



Children start their day with physical exercise (left) and blind Rafiqul Bari (cross-marked) with other teachers at the School for Disabled at Ghatail.

PHOTO: STAR

The blind torchbearer

Blind Rafiqul runs a school for disabled children in Tangail

AMINUL ISLAM, back from Ghatail, Tangail

Mymensingh: Blind Rafiqul has taken a unique initiative. He has opened a school for disabled children so that they can have the minimum education and training and lead a normal life in future.

Inspired by his noble mission, six local youths joined him to extend a helping hand to the disabled. They are giving voluntary service to the School for Disabled at Ghatail upazila headquarter in Tangail district.

Their initiative has drawn sympathy and goodwill from local people.

Rafiqul Bari Khan, 36, a bachelor, and the six youths are running the institution since 2003 without taking any financial benefit.

Rafiqul lost his eyesight at the age of two due to wrong treatment for diarrhoea by a quack.

His father Abdur Rahim Khan spent a lot of money but to no result.

"I knew about the National Blind Organisation (NBO) through the radio. I got admitted there in 1983 and received training." After training from NBO, Rafiqul also took training on some vocations in 1986 from an institute at Tongi in Gazipur, run by the Social Welfare Ministry.

He joined Tangail Cotton Mills in 1989.

Since then he had a dream to do something for the disabled like him.

But Rafiqul became unemployed in 2002 when the mill was laid off. He

was offered a 'golden handshake'. Rafiqul started his real mission in life the same year (2002).

He first established a Disabled Welfare Centre in July 2002. Later he opened a school to impart education to disabled children.

After some days, Morsheda Khatun, Bhajon Chandra Nath, Mukul Hossain, Rozina Siddiqua, Sheuly Akhtar and Shamsunnahar joined him and volunteered their service. They are able-bodied youths.

They are teaching the disabled children with love and affection since setting up of the school.

There are 80 students on roll. Four of them are blind, 20 physically disabled, 22 with impaired hearing and 34 are disabled in intelligence. Twenty-five of them come to school regularly and attend classes.

The days programme starts with physical exercise in the morning in the backyard, followed by classes on Bangla, English, general knowledge, mathematics and painting.

Performance of students and teachers are reviewed regularly.

Many illiterate children can read or write now.

The school was formally inaugurated on August 19, 2003 by former state minister for Jute Lutfur Rahman Khan Azad MP, now State Minister for NGO Affairs.

The state minister donated Tk 20,000. Later the upazila administration allotted one metric ton of rice.

"That is all. Since then I did not

get any help from the government to run the school.

"Running the school is becoming harder due to increasing financial crisis".

The school runs at a two-room house, rented at Tk 1000 per month. One room is used as classroom and the other for office. The school has to pay around Tk 150 as monthly electricity bill.

But the school has no income as the students are from poor families. Tuition fee is not realised from them.

Moreover, the school authorities pay Tk 1200 per month for transporting the students to and from the school by rickshaw vans, Rafiqul said.

"As we have to deal with four kinds of disabled students, we need at least four rooms and a play ground for recreation and mental development of the students", he said.

Morsheda Khatun, a graduate from a local college, heads the teaching staff.

She said sports facilities are vital for such disabled children, but there is none except two caromboards.

Education for the disabled is mainly given through instruments, but we lack those and also proper training.

She said the teachings at the school are helping the children tremendously.

"Many students who could not understand anything earlier now understand many things. Their level

of understanding is growing".

Rafiqul regretted that the local administration did not support their initiative in any way.

He met the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) several times but did not get any positive response. "Rather the UNO discourages me", he said.

Rafiqul is very grateful to Ghatail Upazila Social Welfare Officer Nikhil Chandra Majumder who helped him get registration of the Disabled Welfare Centre (DWC) as an NGO when it was started.

"We the disabled people are not the burdens on society. We do not seek pity. We demand our rights", he said.

Disabled people can lead a normal life if educated and trained, he asserted. Rafiqul wants to build the school as an ideal institution for the disabled in the country.

Hearing impaired Dulal, 14, is among the students. Talking to this correspondent, his rickshawpuller father Shamsul Haq said his son has improved a lot since he started attending the school.

Similar view was expressed by retired army man Shahjahan, father of mentally impaired AL-Amin Chayan, 15.

"I am happy about the improvement. Now Chayan can understand what he should do and what he should not do", he said.

No rise in holding tax: KCC Mayor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Khulna Mayor Sk Tayebur Rahman reassured citizens on Sunday that he would not raise holding tax under any circumstance.

Holdings tax assessed during the 1988-'89 financial year will remain enforced, he said this at a press conference.

The Mayor called upon the people to remain alert against evil forces who are trying to create a chaotic situation over imposition of new holding tax.

"Officials responsible for sending letters to citizens to pay increased holding tax will be severely dealt with," he reaffirmed people. "This was done without my knowledge," he informed people.

A group of vested interest is trying to malign his image in a planned manner with a view to retarding ongoing development work here.

"I am determined to foil the deep-rooted conspiracy hatched up by vested interests with a political motive," he said.

"I am sure they will not succeed in their vile attempt to tarnish my image built through work as an elected mayor," he added.

LPG price up in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Gaibandha*

Prices of LP gas have shot up in the district in recent days.

A cylinder of LP gas is being sold at between Tk 530 to 580 while it was being sold at between Tk 350 to 380. Consumers opined that dealers enhanced gas price by creating its artificial crisis.

Sources said the price has been increased by a section of unscrupulous traders while there is no shortage of gas cylinders in the market.

OMS: Many areas in Barisal left out

Prices fall in city

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

Open market sale (OMS) of rice has not yet been started in many areas in Barisal region.

Rice prices have started falling in some areas following the OMS operation.

Alongside, there are allegations of "politicisation" of OMS dealership, supply of low quality rice and sale of rice in black market in many areas.

In Barisal city, only 23 dealers have been engaged under the OMS programme while at least 60 are needed to cover all the 30 wards. Of the 23, only 15 have started selling rice.

Allegations have it that most of the dealers are ruling party men, who are doing irregularities in sale of rice.

Traders at the wholesale rice market at Hatkhola, Fariapatty and Chaulapatty in the city said that since launch of the OMS program, price of different varieties of rice declined by

Tk 50 to 150 per quintal (100 kg.).

Coarse rice sells at Tk 16 per kg and fine rice at Tk 22 in the city markets, they said.

Reports from Gournadi said 14 dealers have been engaged in seven unions and another three in Gournadi Municipal area. All the dealers are ruling party men, including the general secretary of Gournadi Government College Students Union, sources claimed.

Twelve of the 17 dealers in Gournadi received 14.28 tonnes of rice

from the food department is last three days. But a sizeable portion of the rice was sold in the black market, they alleged.

When contacted, Gournadi Upazila Food Officer Abdur Rob said a seven-member supervision team is supervising proper distribution of OMS rice and prevent black marketing.

In Banaripara upazila, the OMS of

rice is yet to start. UNO Khan Md Rezaul Karim said eight dealers have been selected and the rice sale in the upazila and the municipal area will be started in a day or two.

In Jhalakati district, only 28 out of 74 dealers got their rice allotments. They sold tonnes of rice so far, but this did not have any impact on the prices.

In Barguna, food department officials changed the list of OMS dealers under political pressure, some dealers alleged when contacted over phone.

The officials however said OMS programme was launched in the district three days back.

In Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali, dealers received OMS rice but did not distribute those fearing public reaction as the rice was of very low quality having bad smell. Sixteen dealers have been selected for the upazila.

5 killed in a day

Victims include 3 outlaws

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kushlia*

Five persons were killed in separate incidents in Chuadanga and Jhenidah on Monday.

Three persons were killed in Chuadanga. Of them two outlaws were killed by two rivals in Alamdanga upazila while another outlaw was caught after a 'crossfire' with police.

In Jhenidah, rivals slaughtered a BNP leader while a businessman was killed in a 'crossfire' of the cadres of two outlawed parties.

Janajuddho factions of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML) slaughtered two party rivals at Koutola village in Alamdanga upazila, according to Chuadanga police.

The victims were Liaqat Ali Mollah 40 of Jhutiadanga village and Hazrat Ali, 36, of Natidanga village.

In another incident, a listed criminal and accused in several cases including murder was killed in a 'crossfire' between police and criminals at Hatidaka village in Damurhuda upazila, police said. Abdul Kuddus, 31, son of Khair Ali of the village was arrested on Saturday from his house.

Police returned fire, triggering hour-long gun battle. Police fired 20 gunshots. Kuddus died during exchange of gunshots on the spot.

Police recovered two pipe guns and five rounds of bullets from the spot.

Elderly BNP leader Rojdar Ali Mondol was killed by rival partymen at Shyampur village in Saikupa upazila, according to Jhenidah police.

In another incident at Atlia Bazaar in Sadar upazila, a rice mill owner Abu Bakkar was killed in a 'crossfire' when two outlaws were engaged in gunfight.

Inedible rice seized from OMS dealer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Gaibandha*

A rice dealer was arrested and three bags of inedible rice were seized from him by police at Palshbari on Monday.

A dealer Nirodh Kumar Chowdhury along with two of his companions lifted rice from the food godown and sold them at local market at high price. Later, his men procured inedible rice from market for sale under OMS programme.

Being informed, Palashbari UNO Dulal Krishna Shaha along with a police contingent raided the spot and seized 153 kg contaminated rice in three bags.

Patients hostage to fake doctors in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Ailing Amirunnessa, 42, came to Satkhira town on Monday from remote Dhurnghat village adjacent to the Sundarbans in Shyamnagar upazila for treatment.

She and her husband Emdad Ali got down from a bus at about 10 am. They hired a rickshaw van and asked the rickshawpuller to take them to the clinic of Dr. Shahiduzzaman, consultant doctor at Satkhira Sadar Hospital.

But the rickshawpuller took them to Satkhira Surgical Clinic. The rickshawpuller was an agent of the clinic, deployed at the bus terminal to collect patients.

At Satkhira Surgical Clinic, a man identifying himself as Dr GM Shahjahan Kabir advised her to have some pathological tests of urine and blood. Kabir charged Tk 150 as his fee and Tk 200 for the tests. The tests were done at the clinic.

The degrees written on Kabir letterhead pad reads: M.A.B.A MC (AFIM), Dhaka. He is also a business partner at the clinic.

Amirunnessa had arranged Tk 400 by selling a goat. He gave Tk 350 to the 'doctor'. He handed her a prescription and asked her to go home and take the medicines.

But she did not know that she was cheated by a fake doctor who has no academic qualification.

Later, when a pharmacy owner informed the matter to a local journalist, the fake doctor returned her the money.

Shahjahan Kabir and many others are cheating patients in this way for long, impersonating highly qualified doctors.

On investigation, it was found that there are 56 clinics and 47

diagnostic centres in the district, of which only 24 and 5 are registered.

But the number of MBBS radiologists, sinologists and microbiologists in the district town is one tenth of the number of the pathological laboratories and diagnostic centres.

People now ponder how so many laboratories are run with so few specialists.

Investigation reports of these diagnostic centres are often misleading, at times leading to death from use of inappropriate medicine due to wrong diagnosis.

The cheating is going on unabated but neither the district health department nor the administration has taken any step to stop this.

Most of clinic owners in Satkhira have "agents" at the Sadar Hospital and other places to lure patients in the name of better treatment. They are paid.

This correspondent during a visit to the Sadar Hospital on Monday saw some agents moving there.

Some of them admitted that they receive money from clinic owners for luring patients.

"As doctors are involved in the process, I never consider it unethical" said an agent on condition of anonymity.

Agent Abdus Satter said he gets Tk 50 to 200 for luring a patient, depending on the disease. "I earn Tk 1800 to 2200 per month and this is my only source of income to maintain my family".

When contacted Residential Medical Officer at Sadar Hospital Dr. Ishaque said, adequate measures have been taken to prevent agents from entering the hospital.

However, some hospital employees admitted that agents can not be identified easily as they enter the hospital in guise of patient's attendants.

Some patients and their attendants also alleged that a section of doctors and hospital staff also work in the interest of some private clinics.



PHOTO: STAR

The Apex Club recently distributed relief goods among flood affected people in Rajgonj in Monirampur upazila in Jessore.

11x4

SNAPS

JSD leader arrested by Rab

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rangpur*

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Sunday arrested Goutom Roy, a leader of Jatiya Krishok Jote, a front organisation of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) from Court Square here. A source in Rangpur Kotwali Thana told this correspondent RAB handed over Goutom to police for producing him before court after 24 hours of his arrest.

Man to die for killing nephew

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kushlia*

One person was sentenced to death for killing his nephew at Ramkrishnapur village in Bheramara upazila. The convict is Rezaul Islam Makhan, 36, son of Nazrul Islam. Makhan's elder brother Meherul Islam Ratan died of heart attack five years ago. He left behind his wife, Bithi Khatun and their only son Mehedi Hasan Bijon, a student of class six of Azad Memorial High School. In a bid to grab their property, Makhan sent a marriage proposal to Bithi which she declined. Being annoyed, Makhan kill his nephew Mehedi.