

Angry protests on in Rajshahi demanding Mili murder trial

Classes not held, students wear black badges, day-long hartal May 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

All schools in Rajshahi city remained shut yesterday as school-children observed strike in protest against 'tempered probe' into the rape and murder of school girl Mili. They demanded speedy trial of the case and exemplary punishment of the killers while people held a demonstration at Ghospara and Shaheb Bazar.

Eleven year-old Mafroza Begum Mili, a student of class V at PN Government High School, was gangraped and strangled on May 3 in the morning.

Her father Mansur Rahman Mollah, an Instructor at Rajshahi Postal Academy, filed the case accusing Fazle Rabbi Rion, his relative Saiduzzaman Minar and his neighbour Fazlur Rahman, an employee of Power Development Board.

Avoiding classes, students at most of the schools in the city demonstrated on the campuses, wearing black badges.

Different organisations have called a day-long hartal on May 30 in Rajshahi demanding trial of the murder.

Different socio-cultural, professional, child and human rights bodies have expressed their solidarity with the hartal programme.

Yesterday, different organisations put up demonstrations on Rajshahi city streets, criticising police for not taking action against Mili's rapists and killers, who have



PHOTO: STAR

Government PN Girls High School at Shaheb Bazar in Rajshahi city wears a deserted look during yesterday's strike. Mili was a student of this school.

alleged links with a ruling BNP lawmaker.

Some police sources however told this correspondent that the case was being processed for investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

This (CID investigation) is an eye-wash, many people alleged while talking to this correspondent. They claimed that police are under political pressure.

The murder created a public anger, prompting demonstrations by hundreds of city dwellers

including women and children.

Different organisations including Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, Sammito Sangskritik Jote, Professionals' Allied Council and Rajshahi Rakkha Sangram Parishad held demonstrations in the city earlier.

Meanwhile police arrested all the three accused persons and interrogated them, but could not make any clue, they said.

The police said that the three were found inside the house where

Mili was gangraped and killed. Neighbours rescued Mili by breaking the door.

Mili was left home alone as her father went to office and mother had gone to bring her brother home from a coaching center.

Meanwhile, a medical board headed by Dr Ashraf Alam, chairman of forensic department of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, confirmed that Mili was raped before murder.

Another PCP man shot, two rivals held in Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Another activist of Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP), student front of Parbattya Chattagram Janan Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), was shot in Naniarchar upazila in Rangamati district Tuesday evening.

In another incident on the day, two activists of United Peoples Democratic Front's student front, also named PCP, were arrested with a homemade gun in Kawkhali upazila in the district.

Police said that Tapan Kumer Khisa, son of Bijoy Kumer Khisa of Kutukchhari village, came under attack allegedly by armed cadres of UPDF when he was returning home from Kutukchhari bazaar.

Tapan was shot in the head, leg and back as miscreants sprayed bullets on him, police said yesterday.

He was first taken to Rangamati Sadar Hospital and then shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital at night.

Quoting local people, police said Tapan used to collector toll in the name of PCJSS.

In Kawkhali, army personnel, with the help of local people, nabbed two activists of PCP belonging to UPDF when he was extorting money from people in Adorshagram village, yielding a gun.

They are Aung Chaming Marma, 23, and Mong Ching Marma 19. Police said they recovered a gun with two bullets from them.

They will be produced before court, police said.



PHOTO: STAR

Farmers loading maize for sale (left) and a field of the yellow crop on a Teesta shoal awaits harvest. About 4000 acres of fallow lands were brought under maize cultivation in one year.

Magic maize on Teesta shoals

A step to combat *monga* under Crop Diversification Programme

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Once quiet and lifeless Teesta shoals are now buzzing with activities. Getting rid of *monga* is now in the vision of the poor people there, thanks to introduction of maize cultivation by Agriculture Extension Department (DAE) under its crop diversification programme.

The socio-economic scenario started changing with harvest of golden maize on several thousand acres of lands in Teesta shoals, left 'barren and unproductive' for decades.

Two years ago, DAE tested the soil in shoal areas and found the soil suitable for this crop.

Last year, maize was cultivated on an experimental basis, which achieved an unexpected success.

This year, DAE brought 4,000 acres of land under maize cultivation.

Now, about 10,000 people of 3,000 families in Teesta shoals including Char Kharibari, East Kharibari, Fakrater Char, Vandabari, Jharsingheswar, Gopal Jhar, Alsia Para, Baishpukur have a new lease of life. They are vibrant with hopes that *monga* (a pre-harvest lean period

between September late November when there is no farm work) will not affect them this year. The maize cultivation also created jobs for about 5,000 unemployed people.

The DAE also taught them use of scientific cultivation of maize.

ADAE official in Nilphamari told this correspondent that they have other crops like ginger, onion, garlic, exportable aromatic rice in their basket for cultivation in the shoals.

"We are also trying these crops, and hopefully, will be successful", said Nilphamari DAE Scientific Officer Mohammad Nazrul Islam.

Maize has been introduced under DAE's North West Crops Diversification Project (NCDP).

"Sandy and sand-alluvial soil in shoals is very suitable for maize cultivation", he said.

He said 2,038 men and 2,856 women have been provided short training under NCDP for cultivation of these crops.

Nazrul said the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is providing Tk 1,02,77,800 for loans to farmers in Rajshahi region under the NCDP.

Nilphamari is under NCDP's Rajshahi Division Zone.

Some NGOs like Proshika, BRAC are cooperating in this project.

Janata Bank is also providing soft loans to poor farmers in shoals in Dimla and Jaldhaka Upazilas.

Block supervisors (BS) of DAE and NGO workers are providing technical support.

Farmer Sona Mondal of Char East Kharibari village told this correspondent that about 500 acres of land in his village were covered with 2-3 feet sand layers after a Water Development Board (WDB) dam burst in 2000 and flooded the area.

One thousand families became virtually beggars overnight. There was none to buy these sand-covered lands even at Tk 200 per *bigha* (30 decimal), he said.

Sona Mondal got a new life when maize cultivation began in his shoal last year. "The sandy land is now my asset", he said.

This year he cultivated hybrid maize in two acres of land and got 140 mounds worth Tk 41,000. He had spent about Tk 15,000, borrowed from

bank and relatives.

Sona Mondal is among several thousand farmers in the area hoping better life by cultivating maize on Teesta shoal lands left uncultivated for decades earlier.

Maize farmers Yunus Ali, Abul Hasem, Zulhas, Wasuddin of Char Nilphamari DAE Deputy Director Mohammad Sakhawat Hossain hopes maize cultivation would help remove *monga* from Teesta shoals to a great extent.

Haider Ali, the chairman Tepakharbari union in Dimla upazila, an area worst affected by *monga* said maize has changed the socio-economic condition of his area. People who would queue for relief in front of the Union Parishad office earlier are not seen now.

Second probe into Patuakhali launch tragedy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The second probe body consisting of four members and headed by Shipping Ministry deputy secretary (DS) BD Mitra on Tuesday began investigation into the launch mishap occurred in the Buragourango river in Galachipa upazila on May 15.

The probe body was formed according to instruction of the Shipping Ministry secretary on May 18. The body will submit the report to him, according to BIWTA assistant director (AD) Sultan Ahmed.

The launch having a capacity of 80 passengers sailed for Char Montaz from Patuakhali with over 300 passengers. It sunk due to overloading of the launch. Eighty-two bodies were recovered from the ill-fated launch.

Meanwhile, the first probe body formed by the deputy commissioner (DC) of Patuakhali headed by additional district magistrate (ADM) Monjur Alam could not submit its report till Tuesday, the last date for submission of report.

No launch plied on the route after the accident.

5 lakh brace for flood as Kobadak dredging yields no result

ABU AHMED, Satkhira

Over eight lakh people in five upazilas in Satkhira and Jessore districts brace for hardship and misery from floods this year also as their agitation for dredging the Kobadak brought to result.

The Water Development Board (WDB) took up a Tk 24 crore project in 2003 to dredge the river from Sarashkati to Pajakola following a series of agitation programmes organised by the Koradak Bachao Andolon, a civic body that also includes political leaders from all parties.

Water Resources Minister Hafizur Rahman inaugurated the dredging at a colourful ceremony, held on October 26, 2003.

The dredging virtually yielded no



PHOTO: STAR

The frail Kobadak will turn furious with the onset of monsoon as dredging could not improve its navigability.

result, leaders of the Koradak Bachao Andolon said while talking to this correspondent. They will go for another spell of agitation programmes soon, they said.

They apprehend massive floods in the coming monsoon also as navigability of the river has not improved after the dredging.

Repeated devastating floods in the last couple of years displaced several lakh people in 150 villages under 15 unions in Kalaroa and Tala Upazilas in Satkhira and Jhhikargachh, Keshabpur and Manirampur upazilas in Jessore districts.

Floods damaged scores of houses and crops of vast lands and washed away fishes from shrimp enclosures. In many areas, croplands remained uncultivated

even during the dry season due to stagnant water, which also damaged trees and greenery. Scores of people rendered homeless by the floods are yet to be rehabilitated.

When contacted over phone, the Jessore WDB Executive Engineer admitted that such dredging is a "temporary measure".

Satkhira WDB officials said there is no alternative to continuous dredging of the river for keeping its navigability.

The problem can not be solved in an isolated way, they said.

Other silted rivers in the area including Mathabhanga, Betna, Chunkuri, Marichap, Bhairab, Chitra, Harihar should be dredged under a comprehensive plan to check recurring floods in the region, they said.