

# Tip of the iceberg

## Underage nuptials of 13 girls in a month at Patuakhali village

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Believe it or not, 13 underage girls of Char Ganga village of Barabaisdia union under Rangabali upazila were married off in last one month, bearing testimony to large-scale prevalence of child marriage in remote areas of the district.

In most cases, bridegrooms of these girls are also below the marriageable age.

Popi Begum, 13, daughter of Abdul Latif, a marginal farmer of the village, was married with Nazrul Islam, 17, son of Sarwar Mia of Kazirhowla village under same upazila on Friday night.

Shilpee Begum, 12, daughter of Ismail Majhi, also a class six student of Rangabali Hamidia Mohila Madrasa, was married with Sujon, 18, of Chatianpara on Tuesday night.

Reshma Akther, 12, daughter of Nizam Mia, Nilufa, 12, daughter of Shahjahan Mojumder, Marium Akther, 12, daughter of Kabir Hossain, Mousumi, 11, daughter of Mosharef Mia, Tanzila, 12, daughter of Nasu Mia, Zulia, 13, daughter of Zakir Hossain, Sonia, 12, daughter of Babul Mia, Keya Moni, 12, daughter of Kishore Farazee of Char Ganga village were also married during the last one month.

"My daughter is not attentive to her studies. She will not be a service holder. But she has reached marriageable age. So I arranged her marriage," said Mosharef Hossain, father of Mousumi Akther, a class four student of Char Ganga Registered Primary School.

Jasmin Begum, mother of Keya Moni (who passed class five in 2011) said, "Some youths of the village started disturbing my daughter on the way to her school. She is already matured. So we arranged her marriage. Now we are tension-free."

Md Solaiman, headmaster for Char Ganga Registered Primary School, said at least five girls who were studying in classes four or five or just passed the primary terminal examinations from the school were married off in last one month. They are aged between 12 to 14 years.

Sona Mia, member of ward No 5 of Barabaisdia UP, said most of the people

of Char Ganga village are poor and they often lack awareness about the necessity of education and bad effects of child marriage."

"Social security is also a factor behind child marriage as most girls face stalking on the way to school. We are trying our best to increase awareness over the matter," he said.

Villagers said Mahtab Uddin, imam of a local mosque, conducted most of the child marriages in the village.

Asked about the matter, Mahtab said, "I conducted six marriages in last two weeks. Papers of three of the marriages were sent to the office of the kazi (marriage registrar) as they showed birth registration certificates issued by local UP. The three others are still to be registered as they failed to show birth certificates."

Maulana Md Elias, marriage registrar of the UP, also superintendent of Gabbunia Dakhil Madrasa, said, "I don't register any child marriage. However, I came to know that Mahtab Uddin conducted child marriage in the area illegally by introducing himself as my assistant."

Several villagers said in most cases guardians collect birth registration cards from the UP office showing their son or daughter as of marriageable age.

Reaz Uddin, secretary for Barabaisdia UP, said, "Earlier some guardians took birth registration certificates for their children by telling the age. Now we are not issuing any birth registration certificate without presence of the girl or boy concerned."

Mahe Alom, OC of Rangabali police station, said, "We will take step after proper investigation about the alleged child marriages."

Md Liakot Ali, upazila nirbahi officer of Rangabali, said, "I am collecting all information over the matter. We will conduct awareness building programme to prevent child marriage in the area."

In many cases, child marriages result in break-ups within a short period and the girls become burden for the poor parents, locals said.

## 4 policemen closed for beating up transport workers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Four policemen were closed to local police line Wednesday afternoon for allegedly beating up transport workers in Haluaghat bus stand area.

The four are SI Jahedul Alam, ASI Kamruzzaman and constables Ismail Hossain and Nuruzzaman.

Neazuddin Razab Ali, president of Transport Workers' Union Haluaghat unit alleged that the policemen during patrol duty unnecessarily beat up some 20 transport workers and drivers around 2:00am on the day.

Protesting the incident, the transport workers put up a barricade on Mymensingh-Haluaghat road at 9:00 in the morning, halting the bus communication for about six hours.

They also brought out a protest procession at Haluaghat upazila headquarters at noon and submitted a memorandum to upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), demanding punishment of the policemen involved in the matter.

The workers' union leaders also informed Mymensingh police superintendent about the incident.

Following a 'fruitful' meeting with the local administration, the transport workers lifted their road barricade at around 3:00pm.

UNO of Haluaghat Mizanur Rahman Bhuiyan and Haluaghat upazila parishad chairman Ali Asgar, police officials and transport workers union leaders were present at the meeting.

Contacted, officer-in-charge (OC) of Haluaghat police station Md Musfiqur Rahman said that the four policemen were closed on the basis of the allegation made by the transport workers.

A probe body was also formed to investigate the incident, said the OC.

## One killed as rival groups clash in Kishoreganj

UNB, Kishoreganj

A man was killed and four others were injured in a clash between two rival groups over the fund of a social organisation at Gourargop village in Karimganj upazila Wednesday morning.

The deceased was identified as Dulal Mia, 45, treasurer of the Uranta Ekadash Samity of the village.

Police said there was a longstanding conflict between Dulal Mia and Fazlur Rahman of the village over sharing the money of the samity.

Locals said an altercation ensued between them over the issue in the morning. Later, both the groups equipped with lethal weapons attacked each other, leaving Dulal dead on the spot and four others injured.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Later, the body was sent to hospital morgue for autopsy.

Of the injured, Mir Hossain, 60, Alal Hossain, 65, Nur Zamat, 13, were admitted to the upazila health complex while another victim Sohel, 25, to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

## WEDNESDAY'S ARSON ATTACK ON BAU BUS

# Expelled student, Jubo League leader among six arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Six people, including an expelled student of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) and a Jubo League leader, were arrested early yesterday for their alleged involvement in torching a bus of the university at Kewatkhal near the campus Wednesday evening.

The arrestees are expelled BAU student Rafiul Hasan Ronin, secretary of Jubo League Kewatkhal ward unit Ripon, Sumon, Azizul Haque, Sohagh and Mohsin.

The six are among the 35 accused in the case filed by the university authorities with Mymensingh Kotwali Police Station under the Speedy Trial Act soon after arson attack on the bus.

Protesting the incident, BAU students yesterday boycotted their classes and examinations. They formed a human chain on the campus demanding exemplary punishment of the culprits involved in setting the bus afire.

BAU Teachers' council in an emergency meeting yesterday strongly protested the attack on the bus and demanded immediate arrest of the criminals.

Immediately after the incident on Wednesday, the students of the university blocked Dhaka-Mymensingh rail route at Mymensingh, disrupting train services on the route for several hours.

A gang of around 20 torched the bus pouring petrol at around 6:30pm. The bus, bought only six months ago, was

carrying around 50 students to the campus from the district town.

This is the third attack on Agricultural University students in a week. At least 10 students were injured in two attacks at KR Market in the university area on June 6 and 7.

Two students of the university-Rafiul Hasan Ronin and Nashid Kamal Kiron--had been expelled for their alleged involvement in the attacks with the outsiders.

Contacted, officer-in-Charge of Kotwali Police Station Golam Sarwar said police arrested six of the 35 accused in BAU bus torching case. Drive is on to arrest the rest of the accused, the OC added.

# Grabber eyes Shaheed Minar land

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back to Pabna from Bhangura

A local ruling party man's initiative to construct a market just in front of a Shaheed Minar at Maidandighi village of Khanmorich union of Bhangura upazila under the district has given rise to grievance among the locals.

Visiting the village in Chalanbeel area a couple of days ago, this correspondent found that Md Dulal Master, president of Khanmorich union unit of Jubo League, has already constructed foundation of a market in front of the Shaheed Minar.

Walls of the Shaheed Minar were broken as conspiracy is on to occupy the total land of the Shaheed Minar, locals said.

"The union parishad built the Shaheed Minar on the 27 decimal land of government's vested property at Maidandighi Bazar a few years ago. There is no other Shaheed Minar in the remote villages of the union," said Md Osman Gani, a resident of Maidandighi village.

"But Dulal Master is trying to grab the Shaheed Minar land. Hundreds of villagers submitted an application to the upazila Nirbahi officer last month to stop his illegal construction here," he said. Bhangura Upazila Nirbahi



PHOTO: STAR

The Shaheed Minar and its boundary wall were damaged partially allegedly in a bid to grab the land at Maidandighi village in Pabna.

Officer Asadul Haque said, "The 27-decimal land of the Shaheed Minar land is a vested property of the government. After the influential land grabber started the construction there, we visited the spot and stopped the construction. We will take legal action if he tries it again."

"But the grabber is yet to remove the construction materials from in front of the Shaheed Minar. He damaged the wall of the Shaheed Minar

and even touched its main pillar. We demand permanent steps to save the lone Shaheed Minar in the area," Md Shaheb Ali, a member of local union parishad said.

Asked about the matter, Jubo League leader Dulal Master said, "Ten-decimal area of the 27-decimal land around the Shaheed Minar is recorded in the name of my father. I have already taken lease of the remaining land. I started construction of a

market on this land, without touching the Shaheed Minar."

He denied his involvement in breaking part of the Shaheed Minar but could not give any satisfactory answer when asked why the construction materials are kept on the foot of the Shaheed Minar.

On the other hand, Bhangura UNO said, "The Shaheed Minar is on a vested property and it cannot be leased. The grabber's claim is invalid."

# Dharla erosion hits 8 villages

## Around 200 acres devoured in 3 weeks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Erosion by the River Dharla has devoured about 200 acres of cropland at eight villages in Mogholhat union of Sadar upazila in the last three weeks.

The erosion hit villages are Badaitari, Majhitari, Kurul, Etapota, Karnapur, Kalibari, Bumka and Bowalmari.

A large number of home-

steads and orchards, several government and non government offices and other establishments in the union are also under threat of the erosion, said locals.

Commerce Minister GM Quader visited the areas for twice in the last two years and gave assurances to villagers of taking steps to check the erosion but to no effect as yet, they said.

Farmer Ahad Ali Pramanik,

55, of Badaitari village, said the river devoured one bigha of his farmland in the last two weeks.

He said, earlier he lost three bighas in 2009, two bighas in 2010 and four bighas in 2011.

"My homestead is now under serious threat of erosion", he added expressing fear.

Another victim Monmohan Barmon, 65, of

Majhitari village, said "Two bighas of my cropland have been washed away by the river in the last two weeks".

Upazila agriculture officer Mohammad Nuruzzaman said about 3,000 acres of cultivable land and 200 different fruit orchards in the union were devoured by the Dharla in the last one year.

"If proper steps had been taken to arrest the onslaught of the river immediately, majority of these croplands and orchards could have been saved", he added.

Subedar Ruhul Amin, commander of Mogholhat BGB camp, said the camp is also under threat as it is only 50 metres off the erosion point.

Habibur Rahman Habib, chairman of Mogholhat union, said around 4000 families of the union have been rendered homeless in the last three years due to the erosion.

"The minister and officials of Water Development Board (WDB) visited the areas several times but no steps have been taken yet to stop the onslaught by the river", he added.

Contacted, Kurigram WDB executive engineer Abu Taher said they do not have enough fund to check the erosion.

"We have sent a letter to the higher authorities seeking fund to tackle the situation", he added.

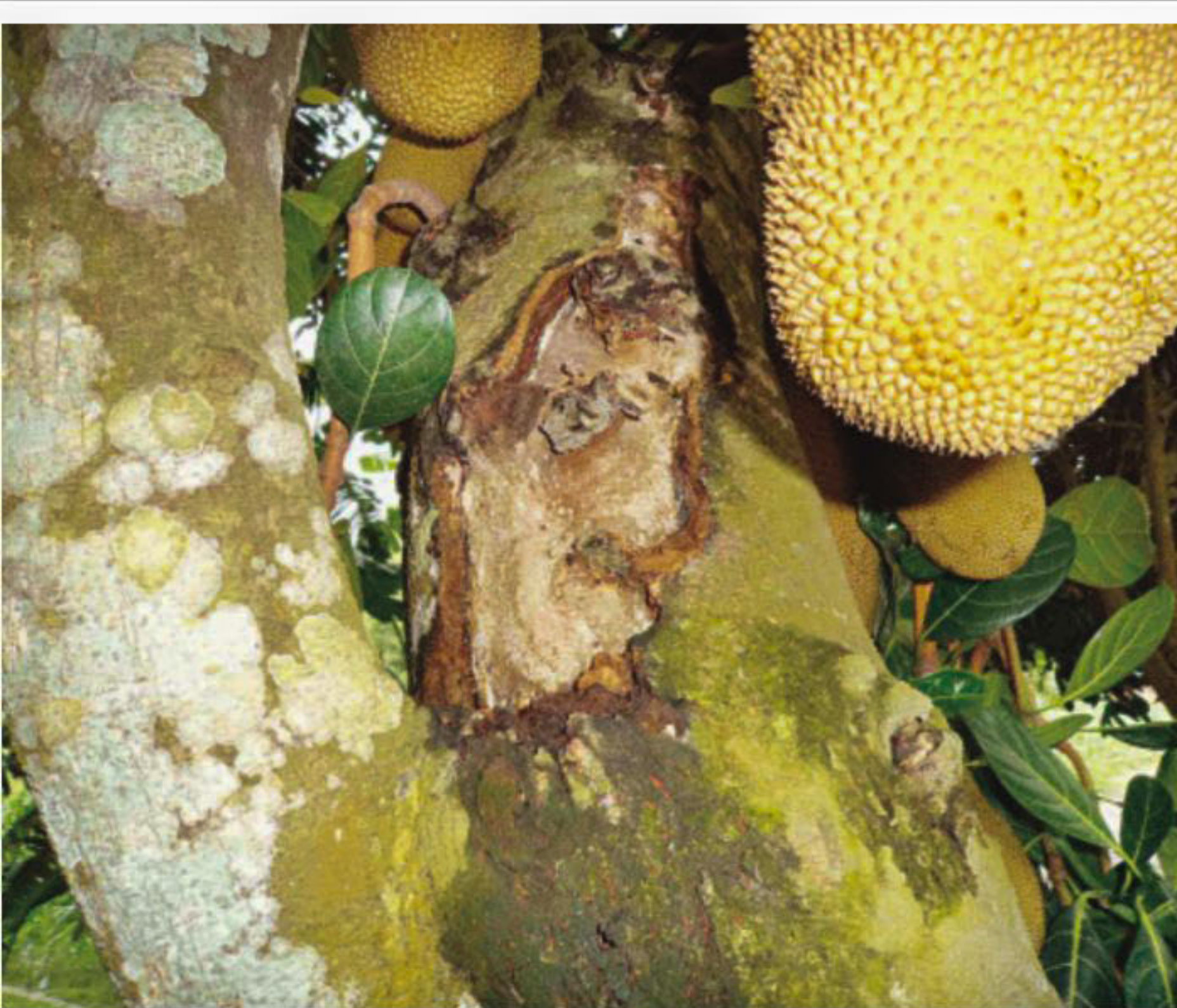


PHOTO: STAR

Jackfruit growers of Kathalbari union in Kurigram Sadar are worried as a disease caused by a certain type of worm is damaging the trunks of the fruit bearing trees.

# Growers worried as disease attacks jackfruit trees

ABDUL WAHED, Kurigram

Jackfruit growers in Kathalbari union under Kurigram Sadar upazila are worried as spread of a disease, locally known as *kathal cancer* affects the yield of the popular summer fruit during the ongoing ripe season.

The disease created by one kind of worm also causes gradual death to the trees.

Rearing jackfruit trees and selling the fruits in summer and rainy seasons is a major earning source of most of the people in the area famous for cultivation of the delicious fruit.

During this time, hundreds of traders purchase jackfruit from Kathalbari Bazar and take it to other districts of the country.

Besides, aged jackfruit trees are cut for getting high quality timber that is used to make good furniture.

A few days ago, this correspondent visited several orchards in Kathalbari union and talked with the affected jackfruit growers.

The disease was prevalent earlier too but recently it has spread alarmingly, affecting around 20 percent trees in the area, said locals.

"The disease has attacked my two jackfruit trees. It is caused by a kind of worm that continues eats inside the tree trunk. Consequently, fruit production declines and their sizes become smaller. Such poorly

developed fruits are used mostly as fodder," said Idris Ali, 32, son of Md Efaq Uddin of Sannashi village of the union.

"Affected tree trunks and branches become weak and easily break down during storm or strong wind. Value of wood from such trees is very low. We do not know the reason of such attack by the worm," Idris Ali said.

A farmer Abdus Salam, 39, of the area said, "Four years ago, the disease attacked one of my matured jackfruit trees, affecting its growth and production. A recent storm broke the tree."

Another farmer Golzar Hossen of Pramaniktary village under the union said, "There are 20 jackfruit trees in my homestead. But their growth stopped and yield declined following attack by a kind of worm. I have sold a few of the trees. I do not know how to prevent the disease."

Upazila Agriculture Officer of Kurigram Sadar Md Monjur Rashid said, "The growth of jackfruit is affected due to the disease caused by one kind of white worm. The affected trees can be saved if the worms are killed by applying a kind of systemic insecticide."

"We are looking for suitable land in Kurigram Sadar upazila to establish a horticulture centre that has been approved by the government," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Dharla devouring homesteads, cultivable lands and orchards at Badaitari village of Mogholhat union in Sadar upazila of Lalmonirhat.