

2 Bangla Bhai 'cadres' held on extortion charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Nilphamari

Two young men were arrested on Monday when they went to Nilphamari LGED office to collect toll money, identifying themselves as 'cadres' of Bangla Bhai.

They are Rezaul and Azad. On Saturday morning, one person identifying himself as Siddikur Rahman alias Bangla Bhai talked to Nilphamari Executive Engineer A K S M Mostafa Kamal over telephone and demanded Tk 4 lakh for treatment of one of their sick activists.

It was finally settled over phone that Tk one lakh would be given and

the money would be handed over to Bangla Bhai men at the LGED (Local Government and Engineering Department) Monday morning.

Being informed by the LGED official, some plainclothes policemen waited at the office in the guise of employees and some took position outside.

A young man went to the office at about 11 am, identified himself as Bangla Bhai activist Rezaul and handed over a letter with a so-called code number (525) to the Executive Engineer.

Police arrested him immediately and asked him to call his compatriot there.

On a telephone call from Rezaul, another young man named Azad went to the LGED. Police nabbed him.

A case has been lodged with Nilphamari thana.

Nilphamari thana Sub Inspector Abdul Bari told this correspondent that the arrested persons were being interrogated to know whether they are actually activists of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) run by Bangla Bhai.

Rezaul identified himself as son of one Abdul Haque Patowari of Sri Rampur village in Mohespur upazila in Jessore district. His associate Azad hails from Noakhali district, he said.

13 Bangladesh bound loaded trucks burnt at Petrapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Five Indian trucks loaded with goods imported by Bangladeshi importers were burnt at Petrapole on the Indian side of the border yesterday afternoon.

Another eight trucks were badly damaged along with goods, customs sources at Benapole check post said.

They said a good number of Indian trucks loaded with paper, tyres and chemicals were waiting on the road in front of the warehouse at Petrapole for entry into Benapole.

All of a sudden one of the trucks caught fire at around 5:55pm. Within a short time the fire spread to 12 trucks.

Kalaroa project for arsenic free water fails to take off

ABU AHMED, Sathkira

A project to supply arsenic-free water is lying unutilised for over a year after completion in Kalaroa municipality, where arsenic contamination of groundwater is much beyond the permissible level.

Allegations have it that a vested quarter backed by a ruling party man does not want operation of the project for his petty interest.

The project was scheduled to be commissioned in May last year.

Costly appliances including the chemical dosing pump (not available in Bangladesh), two planet boards and a capacitor along with 10 kilograms of water purifying chemicals were stolen on June 16, putting the last nails on the project.

Sources claimed that an organised gang committed the theft on the night of June 16.

Police arrested the night guard but released him allegedly due to political pressure, they claimed.

Severe arsenic contamination of groundwater is a long standing problem in Kolaroa, where the level of arsenic is between .70 (point seven zero) and .50 (point five zero) against the permissible level of .05 (point zero five).

According to the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), about 96 per cent of the 18,510 tubewells are arsenic affected in the upazila. According to a survey done in 2001, there were 683 arsenicosis patients in the upazila. The number would be more now, PHED officials told this correspondent yesterday.

Residents in the small town on several occasions demanded steps by the municipal authorities to supply safe water but they were helpless due

to lack of funds.

The Bogra Rural Development Academy (RDA) came forward with assistance. It gave Tk 18 lakh interest free loan to JESH.

Foundation, a local NGO, for a project. The loan is payable in 20 installments in 10 years.

The project included construction of an overhead tank, a water treatment plant, sinking of a deep tube well and

laying of PVC pipeline in the town for water supply.

Kalaroa pourasava leased six decimal land to JESH Foundation for 15 years for the project on an annual payment of Tk1500. All work except the pipeline laying work was completed on the leased land.

As per agreement with JESH Foundation, the pourasava authorities would bear the cost of laying the PVC

pipe line in the town and get 40 percent of the profit from the project.

Pourasava authorities floated a tender for the Tk 5,50,000 PVC pipeline laying work in February last year. Ten firms bid for the work. But the pourasava cancelled the tender allegedly without showing any reason.

It is alleged that the tender was cancelled following political pressure from a ruling party man. But the ruling party man, on contact over cell phone earlier, had denied the allegation.

Since then there has not been any progress in pipeline laying work.

As agitation by the town dwellers mounted, the pourasava in January this year asked the project authorities to supply arsenic free water from the project site to the pourasava premises, with a plan that residents would take safe water from there till pipeline is laid. The NGO complied with this.

But after three days, the pourasava authorities declined to take water from the project and wrote a letter to Bogra RDA for handover of the project to it.

The Bogra RDA refused as it was beyond the agreement, the sources said.

The project authorities then started supply of arsenic-free water to people from its compound. But the supply is stopped after the theft on June 16 night.

Asked about the fate of the project yesterday, Kalaroa Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md. Bashirul Alam said he was took over charge few days back and declined to make any comment without seeing files. The UNO is also the administrator of the municipality.



PHOTO: STAR
The unutilised overhead tank built to supply arsenic free water in Kalaroa municipality.

A victory over recurring floods

33 km dam by UNDP protects crops in 22 Kishoreganj villages

STAR NATIONAL DESK

The villagers have named it "Bijoy" (Victory). The Bijoy Bandh (embankment) symbolises their victory over recurring floods.

The 33 kilometre embankment saved crops in 22 villages in Itna, Mitamoin and Azmeriganj upazilas in Kishoreganj haor from floods this year, benefiting about 5000 families.

Their life was dependent on nature earlier. Being residents of haor area, they get only one crop a year. In last seven years, the villagers lost crops five times and reached the bottom of poverty. Now they hope to raise more than one rice crop a year.

"During monsoon my cropland used to reel under water every year. But this year I got a good yield," said Rahim Mridha, 50, of Birkul village.

Earlier, floods would damage crops on 12000 acres of land almost every year. Due to the Bijoy Bandh, about 200,000 metric tons of paddy have been saved from flood so far this year.

The embankment has been constructed under UNDP's Cash-for-Work project under flood recovery programme. With financial assistance from UNDP, Gonoshasthaya Kendra initiated construction of the embankment on February 8 this year. It was completed at a cost of about Tk 2.5 crore.



A portion of the 33 km dam built by UNDP in Kishoreganj

Over 5,000 poor people also got work during construction of the embankment. "Besides protecting our lives and property, the embankment provided us with work," said Kalimunnesa, a 40-year-old widow.

The villagers are so happy now that they have formed village-based Development Committees for maintenance of the embankment. They are also raising funds— Tk. 500 per acre for this.

They have also taken initiatives for tree plantation on the embankment. "It's a great sense of relief that flood could not affect us anymore. We are proud of our Bijoy bandh," said Rahim Mridha.

VGD rice stealing by UP chairman being probed

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Chairman of a Union Parishad (UP) in Tarail upazila in Kishoreganj district has misappropriated VGD rice and money from ADP allocation for education programme in 2003-2004 financial year, according to a complaint by a member of the UP to the Deputy Commissioner.

Rauti UP member Md. Motiur Rahman in the written complaint alleged that UP Chairman Sharif Uddin Jewel took the rice to his house and gave each cardholder 20 kilograms of rice instead of 30 and realised Tk 200 per card for the dole. Twenty cardholders were not given any rice.

In the complaint, Motiur Rahman alleged that the UP chairman misappropriated Tk two lakh from the ADP allocation.

When asked, the Tarail Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) told newsmen that he recovered 25 sacks of rice sold by the UP chairman in blackmarket.

Sources at the Deputy Commissioner's office said the DC has ordered investigation into the allegation. Investigation is going on, they said.

They call it victory over recurring floods/ Villagers call it Bijoy Bandh.

The 33 km dam protects crops in 22 villages in Kishoreganj haor

Human chain protesting Tengratila blowout

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The Daily Star Readers' Club, Moulvibazar Monday formed a human chain at Chowmuhani Square protesting the recent gas blowout at Tengratila gas field at Chhatak, Sunamganj.

Condemning the indifference of Niko the participants demanded of the authorities to take steps against the Canadian company.

People from all walks of life including students, teachers, journalists and cultural activists took part in the human chain.

The Daily Star Readers' Club convenor Sybed Monsur Ahmed, Moulvibazar district correspondent of The Daily Star Prof Rajat Kanti Goswami, joint convenors Tuhin Tahid and Shahrier Mostafa, advisors Abdul Matin, Akmal Hussain and journalists Sarwar Ahmed and Fakrul Islam were also present.

4,000 without power for 3 days Consumers refuse REB service at Haragachh in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

About 4000 clients in Haragachh municipality in Kounia upazila are without electricity supply for three days as the Rural Electrification Board (REB) snapped the supply line following accumulation of huge amounts of bills.

About 150 small industries including some Bidi factories are closed there for three days for want of power supply.

Haragachh Biddut Grahak Sangram Parishad (HBGSP) at a press conference at Haragachh that REB stopped power supply violating a High Court order.

The trouble in the area began after the government handed over power supply in the area to Palli Biddut Samiti, Rangpur-2 (under REB) from Power Development Board (PDB) on November 2, 2002.

Local people protested the transfer, alleging that it would increase load shedding.

Since then local people staged demonstrations on several occasions under the banner of HBGSP, demanding power supply under PDB.

Earlier, on a prayer given on behalf of HBGSP, a Rangpur court stayed execution of REB service in Haragachh and ordered a status

quo.

Since then, neither PDB nor REB realised electricity bills from consumers.

The HBGSP on July 3 appealed to the High Court, which also ordered a status quo.

Amin Uddin, Secretary of HBGSP claimed that REB unlawfully snapped the power line violating the HC order.

General Manager of Rangpur Polli Biddut Samity-2

Enamul Hoque admitted that the power supply was snapped as huge amounts of bills were unrealised.

He, however said the Samity is yet to get a copy of the HC order.



PHOTO: STAR
A portion of the human chain formed by The Daily Star Readers' Club at Chowmuhani Square in Moulvibazar town on Monday protesting the Tengratila blowout.

52nd RU founding day today Lacklustre programmes protested

RU CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 52nd founding anniversary of Rajshahi University (RU).

The university authorities have chalked out a day-long programme to mark the day. The programme includes procession, placing of wreath at the university central Shaheed Minar and mass grave, tree plantation, friendly cricket and handball matches, special prayers at the central mosque and illumination of university buildings.

The day's programme will begin with hoisting of national and univer-

sity flags.

RU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Altfat Hossain will inaugurate the programme releasing pigeons and balloons.

A joint procession of teachers, students and employees will also be brought out on the campus.

Different cultural organisations and theater groups will organise cultural shows and street dramas at the Shaheed Minar and on the Folklore Department premises.

However, Progressive Teachers' Association (PTA), Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) have decided to boycott the programme.

At a meeting held on the campus yesterday, BCL general secretary Ayan Uddin said, 'it is a pity that the university authorities are going to celebrate the founding anniversary after 14 years in such a poor way'.

PTA leader Prof Entajul Haque regretted that the university authorities are depriving the teachers and students of a memorable event.

The last founding anniversary was celebrated in 1990.

A unique way of snatching

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

An amount of Tk 62,500 was taken away from Islami Bank's Rangpur branch in a unique way on Monday.

Bank employee Saifuzzaman Sohel had kept the money on the counter for disbursement.

Some persons entered there on a plea. They dropped some 10 taka notes on the floor near the counter and started picking up as if those dropped from their pockets by chance. They also asked Sohel to help them collect the notes.

As he bend to pick up some notes, they instantly eloped with the bundles kept on the desk.

As Sohel straightened himself, he saw neither the bundles nor the persons around. The snatchers ran out and melted in the crowd.

"I could not understand that the snatchers themselves dropped the 10 taka notes on the floor and diverted my attention", Sohel said.

A case has been filed with Kotwali police but none has been accused, the bank officials said.

Ex-UP chairman murdered in Sirajganj

A CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

A former chairman of Hatikumrul union was strangled by unidentified assailants at Charia Madhopara near the Hatikumrul-Bonpara highway in Ullapara upazila on Monday.

Police and family sources said the culprits intercepted Abdul Barik, 45, on the way while he was returning home from Solonga bazaar.

On receipt of information, Solonga police recovered the body on Tuesday morning and sent it to Sirajganj General Hospital morgue for autopsy. The motive behind the murder could not be known immediately. None was arrested so far.

50 injured in Rangpur clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

At least 50 people were injured, 10 of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups of villagers in Pirganj upazila over possession of a big government waterbody yesterday.

The seriously injured people have been admitted to the local upazila health complex. The rest were released after treatment at the health complex and hospitals in Rangpur.

Locals said the clash ensued in the morning when a group of people allegedly led by Khushi Miah and Ahmad Ali went to occupy the 11-acre waterbody at Harinpur village in Bora Alampur union.

The locals alleged that police did not go into action despite being informed.

When contacted, Pirganj thana police said they did not know about the incident. A team will go to the area today, they said.

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