

SNAPS

3 girl students abducted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Three girl students of Tulshirabad High School in Rampal. Bagerhat were abducted by woman traffickers on Thursday. According to an FIR lodged by a victim's mother, Habiba Begum, the abducted girls are Jannat-ul-Fardous, 16, of Class ten, Shima Khatoun, 13, of Class nine and Saira Khatoun, 14, of Class nine. They hail from Darpa Narayanpur and Shibnagar villages in Rampal upazila.

Two woman traffickers Suraiya Khatoun and Abdur Rahim Kazi abducted them while they were returning to their homes from school.

Indian elephants create panic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Two Indian elephants have created a panic among people in Lohagara upazila in Narail.

The two wild elephants entered the area on May 15 after travelling Chuadanga, Jhenidah and Magura.

They entered the Bangladesh territory on May 7 through Mujibnagar border in Meherpur.

According to Lohagara upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), the wild elephants caused extensive damage to crops and banana plants.

2 'outlaws' nabbed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

The joint forces on Sunday arrested two 'outlaws' from Khalishpur housing estate.

They were identified as Shumon 24, son of businessman Mujibar Rahman and Shariful 27, son of rickshaw puller Chand Miah, both of Khalishpur housing estate.

Police recovered two pipe guns from possession of the two Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janojuddho) members.

2 'dacoits' beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

Two alleged dacoits were beaten to death by people at Ramnagar village in Bauphal upazila in Pataukhali district in the early hours of yesterday.

Quoting villagers, police said members of a voluntary village defence party engaged by the villagers raised alarm when they saw a gang preparing to commit a dacoity at the house of one Jabbar Howlader. People caught three of the alleged dacoits and beat them severely.

Biplob, 32, of Modonpura village and Jewel Sharif, 25, of Inrakul village died on the spot. Riaz, 18, of Pada village was critically injured.

On information, police came and took the bodies and admitted Riaz to Bauphal upazila health complex. A case has been filed.

Strike at Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Workers of the state-owned Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills at Khalishpur have stopped work from 11 am on Sunday to press home their demand for payment of arrear wages of last five weeks.

A tense situation has been prevailing in the mills area as the agitated workers are holding rallies and processions.

Three platoons of riot police have been deployed inside and outside the mill premises to cope with any untoward situation.

Employees of the mills who are also deprived of salaries for the last three months joined the workers in their agitation programme.

On contact, the mills authorities expressed their inability to pay the arrear wages and salaries due to severe financial crisis.

Villagers buy drinking water

Most tubewells in Nabinagar upazila in Brahmanbaria are highly arsenic-contaminated: DPHE identifies 216 arsenicosis patients: About five lakh exposed to danger

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Brahmanbaria*

Unbelievable though, villagers have to buy drinking water.

They buy 10 litres of treated water at Tk 5 from a private plant at Nabinagar upazila headquarter because tubewell water is highly arsenic-contaminated.

But they are a microscopic fraction of a population of 48,8650 exposed to danger because ground-water in all the 196 villages except one is highly contaminated with arsenic, a silent killer.

Ashar Alo Bebosaye Samati (hope traders association) headed by one Bikash Roy has set up the plant. Its lifts water from nearby Titas river and purifies it with Potash Alum and Chlorine. It supplies up to 6000 litres a day.

But the buyers do not know how pure the water is.

Md Monir came from a far away village for water. "They (plant owners) apply the chemicals basing on assumption and have no tool to measure the ratio", he told this correspondent at the plant yesterday.

Bikash Roy said they examine the ratio of Chlorine with a test tube. There is no need to examine the ratio of Potash Alum as water can not absorb excess quantity of the chemical, he said.

The arsenic contamination has created a crisis of drinking water in all areas of Nabinagar upazila because most of the ponds have dried up. At places, people are taking impure water of the Titas, causing diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases.

Sources at the DPHE (Public Health and Engineering Department) said 23,663 tubewells out of the 28068 in 195 villages have been found highly contaminated with arsenic. Rasulpur village in Natghar

union is the only exception. All the tubewells there are arsenic-free.

A recent DPHE survey detected at least 216 arsenicosis patients in the upazila. The number is increasing.

In 58 villages, there is no tubewell free from arsenic. The groundwater is severely contaminated in 34 villages. These include Chander Char, Das Kanda, Sadekpur, Daponia, Islampur, Kamalpur, Lakhavra, Radhanagar, Bangaura North, Asrabpur, Pandabnagar, Padmanagar, Bhatpukur, Kajzila, Barashikonika, Chalikhula, Chakrakhukla, Buldibari, Gumpukuria, Bajebi, Bandukhar, Nasrabari and Ghiara, DPHE sources said.

DPHE has marked the affected tubewells with red marks, forbidding their use. But finding no alternative, people are drinking arsenic contaminated water from red-marked tubewells, they said.

Arsenic damages kidney, liver and the nerves system, leading to

death, doctors say.

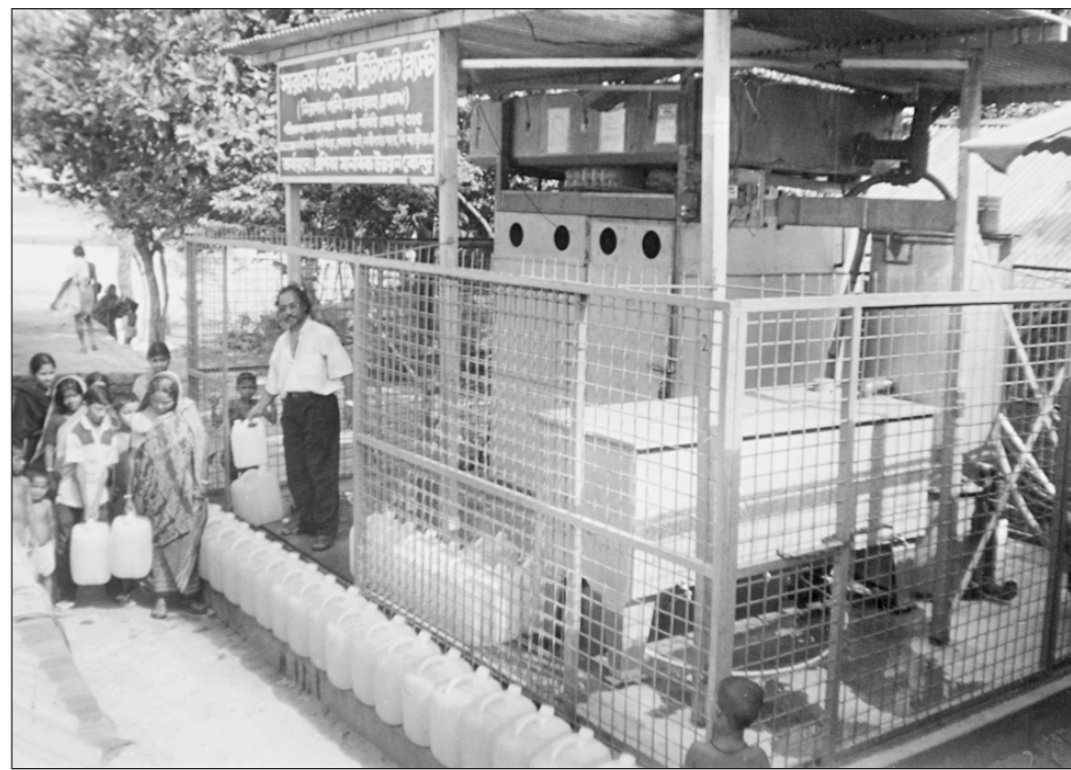
DPHE Sub-assistant Engineer Md Gulam Mastufa Buian at Nabinagar told this correspondent that he often visits the private plant but he has no equipment to test the treated water. Sometimes the owner of the plant shows him a 'fitness certificate' given by high authorities, he said.

According to the DPHE survey report, arsenic contaminated water is found at a depth of only 30 metres.

DPHE sources at Brahmanbaria said they have taken up a plan to sink 125 deep tubewells and dig 37 ring wells in the affected areas.

Besides, the Unicef-assisted Arsenic Mitigation Project is working on a plan to preserve rainwater for supply.

DPHE Executive Engineer Fazlul Haque at Brahmanbaria when contacted said a plan has been taken up to mitigate the problem soon.



Plastic cans kept in a queue for treated water at the lone treatment plant at Nabinagar upazila headquarter. A can of water sells at Tk 5.

PHOTO: STAR

Municipal polls: AL does better in Sylhet region

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

The Awami League (AL) and its allies performed well in the just concluded pourasabha (municipality) elections in Sylhet region.

In seven pourasabhas of the division, AL bagged three posts of chairman, 4-Party Alliance two posts; and Jatiya Party and an independent candidate got one post each.

In Sunamganj Pourasabha, a faction of the AL led by the party presidium member Suranjit Sen Gupta backed Moudjin. Sen joined Moudjin's processions and meetings violating the party decision. Moudjin came out victorious as chairman for third time defeating the AL candidate Ayub Bakht Jaglu also acting general secretary of the Sunamganj AL. Moudjin bagged 11,450 votes while Jaglu got 9,244 votes.

The Four-Party Alliance candidate Advocate Humayun Kabir

Jahanur got only 1,755 votes losing his security money.

In Moulvibazar Pourasabha elections, six charman candidates brought serious allegations of irregularity against ruling party candidate Faizul Karim Mayun who had been declared elected unofficially. They demanded fresh poll in presence of the Army.

Agitation is still going on there. The district unit secretary of the BNP, Faizul Karim Mayun was unofficially declared chairman bagging 7,677 votes.

Similarly, incumbent chairman of Habiganj Pourasabha Advocate Shahid Chowdhury of the AL was defeated by the ruling party candidate GK Gous. Gous got 15,713 votes while Shahid bagged 9,373 votes. A serious allegation of rigging was brought against the ruling party candidate.

In Kulaura Pourasabha, both the

4-Party Alliance and the AL candidates were defeated by independent candidate Kamal Ahmed.

In Nabiganj Pourasabha, the AL candidate and incumbent chairman Tofazzal Islam Chowdhury retained his position by a margin of only 146 votes defeating the Alliance candidate Advocate Abdus Shahid Golap.

In Madhabpur Pourasabha, both the ruling party and the AL candidates faced resistance from their own party.

However, the AL candidate Shah Mohammad Muslim Uddin got 3,721 votes while his rival candidate also his party man Advocate Mohammad Ali got 1,236 votes.

In Shayestaganj Pourasabha, the Jatiya Party's Jahir Ahmed Moyna Miah became chairman bagging 5,700 votes while incumbent chairman Abdur Razzaque Raja got 3,446 votes.

RU teachers march on campus to press demands

BSS, *RU*

Some 300 teachers of Rajshahi University (RU) brought out a procession on the campus yesterday to press their three-point demand which include legal action against teachers who are not taking class.

The other demands are immediate expulsion of the 'unruly students' and punishment to teachers who use students for political interest.

The procession started from in front of the Senate building. They also held a rally which was addressed by, among others, Prof Abdus Salam, Prof Nazrul Islam and Prof Zahid Hossain.

The speakers condemned discourteous behaviour and destructive activities of some students and demanded their expulsion from the university.

Rivals in Jhenidah kill JCD leader

One killed, 40 hurt in Kushtia clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kushtia*

A leader of ruling BNP's student front Jyitabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and a villager were killed and 40 people injured in two incident in Kushtia and Jhenidah on Sunday.

In Jhenidah, a gang beat JCD leader Manirul Islam to death on Sunday night.

Police said the killing could be a sequel to previous feud with an influential leader of district Jyitabadi Sramik Dal, labour front of BNP.

Family source said, a gang of 10 stormed into the house of Manirul, 25, son of Tajul Islam, at Kanchanpur village and picked him up at gunpoint.

They took him to Baka Bridge in Paglakanay and beat him. He was taken to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital in a critical condition. He died there hours later.

As the news spread in the town, traders brought out protest rally and demanded arrest of the killers. A case

has been filed with Jhenidah Sadar police.

In the other incident, one person was killed and at least 40 people were injured in a clash between two groups at Bishnudia village in the Sada upazila in Kushtia district Sunday night.

The clash took place between supporters of Mokkel Mollah and Jharu Mollah, two relatives residing at the same village. Quoting villagers, police said they had a long standing dispute over ancestral land.

Hakim Mollah, 26, son of Mokkel Mollah died on the spot as the groups fought with lethal weapons.

Eleven of injured were admitted to Kushtia General Hospital and Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

Police visited the spot on the night, recovered the body and sent it to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

A tense situation was prevailing in the area. No case was filed till filing this report at about 11:am yesterday.

Conflict with ministry weakens local govt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Conflict between the Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) ministry and Union Parishad (UP) leaders is the main hurdle in strengthening the local government.

Speakers disclosed this at a two-day meeting organised to exchange opinion at Satkhira district scout office on May 14 and 15.

A non-governmental organisation (NGO), Uttaran arranged the meeting in assistance with USAID-funded Local Government Initiative (LGI) and implemented by ARD Inc USA. Civil society members, teachers, lawyers and journalists took part in the meeting.

Speakers identified other factors such as non-co-operation of law makers with local government representatives, violation of the UP manual by both the law makers as well as the central government, tendency to keep woman repre-

sentatives non-functional, apathetic attitude towards the representatives of the opposition political parties and insolvency of administrative institutions at the grass roots level as other major obstacles.

Participants stressed the need for strengthening the local government bodies in accordance with the law and UP manual for uplift of rural people as well as to institutionalise democracy.

Rezaul Islam, Selim Morul, Abu Musa and Kazi Shahidul Haq Raju were the main discussants while civil society members Anisur Rahim, Editor, of local daily The Satkhira Chitra, advocate Shah Alam, former general secretary of the bar association, Ashraf Ali Siddique, Headmaster, Dhulihar High School, Shahnaz Parvin, Director, Labanya moyee Mahila Sangstha, Tahmina Islam, Director, Ananya Mahila Sangstha and Sheikh Farid Ahmed Moyna addressed.

FALSE CASE Hoodlums foil newsmen's protest rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Some hoodlums allegedly led by local ruling party men on Sunday foiled a rally of local journalists arranged to protest filing of a 'false case' against Kaligonj Press Club President Mainul Hasan Bachchu.

Journalist Hafizur Rahman was injured in the attack. Mainul Hasan and some others were implicated in the 'false case' filed by one Abdur Rashid on May 10 with Kaligonj thana. To protest this, members of Kaligonj Press Club arranged a protest meeting at Fultala intersection at the upazila headquarters.

As they started the meeting, some hoodlums allegedly engaged by local ruling party men swooped on the meeting and foiled it.

Earlier on Saturday, some hoodlums led by local BNP leader Manirul Islam Manu snatched the microphone as some journalists were making publicity for their Sunday's protest rally.

The journalists alleged that Kaligonj thana OC was informed but he did not take any action.

Later, journalists at Satkhira met the Police Superintendent and urged him to take action against the attackers. He assured them of action.

From darkness to light

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *B'baria*

Good sense finally prevailed on them. Fifty thieves and dacoits made a public pledge to give up crime and lead an honest life.

"I spoiled my life. I do not want to spoil the life of my children", said Janto Mia, one of their 12 ring-leaders at the solemn and simple function held recently at the Eidgah field at Tarua village in Ashuganj upazila, attended by village elite.

Some local elite in cooperation with Grameen Bank arranged their return to normal life. One from the administration was present. The Police Superintendent was kept informed, local people said.

Some of the ring-leaders told the meeting that more thieves and dacoits would return to normal life.

Some of them said good sense started haunting their minds when they saw their children did not like them and their bad deeds. Their children felt shy to join others in the society.

At the meeting, Grameen Bank official Shahnaj Parvin said her bank will provide Tk 5000 loan to each of the 50 people for income generating activities. Bigger loans will be given if they repay the loan and lead honest life, she said.



PHOTO: STAR

Blind Selim is now a hawker and earns at least Tk 125 a day, thanks to the Satkhira unit of National Blind Welfare Organisation. He left begging in 1996 and started hawking brooms, cleaners and plastic articles on the streets of Satkhira town with Tk 2000 donated by advocate Shamsul Haq and advocate SM Haider, president and general secretary of the organisation here. Son of a day labourer, he had left the School for the Blind when he was a student of class eight at the age of 15. Selim, now 32, says he saved money from his small business and arranged marriage of his younger sister Amena. He is grateful to those who buy things from him. But he has qualms. He married in November last year but his wife left him because he is blind. "I am born blind. Is this my fault?" he said while talking to this correspondent.