



PHOTO: STAR

Depositors crowd postal savings banks in Gaibandha (Left) and Nilphamari yesterday to inquire about the fate of their savings.

## Infected donors, unsafe blood

### Rajshahi patients at risk as private blood banks have no screening facility

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Blood transfusion to patients in Rajshahi city hospitals and clinics is risky due to a lack of sufficient screening facilities at blood banks.

Blood collected from professional donors is also of lower quality and often infected with germs of diseases, it was gathered from sources at blood banks.

At least 50 per cent of the total blood collected in the city is from professional donors and most of them are sick or drug addicts. They are often seen sitting on the premises of the blood banks and sell blood only to buy drugs.

According to the sources, the blood of professional donors contains inadequate blood cells and harmful microorganisms and chemicals like HBsAg (Hepatitis B

virus antigen).

In Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) blood bank, at least 30 per cent of the collected blood is from professional donors, 50 per cent from relatives of patients and the rest from voluntary donors, said a study report.

RMCH blood bank chief Dr Mosaddek Hossain said that they collect and supply blood after screening tests under the Safe Blood Transfusion Programme. The tests include HIV (virus of AIDS), HBsAg, HCV (Hepatitis C virus) and VDRL (test for syphilis).

In 2003, a total of 12,500 blood bags were collected in the hospital. Of those, HCV positive was found in 44 bags, HBsAg positive in 33 bags and VDRL positive in eight bags. However, no HIV positive was found in any of the blood bags.

Private blood banks do not have

any screening facility, the sources said. Some of the owners of blood banks admitted that usually they do any go for screening test of donors' blood. They all said screening tests cost about Tk 450 and they are to give Tk 90 per bag to professional donor.

"Per bag screened blood should sell at no less than Tk 700, which most buyers cannot afford," said an owner of a private blood bank. Private blood banks usually sell blood at around Tk 350 per bag.

There are six private blood banks in the city and each sells about 200 bags of blood a month.

But men at private blood bank usually tell buyers recipients that they have performed screening tests and their blood is safe, it is alleged.

# Worried depositors crowd postal banks: Panic withdrawal

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Hundreds of worried depositors crowded postal savings banks in Nilphamari, Gaibandha and Rangpur yesterday to check their accounts following reports of defalcation of crores of Taka by postal employees.

In Nilphamari, the amount defalcated from depositors' accounts at the Head Post Office may cross Tk 10 crore, according to sources in the probe team. A quarter having political backing is allegedly trying to save some of the persons involved in the scam.

At Syedpur, people reportedly attacked the house of a postal employee involved in the scam.

**Our Nilphamari correspondent reports:** Bail petitions of accused Assistant Post Master Mir Nural Islam Munna and Ledger Operator Ahmedul Islam Raju were rejected again yesterday by court.

Yesterday was the first working day after reports of defalcation appeared on newspapers.

Several hundred depositors were seen crowding the Nilphamari Head Post Office all day long to know about their accounts.

This correspondent talked to BRAC official Din Mohammad (postal account No. 5760) and Lutfun Nahar, a housewife from Ukil Para in the town (account No. 4481).

They alleged that the system in the bank is faulty, which allows corruption.

They alleged that in the past, after depositing money against their accounts, they were given receipts, which were hand-written. The system should be computerised, they said. They however said their accounts are intact. Abdul Wahed, president of district fertiliser association (account No. 13225) said the system is out-

- Defalcated amounts run into crores of taka
- Mob attacks house of accused in Syedpur

dated and troublesome.

There are 14,000 savings accounts and 17,000 general accounts at the Head Post Office.

Additional Post Master General, Rajshahi Division, who is a member of the inquiry committee, when contacted, refused to make any comment.

"I am not authorised to talk to newsmen" he said.

But he confidently said that the account holders should not worry about their deposited money. Another member of the inquiry committee on condition of anonymity told this correspondent that as per rule it is mandatory for a Head Post Office to send audit reports to Postal Audit Office in Dhaka every fortnight.

Had audit been done timely and properly, irregularities could have been detected initially and so enormous scam would not have happened, he said.

There is a rumour in the town that some 'big fries' of postal department might be involved in the scam. He said two members of the committee returned to Dhaka to submit the investigation report to the ministry. They will return soon with important directives regarding further investigation, he added.

He also said that the culprits have mingled all important papers and documents.

He said the defalcated amount may exceed Tk 10 crore.

Meanwhile, confusion has been created regarding the role of police in

the case.

The Sadar thana OC, who is also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, has gone on leave for four days from yesterday. In his absence the Second Officer, SI Moslem Uddin, refused to make any comment about the case.

Police did not seek remand of the accused till their report was filed at about 3pm yesterday.

Allegations have it that an opposition leader during last municipal election took several lakh Taka from Assistant Post Master Mir Nural Islam Munna to repay his bank loan.

An influential quarter is trying to save the culprits, according to some sources.

Reports from Syedpur said angry people attacked the house of absconding Postal Operator Taslim Uddin in the town Friday night.

**Our Rangpur Correspondent reports:** People thronged the main branches of post offices in Rangpur, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram yesterday to check their savings accounts.

The bank authorities assured them that their money is safe.

Probe bodies continued their investigation today in Lalmonirhat, and Kurigram post offices.

A source at Kurigram post office on condition of anonymity said investigation into the scam slowed yesterday for unknown reasons.

Sources at Rangpur Post Office claimed that the authorities were trying to save the culprits.

Earlier, the probe body detected that Rangpur Postal Inspector Abu Taher Md Shamsuzzaman withdrew about Tk six lakh through forgery from the post office. But some sources at the post office claimed yesterday that he did not withdraw the money, but deposited it with his account at the post office.

Abu Taher's family returned the money by this time, some sources said.

Post Master of Rangpur Head Post Office however denied the allegation. He said the probe body investigated all ledgers starting from 1995, and there is no way to escape if any body has defalcated any amount.

A member of the probe body in Kurigram said the accused withdrew money from account of 'dead and missing clients', whose relatives did not look into those.

Lalmonirhat police, when contacted over phone, declined to name the persons involved in money defalcation for the shake of investigation.

But they said a network inside the post office had long been involved in misappropriation of money.

**Our Gaibandha Correspondent reports:** The amount defalcated from depositors' accounts in Gaibandha postal savings bank may be over Tk one crore, according to sources close to the probe team.

They said an organised gang did the scam.

Worried depositors were seen crowding the postal savings bank

yesterday.

Many of the account holders were seen withdrawing their money.

"God saved me, my account is intact", said Dilip Kumar Shaha of David Company Para in the town.

"I do not know whether my three-year time deposit is all right", said Pullok Chandra of Banglabazar.

"I am badly in need of Tk 2000 but the bank could not provide me with cash", said Ahinor Rahman, a housewife.

"We are facing shortage of cash due to heavy rush for withdrawal. The situation will be alright soon", said Amjad Hossain, newly posted Postmaster.

A three-member team from Rajshahi headed by Ashrafuzzaman, Deputy Post Master General (Investigation), is now in Gaibandha to monitor post-investigation situation at Gaibandha Post Office.

Meanwhile, sources said the official procedure for suspension of the six persons accused for defalcation is being completed, said the Rajshahi DPMG.

The team led by Abdur Rashid, Director, Postal Department, will resume investigation soon, he said. The amount defalcated will go high, he added.

None of the accused persons could be arrested till yesterday. They are assistant post masters Golam Nabi and Rafiqul Islam and postal operators Habibur Rahman, Solaiman Ali, Mozaherul Islam and Rafiqul Islam.

Police said they made a drive last night to arrest them but the accused are fleeing.

**SNAPS**

**Shyamol died in Rab torture, claims WP**

RU CORRESPONDENT

Workers Party leaders at a rally in Rajshahi city yesterday alleged that their party leader Shyamol Kumar Sarker was killed due to torture in Rab custody. Sarker was Chuadanga WR general secretary. The rally held at the Zero Point was presided over by WR Rajshahi city unit president Liaket Ali Liku. The rally demanded investigation into the killing and trial of the persons responsible. Speakers at the rally urged all progressive forces to unite and launch a tougher agitation to dislodge the four-party alliance government. The speakers included Sadrul Islam, Taibur Rahman, Abdur Rahim, Matiur Rahman, Debashes Praminik and Tapon. Earlier, they brought out a protest procession and paraded the city streets, chanting various anti-government slogans.

**Two flee from custody**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Two arrested accused fled from police custody in Barhatta upazila Thursday night. A team from Barhatta police station led by SI Bakir Hossain in a raid at Gopalpur village had arrested absconding accused Abdul Kaddus, 32 and Ripon, 28. The two were among three accused wanted in a case. As police raided another house to arrest the other accused-- Abu Kalam--, the two handcuffed accused fled from custody. Officer-in-charge (OC) of Barhatta thana admitted the incident but declined to say anything more.

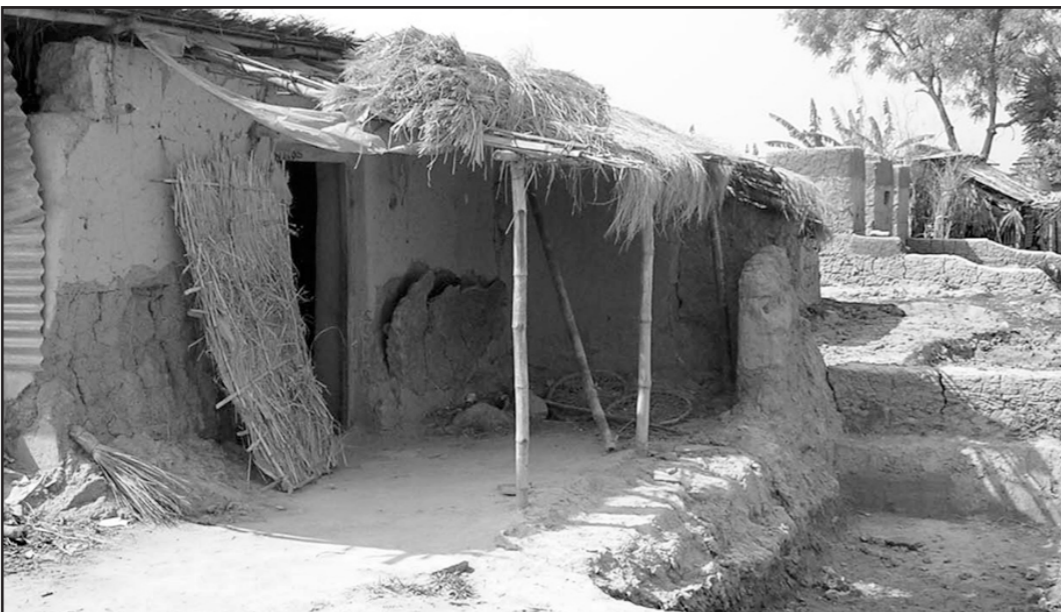


PHOTO: STAR

A desolate Bhimpur village in Naogaon after the ethnic people left homes. The photo was taken yesterday.

## FALLOUT OF ALFRED MURDER

# Ethnic families flee homes for fear of life in Naogaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Thirty-five members of ten ethnic families have left homes in Bhimpur village in Mohadevpur upazila in Naogaon district as they are threatened with death by influentials.

During a visit to the village by some journalists yesterday, some ethnic community people said, the families are fleeing homes following threats by Shitesh Bhattacharya alias Godai and his accomplices who were allegedly involved in the murder of ethnic leader Alfreed Sawren.

But Godai denied the allegation. Alfreed was killed in front of his house at Bhimpur village during day time on August 18, 2000 for opposing land grabbing by some influen-

tial people.

There are 545 bighas of 'disputed' land in the village. Sources said these are government lands but some influentials said they own those.

Only Alfreed's brother Open Hemroon, his wife Rebeka Sawren and their minor daughter were found in the village during the visit.

Open said most of the ethnic families have left homes due to lack of security after a temporary police camp, set up at the village after Alfreed's murder, was withdrawn about 18 months ago.

Some of the families now fleeing homes are eyewitnesses to Alfreed's murder, he said.

Open Hemroon said he may also leave the village as he is being

threatened.

He said Alfreed had been fighting for the interest of ethnic people and allotment of government land to them.

Godai claims that he owns 250 out of the 545 bighas of disputed land.

Lawyer Mohsin Reza, engaged by Alfreed's family, said trial of the murder case is being delayed due to absence of witnesses.

Ninetyone people have been accused in the murder case. They include Godai and another influential man, Hatim Ali.

Public Prosecutor (PP) Jaynal Abadin said proceedings of the case are now stopped as Godai and some other accused have filed a writ with the High Court.

## ANTI-SMOKING LAW Bidi output falls, workers face job loss in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Production of Bidi in Barisal region has come down by about fifty per cent and at least 20,000 workers have become unemployed after enactment of the law banning smoking at public places, according to sources in the industry.

The jobless workers held several demonstrations in the city in the past week demanding relaxation of the law till their rehabilitation.

The anti-smoking law took effect on March 26. Now smoking in transports and at public places are rarely seen.

Niranjan Dey, an official of Karikar Bidi Factory, said in last one week, about forty million Bidi sticks were produced, but not even half of those were sold. As a result, workers have not been given any new work order in the current week.

Haider Ali Khan, Managing Director of Sultani Bidi Factory, told this correspondent that 6000 workers of his factory were given only two days' work last week and their work in the coming week is also uncertain.

Bidi produced last week are yet to be sold, he added.

Bidi factory workers usually work on daily basis under master roll and they remain unemployed if work is not given.

Leaders of the Bidi Sramik Union said if the trend of slide in production continues, about three million out of fifty million workers would become jobless within a short period.

Different trade unions of Bidi factory owners and workers have decided to hold a grand rally at Paltan Maidan in Dhaka on April 20, where they will demand relaxation of the law and alternative programmes for rehabilitation of jobless workers.

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