

# A small effort changes many lives

Srimangal candle factory helps poor women live with honour

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Uma Hajra maintains her family with the income from a small candle factory.

Her labourer husband earns only Tk 27 a day at Bharaura tea garden, which can not even meet the cost of rice for their family with four children.

Eighteen year-old Kajol Hajra said she was driven away from house by brothers due to poverty after her father's death. Now they live with her as she earns around Tk 1000 per month from this factory.

Sakuntala Hajra said she maintains her three minor daughters and sick husband with the income from the factory.

They are among many poor women who work at a small candle factory at College Road at Srimangal upazila headquarters, run by the Multipurpose Socio Economic Development Association (MSEDA) at its office.

The local NGO's efforts have allowed the poor women to live with honour.

Many others want to join them but the scope is limited, said Director Luthfur Rahman while talking to this Correspondent during a recent visit to its office.

The MSEDA launched this small venture in November 2002 with financial assistance from Bangladesh Freedom Foundation (BFF), another local NGO.

Workers are also given a percentage of the profit.

The candles are marketed in Srimangal. "We had to work hard to convince wholesalers as well as retailers", said its president Md Mizanur Rahman.

"Businessmen are sympathetic to us now as distressed women are helped if they buy the product. We have also improved the quality", he said.

MSEDA's Executive Director Tohirul Islam said they are

trying to expand the project by buying some new machines. It is a sustainable venture with a small capital, he said.

Similar hopes were found at another such small candle factory at Ramnagar near Kalighat tea garden, set up by another local NGO -- Institute for Social Advancement (ISA).

Sumati Munda was busy packing candles there.

"My father Lakshminarayan Munda works in Kakiachhera tea garden. I had stopped going to school due to poverty.

I started again after I got a job here. Now, I am preparing to appear at the SSC examination", a confidant Sumita said.

BFF's Programme Officer Shamimul Islam Shimul said they are trying to expand its programme by assisting such small ventures.



Underprivileged women working at a candle factory run by MSEDA at Srimangal in Moulvibazar district.

## Hasina visits 5 southern districts from April 2

Adequate security steps taken, SPs say

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina will visit Barisal, Barguna and Patuakhali, Barguna, Jhalakati and Pirojpur districts from April 2 to 6.

The AL leader will address 13 public meetings at different places to create public opinion in support of her party's oust-government agitation. She will also hold party workers' meetings.

AL leaders and workers are taking all-out preparations at district and upazila levels to make their party chief's tour a success.

They claimed that ruling party cadres are also preparing to foil the meetings at places.

On contact, police superintendents of Barisal, Jhalakati, Pirojpur, Barguna and Patuakhali said measures have been taken to ensure safety and security of the Opposition leader and peaceful holding of her programmes.

On Saturday, BNP activists gutted AL office in Mathbaria, ransacked the house and business establishments of AL leaders, while the local BNP office came under attack by AL activists.

At least 26 leaders and activists of both the parties were injured. The injured include Rafiquddin Ahmed Ferdous, upazila AL president and Mathbaria municipality chairman, Dr Anwar Hossain, AL

leader, Kamal Munshi, upazila BNP organising secretary and Nazma, a domestic help of local AL president.

Five of the injured were rushed to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital. Both the parties blamed each other for the attacks and clashes.

Special forces have been deployed to quell any untoward situation.

This will be Hasina's second visit to the southern region. She visited Barisal and Bhola from February 24 to 26. Her motorcade in Barisal came under attack by BNP activists.

## 7 highwaymen arrested in Rajshahi, Syedpur

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Seven highwaymen were arrested in Rajshahi and Syedpur on Monday.

Our Staff Correspondent reported from Rajshahi that police arrested six listed highwaymen from the city.

They are Abdul Hakim of Nandigram upazila; Mintu of Dhupchachia upazila in Bogra; Tasikul Islam of Chapainawabganj; Mizanur Rahman of Naogaon; and Mithu and Shyamol of Rajshahi.

They were on the run since Saturday as a police team led by Omidul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kahalu thana in Bogra chased them from Bogra.

Assisted by Boalia police in Rajshahi, the team raided a house at Bhadra residential area in Rajshahi city and arrested them Monday morning. The house owner is absconding.

However, the alleged gang leader -- Atikul Islam Sona --

escaped.

The arrested are accused in two cases filed with Kahalu and Dhupchachia thanas, police said.

Police seized a truck used by them and recovered six videocassettes of vulgar films from it.

Police said the dacoits used the house in the city for committing highway robberies at night.

Our Nilphamari Correspondent reported that villagers at Neamatpur in Syedpur upazila in Bogra district caught a member of a gang of highway robbers after they committed a dacoity in a Panchagar-bound night coach from Dhaka.

Five dacoits had boarded the night coach (No. Metro-BA-11-0587) of Shuvo Basundhara in the guise of passengers.

As the bus reached Tarangang on Monday early morning, one of the dacoits took control of the bus by pointing a firearm at the driver and the rest swooped on the passengers.

They beat passengers and snatched about Tk three lakh in cash, valuables and gold ornaments. One passenger -- Moammar Haque -- hailing from Boda upazila in Panchagar, was stabbed as he resisted.

As the passengers raised a hue and cry and chased the dacoits, villagers joined them. After chasing about two kilometres, they caught one of the dacoits named Liqat alias Quayum. Others escaped.

He was handed over to police, who said the gang was from Jessor.

The driver of the coach, Humaima Kabir, lodged a case with Syedpur thana. Police could neither arrest any one of the rest dacoits nor recover the looted goods till yesterday.

Earlier, over 150 chairmen and members of union parshads in the district brought out a procession in the town.

Later, they submitted a memorandum to the DC containing their 16-point demands.



PHOTO: STAR  
Disabled people parading the streets of Bogra town Monday prior to the Regional Disabled Drama Festival-2004.

## 14 yrs RI for kidnapping child

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Netrakona Additional District and Session Judge Amirul Islam on Monday sentenced 12 people including a Union Parishad chairman to 14 years RI for kidnapping a nine-month baby.

The convicts are Abul Kalam Azad, chairman of Kandura UP in Kendua upazila, Lalu Mia, Nahara Begum, Mojibor, Saittendra Debnath, Anajid Das, Azizul Haque, Abul Kalam, Mohammad Shahjahan, Ashadul Islam, Shaiful Islam and Liton.

They had abducted Amit from Dashani village in Madan upazila on July 24, 2000.

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Monday morning and assured the villagers that the killers would be arrested and tried.

The victim woman--Mouria Begum, 20-- was the wife of Azizul Islam, a madrasah teacher.

Initially police suspected Azizul for the murders.

But now they say the double murder might have been committed by some local people with whom Azizul has land dispute. There are 15 cases lodged by Azizul and his rivals overland dispute, they said.

A case has been lodged with Syedpur thana but police could not arrest any body till yesterday.

Police said clue to the murders will be found when Abdullah recovers.

# Agitation for IU VC's removal intensifies

Liaison body formed: Fresh programme at today's rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The Bidibidhan Sangrakhan Committee (BBSC), a body of Islamic University teachers, at a meeting yesterday formed a liaison committee to carry forward its agitation for removal of Vice-chancellor Prof Mustafizur Rahman and decided to go for tougher programmes.

The liaison committee includes representatives of teachers, students, officials and employees of the university. Prof Ashraf Ali, convenor of BBSC and president of IU Teachers Association (IUTA), presided over the meeting.

As per a decision of the meeting, a joint rally of teachers, students, officials and employees will be held at the main gate of the university today, where a fresh agitation programme will be announced, meeting sources said.

Meanwhile, the IUTA in a statement yesterday expressed deep concern at deadlock and demanded immediate removal of the VC. "It is very painful that a

university is being destroyed for a vice-chancellor", the IUTA statement said.

Kushtia District Ainjibi Samity in a statement on Monday also demanded immediate removal of the VC.

On the other hand, Jamaat-e-Islami-backed teachers who support the VC are demanding removal of IU Treasurer Prof Mosarraf Hossain. The pro-Jamaat teachers grouped in the Green Forum in a statement on Monday said their agitation will continue till the treasurer's resignation. Mosarraf, president of IU Zia Parishad, is among those seeking the VC's resignation.

Meanwhile payment of staff salary for the month of March has become uncertain as the VC who left the campus on March 15 is yet to return and sign the salary sheets, sources said.

## Magura AL council postponed again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

The council of Magura district Awami League (AL), scheduled for today, has been postponed.

The district leaders postponed the scheduled meet fearing clash among rival groups despite a "strict order" from the party high command to hold it in time (March 31), party sources said.

During a meeting with Magura AL leaders at the party central office on March 8, party chief Sheikh Hasina ordered holding of the council on March 31 and threatened them to dissolve the district convening committee for failure, party leaders told this correspondent yesterday.

No fresh date has been fixed for

the council, they said.

Earlier, the council was scheduled for January 23 but postponed due to internal feud.

Party insiders said, due to internal feud, committees could not be formed in three upazilas and in one municipality, which are essential to hold the district council.

The district council was cancelled as those committees could not be formed, they said.

The rival factions are led by local lawmaker MSAKbar and district AL convenor Md Altaf Hossain. They want their men on committees to be formed at different levels, thus dividing the party into two major groups.

At least ten incidents of clash took place between rival groups in

the district in the last three months.

District convening committee members Abdul Kuddus and Golam Mowla were among the injured in the clashes, they said.

But Altaf Hossain said there is no internal feud in the party. There is rivalry overleadership.

"A new date for the council will be announced soon," he said.

Postponement of the council twice in three months frustrated mid-level leaders and workers, party sources said.

The last council of district AL was held in 1992, where a committee was formed. But it was dissolved on August 6, 2002. Md Altaf Hossain was made convenor within three months of the dissolution.

## Banskhali carnage: BNP leader refutes allegation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A BNP leader and Union Parishad (UP) chairman on Monday refuted allegations of his involvement in Banskhali carnage brought by the Bangladesh Hindu Boudha Kristian Oikya Parishad.

While refuting the allegations at a press conference at Chittagong Press Club, the general secretary of Banskhali unit of BNP and No 5

Kalipur UP chairman Aminur Rahman Chowdhury termed those as false, 'fabricated' and 'baseless.'

The evil design Oikya Parishad has been aimed at destroying communal harmony in Banskhali, he said.

Aminur Rahman, also a cousin of State Minister for Forestry and Environment Jafurul Islam Chowdhury MP, further disclosed that as per confession of the

arrested it was an incident of robbery. But, the Oikya Parishad leaders termed it as a "massive killing of minority people," he told at the conference.

Leaders of Banskhali unit of Oikya Parishad were present at the press conference. They are Bhupal Guha, Dilip Dash, Sudhir Malik Roy, Dr Ashish Shil, Dr Ajit Sarker, Alok Dash, Sukumer Das, Anil Kar, Hridoy Ranjan Dhar, Chandan Dewanjee and Sujit Chowdhury.

## MURDER OF MOTHER, BABY

# Agitation for arrest of killers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Grief-stricken people yesterday brought out a procession at Molla Para village in Syedpur Sadar upazila demanding trial of the gruesome murders in which a mother and her 48-day-old baby were slaughtered on Sunday night.

Her stepson, 12-year-old Abdullah, who survived a similar attempt, is now under treatment at Rangpur Medical College Hospital for cut injury in the neck.

The incident created a sensation in the entire upazila.

The Nilphamari Deputy Commissioner (DC), Superintendent of Police (SP) and the Syedpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) visited the spot