

Top priority to journalist murder cases, says IGP

Probe into Balu, Belal murders not satisfactory, Khulna newsmen told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Ashraf Huda yesterday said the government had given "top priority" to investigation of cases regarding murder of journalists in the south-western region and elsewhere in the country.

He was addressing a largely attended press conference at the KMP (Khulna metropolitan Police) headquarters here.

Ashraf Huda said a total of 15 journalists were killed in the country from 1996 till February this year. Of these, 10 cases are still under investigation, three are under trial and two cases have been stayed by the High Court.

"The purpose of my visit to Khulna is to monitor and oversee progress of investigation of murder of journalists Humayun Kabir Balu and Belaluddin. "Because, monitoring cell of the Home Ministry is not satisfied with investigation of these

two murder cases", the IGP said.

When asked, he said journalist Dip Azad bomb attack case has been transferred to CID for fair and impartial investigation only because a senior police official is implicated in it. CID of Dhaka is investigating the case, he said.

Ashraf Huda said government has decided to equip police with modern arms, choppers and other equipment despite resource constraint to make it stronger.

"We are grateful to the present government for this move", Huda said.

The IGP also held a meeting with DIG of Khulna Range, senior officials of KMP and police superiors of ten districts of Khulna division yesterday.

The meeting which continued from 10 am till 1 PM discussed law and order in the division and in Khulna metropolitan city.

Matters relating to progress in investigation of police and journalist

murder cases and new tactics to be adopted to "crush terrorists" also figured prominently in the high-level meeting, he said.

The IGP was accompanied by DIG Shamsul Islam of CID, Legal Advisor Saifur Rahman of Home Ministry and IO of journalist Dip Azad bomb attack case ASP Mostaff Halim of Dhaka CID.

Editor of Janmabhumi Humayun Kabir Balu was killed in a bomb attack on January 27 last year in front of his office at Haji Ismail Road in Khulna city.

Sub-inspector Maruf lodged an FIR with Khulna thana as complainant on August 29 last year without naming any accused.

Charge sheet of the case was submitted to the court naming eight outlaws of both M-L

and Janajuddho factions of Purba Banglar Communist Party as accused.

Names of two out of the eight accused were later dropped from

the charge sheet. One of them was BDR Altaf of Janajuddho, who died in a crossfire with police in October last year and the other is Iqbal Hossain who is also a Janajuddho activist, now in jail as an accused in Dip Azad bomb attack case.

Charge sheet of the case is yet to be submitted allegedly due to negligence of the investigation officer (IO), who is an Inspector of KMP Detective Branch.

Journalist Balaluddin of Dainik Sangram was severely injured in a bomb attack in front of the Khulna Press Clu7b on the night of February 5. He died at the CMH in Dhaka.

Two separate cases were recorded with Khulna thana. Twelve people have been arrested by the then IO of the case, ASI Asad.

But all of a sudden, Khulna thana OC Iqbal Hossain was made the IO, who reportedly shelved the investigation of the case for some unknown reasons.

Boy killed for toll

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Underground operatives killed a boy after abduction as his father failed to pay them toll at Matmura village in Gangni upazila in Meherpur district Friday night.

The boy was identified as Sawapan, 16, son of Abdul Jaill, a farmer.

According to family sources, an armed outlawed group had demanded Tk 40,000 from Jaill several days ago. But he declined to pay.

The gang threatened him for dire consequences. Jaill did not go to police as the criminals warned him not to do so.

Police said the gang stormed into the house of Jaill, tied up family members and looted Tk 12,000 and other valuables.

They picked up Sawapan. His body was found on a nearby paddy field. He was strangled. Police recovered and sent to Meherpur General Hospital for autopsy.

Babuganj OC suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The officer-in-charge (OC) of Babuganj Police Station (PS) was suspended on Thursday.

The action was taken against OC Abus Salehin for arresting five people including an Imam of a local mosque without any allegation against them on Monday.

The arrested persons are Maulana Majibur Rahman, 50, imam of the Rahamatpur mosque, his sister Rahima Begum, 46, his tenant Majeda Begum, 45, her daughter Sifat Ara, 26, and Azizur Huq, a member of Kedarpur Union Parishad, also a relative of the imam. Earlier, he was closed on Wednesday.

Assistant superintendent of police (ASP) of Barisal Mizanur Rahman told this correspondent a three-member inquiry committee has been formed to probe the matter.

"A legal action would be taken against him if he is found guilty following the investigation," the ASP told further.

The steps were taken against the police officer following protest procession and agitation by local people.

Debate festival at Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A two-day Jatiya Parbattya Bitorka Utsab (national debate festival for hill people), first such event in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), began at Rangamati town yesterday.

Debaters from across the country are taking part in the programme, organised jointly by the National Debate Federation and Global Village, a Rangamati-based pro-environment organisation.

Jotirindriya Bidhipriya Larma alias Santu Larma, chairman of CHT Regional Council and chief of Parbattya Chattogram Jono Sanghaty Samity, inaugurated the festival.

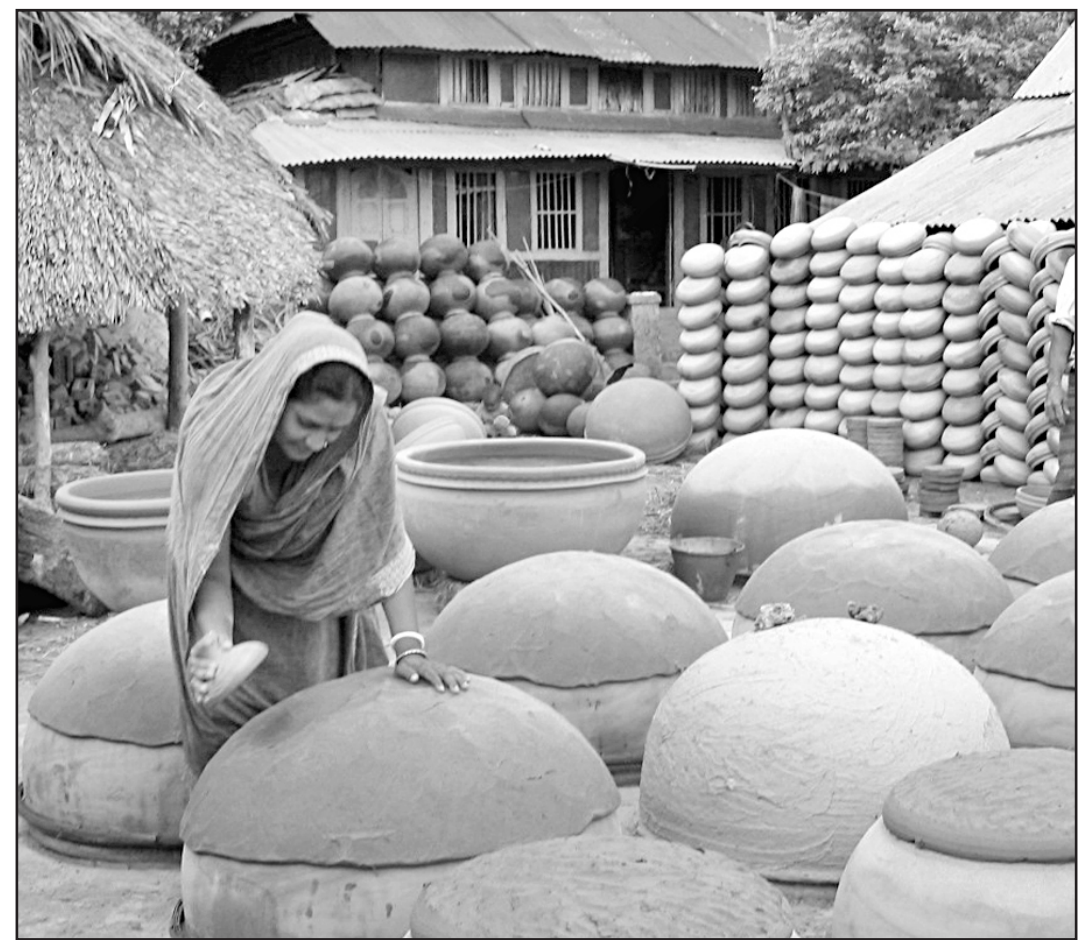


PHOTO: STAR

Women with pottery piled up on the yard at a village in Kowkhali.

Rural potters need skill to move with time

Potter communities in Kowkhali, Pirojpur leaving profession as they find their traditional skills age-old and 'meaningless'

MORSHED ALI KHAN, back from Kowkhali

Decorated and fashionable pottery is becoming popular in urban areas but a large community of potters in Kowkhali upazila in Pirojpur district is facing an uncertain future due to lack of technical assistance and undue intervention by local authorities.

Unable to earn a living from their inherited skills, many of the potter communities are now thinking of leaving their profession and expertise they acquired over generations.

Over the last thirty years, the number of potter families in Shonakur, Pal Para and other area near Kowkhali river has decreased to about 35 from 150. Many have migrated to India and many have taken to professions like grocery, rickshaw-pulling and boat-rowing.

Potters said it is difficult now to market even a limited production of traditional items. Talking to this correspondent recently, they said they are aware that in urban areas,

pottery is nowadays an item appreciated by an increasing number of people. But lack of technical assistance has made their traditional skills 'meaningless'.

Rakhal Pal of Pal Para village, who left the profession several years ago to find a teaching job at a primary school in Kowkhali, said he knows about the increasing demand for various fashionable household pottery items. But his community lacks the know-how to produce those.

Sixty-five year old Haridash Pal of the same village said they are now producing mainly large earthen bowls and other small items including pots for tree saplings and earthen fishing net weights to keep the business running. These are marketed in the coastal belt of the country.

"We have the best of skills in pottery but we need technical know how to produce things for markets in Dhaka, Chittagong and other urban areas," Haridash said.

Traditionally, potters use fuel

wood for baking their products in kilns. This has invited trouble from police. Police raided their kilns several times in the last few months and asked them to restrict their products to limited items.

"They came here to ask us not to bake many items in our kilns and some of them also demanded their conveyance (for coming to the village)," said another potter.

Rakhal, Haridash, Joyanti and her relatives also said that their village on the bank of the Kowkhali river is seriously threatened with erosion. Joyanti, mother of three children, said the river earlier devoured her ancestral houses. She apprehend that her new house may be washed away in the upcoming monsoon.

"We appeal to authorities to save our homes from erosion and help us survive with our age old profession, but to no effect" she said.

Tomato brings fame, fortune

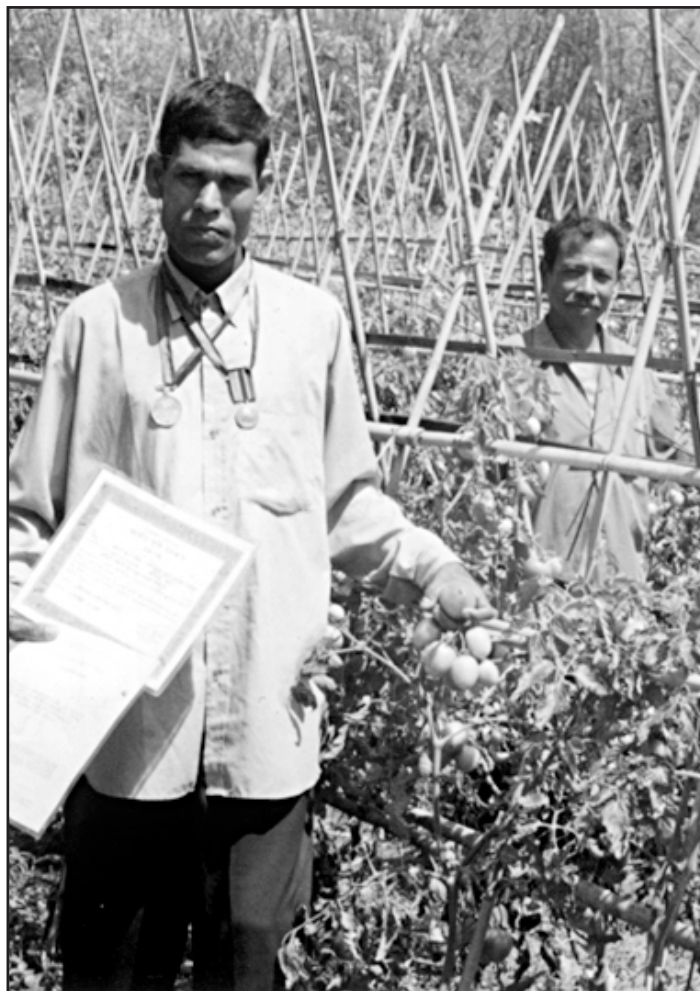


PHOTO: STAR

National Award winning farmer Abdul Karim who earned Tk 14 lakh from tomato cultivation snapped in his field at Jalapur village.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Retired army man Abdul Karim is now an example for many farmers and educated youths. He earned over Tk 14 lakh from commercial cultivation of tomato this year.

Many farmers are following him in Komolganj upazila in the district now.

The people of his area are proud of Karim, who got the National Agriculture Award this year for his outstanding achievement in the field.

"I have special interest in tomato cultivation because it is highly profitable", he said while talking to this correspondent during a recent visit to his farm at Jalapur village.

Karim had joined Bangladesh Army in 1987. While in army, he had also worked as UN Peacekeeper in Bosnia and Croatia.

After retirement in 2002, and come back to his village home at Jalapur. He wanted to do something for his family as well as the country. One of his brothers—Abdur Rahim was a Block Supervisor of Agriculture Extension Department (AED), who knew cultivation of hybrid tomato and other vegetables. He was inspired by his brother.

Karim started tomato cultivation in a small plot of land in 2002. Fortune favoured him. He got a bumper yield.

Next year, (2003) he leased five acres of land in Kamalgonj upazila headquarter and ventured commercial cultivation of hybrid tomato. He invested Tk 7.50 lakh, the money he got as retirement benefit from army.

He earned about Tk 12 lakh in about four months.

This year, he sold Tk 14 lakh tomato so far. The earnings would have been more if he could preserve tomato in a specialised cold storage, he said. A huge quantity of tomato was rotten due to lack of preservation facility and bad transportation facility, he said.

Now an agriculture expert, Karim said he will not cultivate tomato next year. Crops have to be rotated to get good yield.

He is now thinking of an agro-based processing factory because tomatoes will be plenty in supply in coming years as many farmers will cultivate tomato and other vegetables, seeing his success.

The government should come forward to help prospective investors in setting up a specialised cold storage to preserve vegetables, he said.

Farming has also earned him fame. He got the national award this year, handed over by Prime Minister Khalada Zia in Dhaka on March 5.

Karim got a silver medal, a certificate and Tk 15,000.

Karim said he inspires other farmers, particularly educated youths, in farming. Agriculture and agro-based small industries can be a regarding sectors for educated youths, which, if patronised by the government can solve the unemployment problem to a great extent and boost the country's economy.

Father of a son and a daughter, Karim said, training and supply of quality seeds is the prime need to promote agriculture in the country.

'Take steps to save Sylhet haor crops'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Speakers at a rally at Court Point in Sylhet city yesterday demanded immediate steps to protect Boro paddy from flood in vast haors in Sylhet region.

They also called upon the government to form a Haor Development Board with to take up long term steps to ensure sustainable development of haor areas, dredging of Surma, Kushiya, Kalni, Monu and Khowai rivers.

They said flood is a recurring problem, destroying crops worth several thousand crore taka. Embankments and other protection works done by the Water Development Board (WDB) failed to save crop solely due to corruption and faulty planning by WDB officials, the speakers said.

12 chargesheeted in Monju murder case in Bakerganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

After two and a half years of investigation, police submitted charge sheet against 12 persons in the sensational Manjurul Haque Talukder Monju murder case.

Local criminal investigation department (CID) inspector Barisal Fazlul Haque submitted the chargesheet on Thursday.

The chargesheeted persons include Awami League (AL) leaders and activists and former Bakerganj municipality chairman and staff.

They are Mahub Alam, district Awami League information and research secretary and former chairman, Tazul Hossain, staffers of Bakerganj municipality Nani Gopal Sil, Ashraf Hossain, Dulal, Nazem Khalifa, Haider Khalifa, Abul

casil, the speakers said.

If the government fails to form Haor Development Board, there will be tough agitation, they announced.

Haor Unnayan Parishad arranged the rally. Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran joined it as chief guest.

Sylhet city BNP's General Secretary Nasim Hossain, ex-Upazila Chairman of Jamalganj Yousuf Al Azad, Syedpur-Shahar Para UP Chairman Ataur Rahman, ex-chairman of Haldipur UP Rafiqul Islam, Juba Unnayan Parishad General Secretary Manoranjan Talukder and Haor Unnayan Parishad General secretary Md Kamruzzaman spoke at the rally presided over by president of the Parishad Suranjit Barman.

Kasem, Hemayet, Liton, Rob Kazi and Alauddin, AL leaders and associates of Mahub Alam.

Mahub Alam, Dulal, Haider and Nazem Khalifa and Alauddin were granted bail earlier from the court. They are now threatening the complainant and witnesses of the case to withdraw the case, family members alleged.

Armed criminals chopped Manju, 35, an accountant of Bakerganj municipality to death in front of his family members on August 22, 2002.

The murderers also looted cash, valuables and official documents of the municipality from the house.

Victim's father Yunus Talukder lodged a murder case with Bakerganj Police Station.