



PHOTO: STAR

Toiling is better than seeking mercy ... Landless Mominur and his wife Lipiza Begum have defeated Monga. Their seven member family is fed well after Mominur, being refused a VGF card, started crushing mustard seeds in an indigenous wooden tool to produce edible oil.

They defeated Monga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Landless Mominur of Dighirpar village was not lucky enough to have a VGF card to tide over the Monga. The Union Parishad chairman said he is not eligible for this because he is still young.

But he got no reply when he asked the UP chairman why his old mother should not get one. Mominur, 28, of Koimari union in Jaldhaka upazila has to support a big family including his old mother, divorced sister, his wife and three children.

Like many of the monga-hit poor day labourers, Mominur returned home disappointed and worried. But he was undaunted.

People like him either queue for subsidised rice supplied by the government, or leave home for town or even beg. But self-respecting Mominur did none.

He repaired the old indigenous mustard crushing wooden tool (ghani) to produce edible oil. The problem did not end there. A bullock is needed to pull, which he did not have.

During monga (a jobless period prior to harvest of Aman paddy), most of the landless poor sell their domestic animals and chicken to buy food. Mominur had no money to buy a bullock again to pull the ghani. Mominur and his wife Lipiza

Begum decided to pull the ghani themselves.

Now, the husband and wife crush about ten kilograms of mustered seeds worth about Tk 250 daily. They get about three kilograms of mustered oil and six kilograms of oil cake. Mominur sells these for Tk 140 to 150 and buys rice and other necessities. All members of his family are now well fed.

Pulling the ghani is better than queuing for doles, the happy couple told this correspondent during a visit to their village on Saturday.

They said they have defeated the monga and bought new clothes for their children for the Eid.

Villagers defer Eid to repair embankment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Over 3,000 people of five villages in Assassuni upazila celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr on Saturday instead of Friday.

This is because they had to repair an embankment along the Kholpetua at Kola-Ghola point in Assassuni upazila on Eid day. The Water Development Board (WDB) embankment collapsed suddenly Thursday night due to rise in water level in the Kholpetua.

The affected villages are Kola, Bakchar, Hajrakhal, Hijlia and Kalimakhali. Villagers led by local Union Parishad (UP) chairman Abu Hena Shakil rebuilt the embankment on self-help basis.

Local lawmaker Maulana Riasat Ali, former member of parliament (MP) Dr Mokhlesur Rahman, Assassuni Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Iqbal Hossain, former UP chairmen Noor Mohammad and Nurul Alam, district Awami League leader and freedom fighter Matiur Rahman, Advocate Zahurul Islam, Assassuni thana BNP convenor Advocate Faruquzzaman inspired the villagers to do the commendable job.

When contacted, WDB sub assistant engineer (SAE) Abdul Matin said the embankment collapsed suddenly although it was reconstructed previously at a cost of Tk 10 lakh.

Assassuni UNO Iqbal Hossain feared that the embankment might collapse any time again after its repair by local people.

While talking to this correspondent, WDB executive engineer Mosharrar Hossain said a Tk 6 lakh project has already been undertaken for reconstruction of the embankment.

'Listed criminal' held in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police arrested 'listed criminal' Faruque Molla, along with a pipegun Thursday night from Uttar Dharandi village in the Sadar upazila.

He was wanted in five criminal cases. Police said local people caught him at Vhuria launch terminal while he was demanding toll and handed him over to them.

Into the jaws of crocodile

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A fisher man was killed yesterday by a crocodile in Malanchi river in the Sundarbans.

The victim was identified as Abdul Aziz, son of Samir Uddin Gazi of Munshigonj village in Shyamnagar upazila.

Quoting local people, police said Aziz along with others went to fish in the Sundarbans on Saturday after taking permission from the forest authorities.

All of a sudden, a crocodile appeared, caught Aziz by the leg and dived into deep water of the river before others could do anything to save him.

UPDF man held with firearms

A CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

An active member of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) was arrested with firearms in Maishchari area of Mahalchhari thana on Sunday.

On a tip-off, army personnel conducted a raid in the area and arrested Smritymoy Chakma alias Jibon. He was carrying three rounds of bullets, five subscription books and important documents of UPDF. He was recovered from his possession.

Arrested Smritymoy confessed his involvement with the UPDF.

ECNEC APPROVES IRRIGATION, DRAINAGE PROJECT

More 5 lakh MT rice to be produced in 5 districts

A CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

The ECNEC (Executive Committee of National Economic Council) has finally approved the "South Comilla and North Noakhali Drainage" (SCNND) Project after three and a half years of its formulation.

An amount of Tk 300 crore has been sanctioned for the project in the current financial year, official sources said.

The SCNND project includes re-excavation of rivers and canals and improving drainage system to flush out flood water in five districts to turn about one lakh single-crop lands into double-crop lands in 22 upazilas in the five districts. The

rivers included Old and New Dakatia, Choto Feni, Muhuri, Kankri, Mamni, Naglia, Gumti and Sandwip channel.

SCNND project is expected to produce additional five lakh tonnes of rice worth about Tk 500 crore annually.

The project work will begin in the current dry season and is scheduled to be completed within the next financial year, the sources said. ECNEC approved the project at its meeting on October 22, the sources said.

The project has been approved following initiatives by local lawmaker Manirul Haque Chowdhury along with other MPs from greater Comilla and Noakhali districts, they

said. A day-long roundtable held at Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) here in 2002 and participated by three ministers and a dozen lawmakers from the five districts highly appreciated the project after discussing its potentials and socio-economic prospect, the sources said.

The 22 upazilas to be benefitted are Comilla Sadar, Laksam, Chhoddagram, Barura and Nangolkot in Comilla district; Kachua, Chandpur Sadar, Hajigonj, Shahrasthi and Faridgonj in Chandpur district; Noakhali Sadar, Begumgonj,

Companigonj, Chatkhil and

Senbag in Noakhali district; Laxmipur Sadar, Ramgonj and Ramgati in Laxmipur district and Sonagazi, Dagonbhuiyan and Feni Sadar in Feni district.

Paddy cultivation in the single-crop lands in the upazilas are almost uncertain due to inadequate irrigation facilities, early flood and other natural calamities. Besides another rice crop, the project will help about 40,000 farmers in its command area to produce Rabi crops and vegetables.

It will also play a great role in socio-economic development and improve communication in the five districts, the sources said.



PHOTO: STAR

Present and former students of Bindubashini Government Boys High School in Tangail brought out a colourful procession in the town yesterday as part of programmes to celebrate the 125th founding anniversary of the institute.

4 BNP, Jubo Dal leaders held in Chuadanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) in Chuadanga arrested four leaders of ruling BNP Sunday night.

They include Pouro Jubo Dal president and Jibonnagar municipality chairman Abul Hossain Sikdar. He is also brother of Jibonnagar upazila BNP president. The others arrested are Nawab Ali, general secretary of Chuadanga Pouro Jubo Dal; Abil Hossain, general secretary of Pouro Jatytibadi Chhatra Dal Hasan Ali and Maidul, Hasan, alleged cadre of BNP.

Rab said they are accused of charges including extortion and manipulation. Police were hunting for them for long, they said.

Rab was quizzing them when this report was filed yesterday afternoon.

7 killed by BSF in 2 months on B'baria border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Seven Bangladeshi nationals were killed by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) along Brahmanbaria border in last two months.

On August 30, BSF personnel illegally entered the Bangladesh territory at Saldana in Kasba upazila and gunned down three Bangladeshis and took the bodies to India. After a flag meeting, the bodies were returned to BDR. The bodies were identified as those of Rafiq Mia, 40, Dr Rafiqul Islam, 40, and Abu Taher, 30.

On September 9, BSF men took away three Bangladeshis, Mozammel Hossain, 35, Abdur Razak, 36, and Alam Mia, 30, to India from Akhaura border and shot dead them. Later, they returned two bodies to BDR.

After a week, BSF men shot Yunus, 24, and Alauddin, 27, while they were working in field near the border at Nalguria village in the Sadar upazila. Yunus died and BSF dragged the body to India. Later, the body was returned to BDR.

Earlier, on April 16, a BSF team along with some Indian nationals fired shots indiscriminately at people at Kuripaika village and killed a schoolgirl, Nahid Akhter. They looted cash and valuables from the villagers.

According to BDR sources, a BDR-BSF flag meeting was held at Zero Point in Akhaura border on October 10. In the meeting, BSF vowed that they would not fire at Bangladeshi citizen any more.

But violating it, BSF personnel again fired shots at Bangladeshi villagers injuring a farmer on October 16.

Two other Bangladeshis, Dr Amin, 25 and Manik, 20, were injured in BSF firing at Nolguria village in the Sadar upazila on October 20.

Because of frequent BSF firing, Bangladeshi villagers residing along the borders are passing days in great panic, villagers said.

Body handed over by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Saturday handed over the body of a Bangladeshi to BDR on Kushtia border after a flag meeting.

Jahidul Islam, 32, a fisherman of Ramkrishnapur village in Daulatpur upazila, was shot dead by BSF at Charpara border on the night of November 2 when he was fishing at the Padma river at about 12 pm. BSF took away the body, claimed that Jahidul was a smuggler and was trying to cross the border. But Jahidul's family denied the BSF's allegation.

3 shot, 2 kidnapped by BSF in 2 districts

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Three Bangladeshis were shot by BSF on Saturday, two of them in Roumari in Kurigram district and one in Satkhira.

In Roumari, BSF also kidnapped two other Bangladeshis on Sunday while BDR arrested to Indians for illegal entry, creating tension along the border.

A correspondent reports from Kurigram: According to sources in 39 Rifles Battalion in Jamalpur, Bangladeshi nationals Jafor, 20, and Alam, 21, were working in their paddy fields near border pillar No. 1077 in Pathorerchar in Rajibpur upazila at about 5 pm on Saturday.

All of a sudden, BSF personnel shot them from across the border without any cause. The two bullet-hit youths are under treatment at Jamalpur Hospital. The BDR in Raumari and Rajibpur upazilas are under the command of Jamalpur district command headquarters.

Two other Bangladeshis -- Ershadul, 23, and Mostafa, 22 -- were harvesting paddy near border pillar No 1068 near Baraibari border in Raumari upazila at about 3 pm on Sunday.

BSF troops entered into Bangladesh territory and kidnapped them forcibly. After the incident, BDR of Baraibari BOP (border outpost) arrested two Indians who entered

into Bangladesh territory and were wondering suspiciously, BDR sources said.

They were identified as Abdul Kader, 21, and Faruk Hossain 25, of Mainkar Char village on the other side of the border.

BDR sources said they have lodged a protest with BSF and are on alert as tension mounted on the border.

Our Satkhira Correspondent reports: A Bangladeshi cattle trader was injured when BSF shot him on the no man's land at Gobindapur in Swarnapnagar thana under North 24 Pargana district Saturday night.

The injured Bangladeshi has been identified as Sahar Ali, 35, son of Yasin Ali of Rudrapur village in Sharsha upazila in Jessore district.

Quoting the victim's relatives, BDR said, a group of cattle traders had gone to India to body cattle from Hatulgonj market in Swarnapnagar thana on Saturday.

While on way home, BSF opened fire on them when they were on the no man's land at Gobindapur, injuring Sahar Ali. Others escaped unhurt.

BSF personnel took injured Sahar Ali Bongaon hospital in India for treatment.

On contact, Lt. Col. Asadur Rahman Khan, Commanding Officer of 41 Rifles Battalion, confirmed the incident.

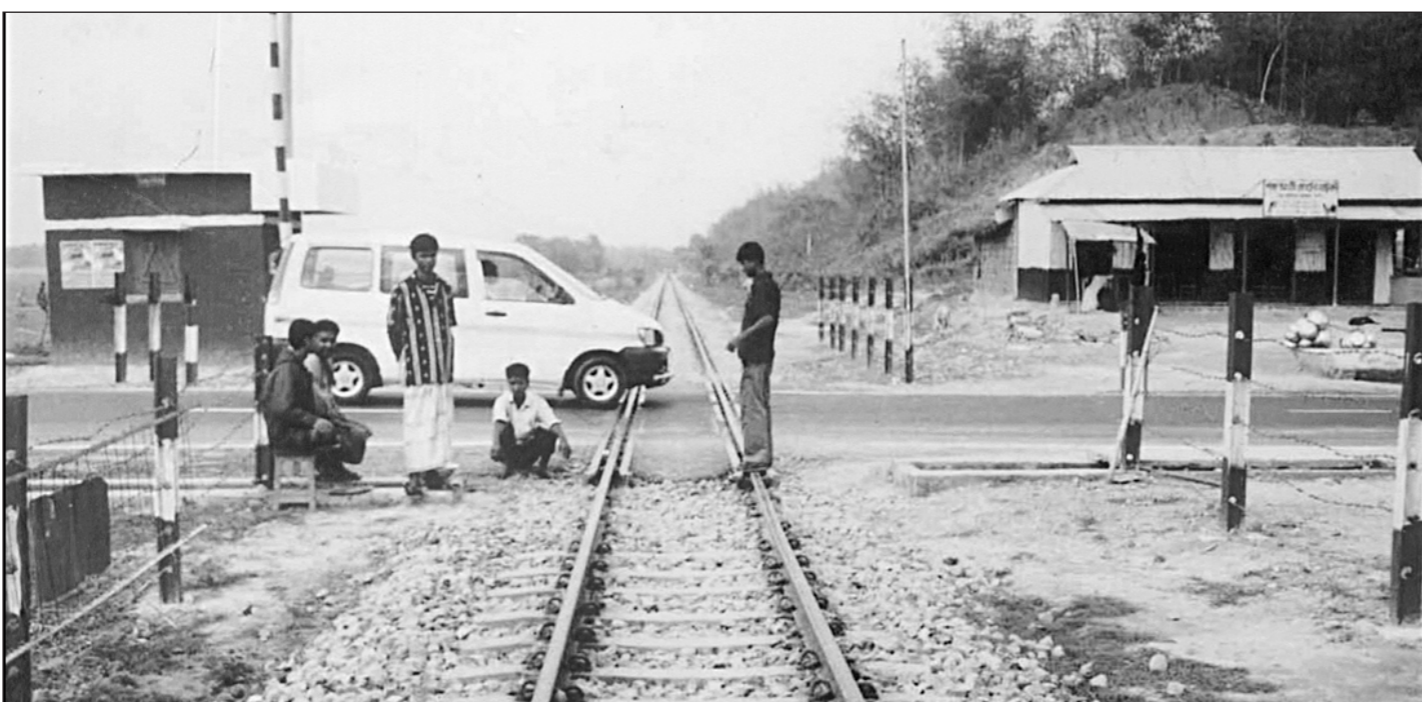


PHOTO: STAR

Poor safety measures cause frequent accidents at Olipur rail crossing in Jagadishpur on Dhaka-Sylhet highway. A plan to construct an overbridge at Olipur is now in the cold storage. Even the bar on one side of the crossing is so slender that it often fails to draw the attention of vehicle drivers while the hillocks keep approaching trains away from their sight.

Cashing in on patients' plight

Magura diagnostic centres charge 10 to 20 times the cost of tests: Connivance with govt doctors alleged

HOSSAIN SERAJ, Magura

Diagnostic centres in Magura are doing a brisk business in collusion with a section of government doctors who allegedly get benefits including commission from them.

These doctors refer patients to the diagnostic centers for tests often unnecessarily, allegedly for 'commission', sources alleged.

There are eight registered and 17 unregistered diagnostic centers in the town. Most of these centres have arrangements with doctors to refer patients in exchange of benefits.

The diagnostic centers charge from patients 10 to 20 times the actual cost of tests and share the huge profit with doctors. This was gathered from a number of employees working at different centres who talked to this correspondent on condition of anonymity.

An investigation by 'The Daily Star' revealed that doctors get 30 to 45 percent 'commission' from the profit

earned by the diagnostic labs from such tests.

In many cases, the doctors also get loans and costly gifts such as computer, refrigerator, cell phone and fashionable items.

Many of the centres have set up doctors' chamber for consultation and this practice is growing.

Everyday, hundreds of patients crowd the chambers of government doctors at the diagnostic centres. These doctors are employed at Magura Sadar Hospital and upazila health complexes.

Some centres have set up air-conditioned chambers for doctors to attract patients. The owners of most of the centres however claim that the arrangements are for the benefit of patients.

An employee at a diagnostic centre preferring anonymity said, "Blood sugar test involves less than Tk 6 but Tk 100 is charged from patients while its rate at Magura Sadar hospital is Tk 25 only. A routine urine test costs less

than Tk 8 but Tk 50 to 60 is taken for this".

Another employee said, "Cost of reagents for blood group test is less than Tk 6 but diagnostic centres charge Tk 130 to 150 for a test. Such a test costs only Tk 33 at Magura Sadar Hospital".

The centres have different rates for similar tests in the absence of rules and inspection by the authorities concerned, they claimed.

"We have no fixed rates", admitted an owner of a diagnostic centre. "The rates are fixed on the basis of mutual understanding among owners".

About the unusual profit, owner of another diagnostic centre admitted that reagents for X-ray films is not so expensive. But establishment cost, electricity charge, staff salary and many other things raise the rates, he said.

The Managing Director of a diagnostic centre said, "We are in a competitive market. If tests are costlier at one centre, clients would

naturally go to another centre. So it is not true that diagnostic centres are charging unusual high rates".

MA Bari, owner of Unique Diagnostic Centre, however claimed, "We do not pay commission to any doctor or have no representative, we just run our business depending on our goodwill only."

Talking to this correspondent, some patients said they are aware of the high profit earned by the diagnostic centres but are undone.

"I went to a doctor for stomach pain. He asked me to get six different tests done. I knew all the tests were not necessary but could I protest the doctor's prescription?" the patient said. All these are happening as the authorities concerned are silent and they have no control over the diagnostic centres.

When contacted, Magura Civil Surgeon Farid Uddin Ahmed admitted unusual high rates at diagnostic centres. They should follow the rates at government hospitals, he said.

Massive pest attack on aman in 13 upazilas in Comilla

A CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

Aman crops on about 11,580 hectares of land have come under pest attack causing huge loss to farmers in 13 upazilas of the district.

This year, 92,940 hectares were brought under aman cultivation in the district. Pests invaded 45.75 hectares in Chandina, 101 hectares in Dabidwar, 98.95 hectares in Muradnagar, 88 hectares in Homna, 132 hectares in Burichang, 19 hectares in Chowddagram, 326 hectares in Laksam, 81 hectares in Nangolkot, 131 hectares in Barura and 68 hectares in the Sadar upazila.

Besides, the paddy plants are dying due to root diseases.

Agricultural experts said bacterial diseases broke out due to affected

seeds, air pollution and attack by grass hopper.

Experts said, pests like Leaf Ruler, Chungi, Gall Machhi, Majra, Pamri, Leda and Green Leaf Grass Hopper have attacked aman fields due to water stagnation after flooding and heavy rainfall.

Farmers said the situation aggravated as they failed to control pests even after applying pesticides in the affected fields. Some villagers in Muradnagar upazila alleged that no block supervisor visited agricultural fields as yet.

Meanwhile, banned and date expired insecticides have flooded local markets. A section of unscrupulous traders are selling those at comparatively cheaper prices.

Pirates loot 11 trawlers in Bay

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Pirates again looted eleven fishing trawlers about 100 kilometres off Patharghata coast on November 4, injuring 24 fishermen and crew in the attacks.

The armed pirates took away fishes and goods worth about Tk 50 lakh and two trawlers.

Two of the injured fishermen-- Abdur Rahman and Jobayer-- escaped. The incident came to light when they were admitted to Vandaria hospital in critical condition on Sunday.

They said that about 30 pirates equipped with firearms attacked the trawlers when they were crossing Narikelbaria, about 100 kilometers south of Patharghata. They came in three trawlers.

Eusuf Mia, owner of F B Bismillah, one of the looted trawlers, said seven fishermen were on board his trawler when the pirates swooped in the fleet. When contacted, Patharghata police said they heard about the incident but could not give details.