

Where harassment is the order of the day for journos

'False' cases against 24, 3 jailed, 4 tortured and 4 forced to flee their areas in last five years in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

At least 24 journalists faced 'false' cases, five were tortured, three sentenced in 'fabricated' cases and four had to flee Kushtia in last five years.

Activists loyal to three former BNP lawmakers in the district were behind most of the incidents, the victims alleged.

The lawmakers were from Kushtia-2 (Mirpur-Bheramara), Kushtia-4 (Khoksa-Kumarkhali) and Kushtia-1 (Daulatpur) constituencies.

Persons loyal to the lawmaker from Kushtia-2 were responsible for at least 14 incidents of atrocities on media men, they alleged.

The lawmaker filed an extortion case against three journalists--- Hasan Zahid of Manav Jamin, Munshi Tarikul Islam of Channel 1 and Al-Mamun Sagar of Jugantor and ATN Bangla on May 9 last year alleging that they demanded Tk 50,000 toll from him.

A day after, one Azad Biswas, accused in six extortion cases and known as a man of the lawmaker, filed another case against the journalists. The journalists fled Kushtia and did not return to the district for about a month.

The lawmaker's cadres attacked

a journalists' convention in Kushtia town on May 29, injuring at least 25 media men including former president of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Observer Editor Iqbal Sobhan Choudhury, BFUJ Treasurer Farazi Azmol Hossain, former vice-president of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) Saiful Islam and the then general secretary of DUJ Omar Faruk.

The convention was called to protest the case against the three journalists.

Musclemen of the lawmaker also stopped publication of local daily Andoloner Bazar for about a month after it published reports alleging corruption by him. They also threatened its editor Manjur Ehasn Chowdhury with dire consequences.

Local BNP leader Fahim filed a case against Kushtia Correspondent of Bangla daily Amader Shomoy Shamsul Alam Swapan in July last year. Taking advantage of the case, the lawmaker at a press conference branded Swapan as an extortionist.

Jubo Dal leader Ibrahim Ali in Mirpur upazila, allegedly at the behest of the lawmaker from Kushtia-2, filed an extortion case against Gazi Mahbubur Rahman, editor of Kushtia-based newspaper

Dainik Alo, its acting editor Jamal Uddin Haiderly and reporter Shamsul Alam Swapan on July 16, 2005.

BNP activist Alam of Daulatpur filed another case against Akjer Kagoj correspondent Sahriful Islam on March 12, 2004. The case was filed allegedly at the dictate of the then lawmaker.

Azad Islam was forced to leave Bheramara, allegedly by the lawmaker's men for his reports on his alleged corruption. He could not return to the area for about a year.

Cadres of the lawmaker forced Bablu Ranjan Biswas to flee the area on July 24, 2003 after a report was published on an alleged scandal of a local political crony involving a woman.

Three journalists were injured when a motorcycle procession by BNP ticket seeker from of Kushtia-2 constituency MA Khaleque was attacked allegedly by the lawmakers' men on January 12 last year. They were Hasan Jahid of Manab Jamin, Munshi Tarikul Islam of Channel 1 and Al-Mamun Sagar of Jugantor and ATN Bangla.

Shamim Bin Sattar, Kushtia correspondent of Dainik Khabar, suffered 16 months' jail term in a case filed by a teacher of Panti Degree College in Kumarkhali after

he reported on alleged irregularities in teacher recruitment at the college in 2003.

It is alleged that the lawmaker from Kushtia-1, who was president of the college governing body, was behind filing of the case.

Andoloner Bazar Editor Manzur Ehsan Choudhury, executive editor Halimuzzaman and reporter Arpan Masud fled Kushtia after one Bashar, an associate of the lawmaker, filed three extortion cases against them on publication of a report on an illegal diagnostic center in Kushtia in 2004. Bashar was the manager of the diagnostic center.

The office of local newspaper Shikol was torched on May 13, 2004. Its owner Sakawat Ibne Moyeen Choudhury filed a case without naming any accused.

But later, the then lawmaker allegedly compelled Moyeen to include in the case names of journalists Manzur Ehsan Choudhury, the then president of Kushtia Reporters Unity, general secretary Sajoy Chaki and Halimuzzaman.

JCD activists allegedly led by its Kushtia district unit president and general secretary beat up news editor of Kushtia based Dainik Akjer Alo for publishing a report on a rape incident at Kushtia Aliya Madrasa in 2003.

JCD cadres attacked Jugantor's Kushtia correspondent Al-Mamun Sagar in February last year as he filed a report on alleged corruption by some JCD leaders.

The lawmaker from Kushtia-4 threatened Kushtia correspondent of The Daily Star after the daily published news on harassment of minority community people in Khoksa upazila by his men in May 2003.

The lawmaker's men also attacked Khoksa Press Club and beat up journalists inside in July last year.

Arif Khan of Jessore-based Dinik Gramer Kajon and Dainik Khabar correspondent Samim Bin Sattar suffered six months' prison terms in two false cases filed by Kumarkhali police allegedly at the behest of the BNP lawmaker.

Daulatpur correspondent of daily Ittefaq Zahurul Isam was beaten and forced to stay out of the area in 2001 for about six months. The atrocities were done by the son of a minister, who also grabbed land property of the journalist.

2 brothers of ex-minister Altaf accused in robbery case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Two brothers of former minister and BNP leader Altaf Hossain Chowdhury have been named as accused among eight people in a case of armed robbery at Mirzaganj Police Station.

They are Babul Chowdhury and Shahin Chowdhury, police said.

The robbery was committed in five houses at Madhokkhali village under Mirzaganj upazila on Saturday night, police said.

At least 10 people were injured by robbers who beat them for creating resistance during the robberies.

Seven of the injured were admitted to Kathaltali Health Sub-centre. They are Tuhin Kazi, 18, Rafiq Kazi, 32, Toffazzal, 35, and Hasina, 45.

Armed robbers numbering 25 entered the houses by breaking open the doors and looted cash and valuables amounting to Tk 3 lakh from the houses.

Patuakhali superintendent of police (SP) Abu Kalam Siddique visited spot. 'We shall take necessary action after proper investigation,' he said.

However, on contact, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury said to this correspondent he is not at all aware about the incident.

3rd convocation of KU today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The third convocation of Khulna University (KU) will be held on the university campus at 10 am today, university sources said.

President Prof Dr Iajuddin Ahmed who is also chancellor of the university will preside over the convocation ceremony. Eminent educationist and Dhaka University vice-chancellor (VC) Prof Dr SMA Faiz will be present as convocation speaker.

KU VC Prof Dr Mahabubur Rahman, 1,453 graduates and post-graduates will be awarded certificates during the convocation. Nineteen students will receive gold medals for their brilliant results.

KU sources said a colourful rally will be brought out from Shaheed Minar to mark the occasion.

OMS rice on sale in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Thirty-two dealers began to sell rice at fair price under the open market sale (OMS) programme at 19 points in the city and 90 points in nine upazilas of the district yesterday.

Rice will be sold at Tk 15.25 per kilogram under the programme.

The District Controller of Food, M Monirul Islam said a buyer is entitled to buy not more than five kilograms of rice at a time. He said preparation is underway to appoint nine more dealers in the city. 'Severe action will be taken if any dealer is found to be involved in irregularity in selling rice,' he said.

Another wonder crop for farmers in the offing

Newly evolved strawberry variety to earn forex

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Farmers will get another wonder crop soon, thanks to the tireless efforts by two scientists of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) in Joydebpur.

They have evolved a variety of strawberry, a highly value added crop suitable for cultivation in Bangladesh's soil and climate.

Strawberry, a sweet and highly nutritious fruit with great export potential grows mainly in cold countries. It also grows in certain areas of Japan, Taiwan and China.

BARI's Principal Scientific Officer Dr Md Abdul Hoque and Senior Scientific Officer Moshiur Rahman, after years of research on four varieties brought from abroad, have evolved through tissue culture a variety, which is suitable for cultivation in Bangladesh.

The variety, BARI Strawberry-1 (proposed), may be released for cultivation at farmers level in next winter season. BARI authorities are now evaluating results of cultivation of the crop at BARI, according to the two scientists.

They said their field study has shown encouraging results. Strawberry will be a highly profitable winter crop for farmers and its cultivation will be acceptable to them as it is easy and does not involve any highly technical skill, the scientists said.

Month-old strawberry seedlings are planted in October-November and harvest begins in December, which continues till the end of March.

Normally, fruiting begins around one month after transplantation of seedlings and the fruits mature within 2-3 weeks. The red coloured



PHOTO: STAR

Sweet strawberry at a field in Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI).

fruit has very attractive flavour.

It will have great commercial prospect as around 6000 plants can be sown per bigha (30 decimal land) and each plant yields at least 500 grams of strawberry, market value of which is at least Tk 300 now.

Imported strawberry is now available in some posh shops in certain areas of Dhaka city. It is also served in some posh hotels.

It will not be very difficult to popularise the fruit among farmers as its cultivation is easy, like winter vegetables commonly grown in our country.

It is less susceptible to pest and virus attack, the scientists told The Daily Star during a visit to BARI.

Cultivation of the crop can be widely popularized in the country as

most lands become dry in winter and will be suitable for its cultivation, they said.

Earlier, another BARI scientist--Dr. Shahabuddin Ahmed--evolved several varieties of summer tomato, which was readily accepted by farmers because of its high value. Starting from Jessore, cultivation of summer tomato spread to most districts of the country, though in limited scale, in two years. Farmers could earn at least Tk one lakh from one bigha of land in about four months from the summer tomato.



PHOTO: STAR

The Saarc car rally on way to India after leaving the historic Kantajir Mondir (temple) in Dinajpur yesterday. It entered Bhutan through Burimari (Lalmonirhat) border in the evening.

Honey production declines as large quantity unsold

Bulk buyers prefer imported processed honey

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A huge quantity of honey is lying unsold with producers in 12 upazilas in Tangail district as big buyers including pharmaceutical companies prefer imported processed honey.

Most of the honey was produced during the last mustard season.

Apiculturists can not supply processed honey, as they do not have technological facility for this, said Dulal Miah, secretary of Bhuapur Upazila Apiculture Cooperative Association. A processing equipment costs around Tk 60 lakh to 80 lakh, he told this correspondent during a visit to the area.

Big buyers import most of the honey from India and Australia.

Sources in Bangladesh Institute of Apiculture (BIP) in Dhaka, when contacted over phone, could not specify the quantity of honey imported annually. "It (quantity) is several hundred tonnes," an official said.

There are at least 25,000 apiculturists including over 300 commercial producers in the country. They produce at least 1,100 tonnes of good quality honey a year, the official said.

Honey is also used for producing medicines and food items.

This correspondent, during a visit found about 10 mounds of pure honey stored at apiculturist Noor Alam's house at Charabari village in Sadar upazila.

He said he produced 12 mounds of honey in the last mustard season from Fotepur area in Sadar upazila and bought another 200kg from small retailers in Tangail town and adjacent areas.

"I contacted several food processing industries including pharmaceutical companies in Gazipur and Dhaka but they want processed honey", he said.

Saiful Islam, a commercial honey producer in Bhuapur, said about 200 apiculturists produce over 100 tonnes of honey in 12 upazilas in Tangail district a year. Of them, 50 are commercial producers.

Apiculturist Motaleb Miah of Taktarchala village in Sakhipur upazila said he produced 20 mounds of honey by setting 100 boxes during the last mustard season but most of it is still unsold.

"I had supplied 600kg honey to two parties in the capital on credit

last year but they are yet to pay me," he said.

Honey is produced commercially in Bhuapur, Gopalpur, Madhupur, Ghatail, Sadar, and Sakhipur upazilas in the district.

Abdul Hye of Rashulpur village, Abdus Salam and Naosher Ali of Ambaria, Ashraf Ali and Faruque Miah of Agterilla in Madhupur upazila and Babul Miah of Balarampur village and Jewel Miah of Betua village in Bhuapur upazila also have stocks of honey.

As a large quantity of honey

remained unsold, its production declined by around 50 per cent this year, the producers claimed.

The apiculturists said honey is produced in five seasons a year--from mustard flowers during December-January, guji til (oil seed) during January-March, litchi gardens during March and from sada (til (oil seed)) from second week of April to second week of June. A large quantity of honey is collected from Sundarbans during March-April.



PHOTO: STAR

Boxes set up by apiculturist Noor Alam at a litchi orchard in Santosh in Tangail Sadar upazila.



PHOTO: STAR

Animated Bangladesh... The victory in World Cup Cricket against former champions India sent waves of jubilation even to remote areas in Nilphamari district in the north.