be named, a resident of Malihata village in Suhilpur union said he paid Tk 70 thousand for an illegal connection to his house two and a half years ago. Like others, he was not given any "bill book", but he has been paying his "gas bill" against the "demand note" each month to an account with United Commercial Bank.

Another resident of the same village said after getting gas connection from the same people, he found out later that the documents he had received against the connection were all fake.

According to Bangladesh Gas Act 2010, consumption of natural gas illegally is punishable by three months to a year of jail term and subject to fines between Tk 10 thousand and Tk 5 lakh.

## Rangamati UP member abducted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

An armed gang abducted a union parishad (UP) member from his house in Rangamati's Kaptai upazila early yesterday.

The victim is Mong Ching Marma, 45, a member of ward no 5 under Raikhali union, Additional Superintendent of Police (Kaptai Circle) Junayet Kawser said.

Mong was a former activist of Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), said the police official.

Mong's wife Sama U Marma said a group of 10 to 12 armed men entered their house by breaking open the door early yesterday and picked up her husband.

At first, the gang looked for Mong's elder brother Abu Marma and then picked up Mong instead, as Abu, president of the ward unit of Awami League, was not at home at that time, Sama U said.

Police are yet to arrest anyone in connection with the incident.

## Priest 'takes own life'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A priest of a Hindu temple allegedly took his own life by hanging himself from the ceiling of his room at Sri Sri Madan Mohan Thakur Jiu Temple in Bhola Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

Being informed by the temple authorities, police recovered the body of Nirmal Bhattacharya, 50, of Khulna, around 8:30pm and sent it to the hospital for autopsy, Officer in Charge of Sadar Police Station Enayet Hossain said.

Quoting witnesses, police said Nirmal physically assaulted Anjali poti, 60, a female assistant worshiper, following an altercation over devotee's money on Tuesday afternoon.

Hearing the incident, local Hindu leaders called a meeting next day to settle the issue.

Meanwhile, after concluding the evening prayer Nirmal entered his room and might have hanged himself fearing public wrath, police said.

## Bench assistant 'conceals' case documents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Documents of a case filed with Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in the district have been concealed allegedly by the bench assistant of the court.

Md Firoz Mia, plaintiff of the case, has recently submitted a written complaint to the chief judicial magistrate in this regard, said Sunomoy Chowdhury, administrative officer of the court, adding that the authorities concerned have already been asked to reply to the complaint.

He also sent copies of the complaint to the law minister, chief justice, secretary to the law ministry, director of Anti-Corruption Commission, district and sessions judge, president and secretary of Brahmanbaria Bar Association.

In September last year, Firoz filed a cheating case with the court against Gias Mia of Kunda village in Nasirnagar upazila.

Refuting the allegation, Bench Assistant Sharif Uddin said the case has already been transferred to Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court. The case documents may be concealed from there.



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