

Cotton factory gutted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A cotton factory was gutted in a devastating fire in Kotchandpur upazila town on Wednesday night.

The fire originated from an electric short circuit at Sylvi-Zinia factory at about 11:00pm and soon engulfed its four godowns, damaging cotton and machines worth Tk 4.5 crore, claimed owner Tobibur Rahman Tobi.

On information, four fire fighting units from Kaliganj, Kotchandpur, Jhenidah and Chuadanga rushed in and doused the blaze after four hours of frantic efforts.

The fire might have originated from an electric short circuit at the factory, said Kotchandpur fire fighting unit officer Bipul Kumar Chowdhury.

Factory owner Tobibur said he had borrowed a large amount of money to run the factory. "How will I repay the loan now?", he posed.

Rice prices soar in northern districts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Rice prices have marked an unusual rise in Dinajpur, Joypurhat and Naogaon, the districts well-known for producing a variety of rice, during the last one week.

The wholesalers and rice millers have attributed the situation to drastic fall in husking of paddy at rice mills due to unavailability of sunlight during the severe cold wave coupled with dense fog.

Due to the adverse weather, it takes much longer period to prepare a chatal for processing paddy into rice, they said.

The price of coarse rice increased by Tk 100 to 120 per 50kg sack while that of fine rice including miniket and pyjam increased by Tk

250 to 300 per sack in the retail markets of the three districts, said market sources.

During a visit to different rice markets in Dinajpur, the correspondent found that the coarse rice is selling at Tk 24 to 25 while it was Tk 22 just a week ago. Besides, price of BR-28 has gone up by Tk 4 per kg.

Miniket and pyjam are selling at Tk 42 a kg while it was Tk 36 last week, said traders at local retail and wholesale markets in Dinajpur.

However, the price of aromatic rice like kathari came down to Tk 65 a kg from Tk 90 around a week ago, they said.

"Price of a 50kg sack of coarse rice Nepali Sharna jumped to Tk 1300 from Tk 1150 in a week as the millers

suddenly increased the price," said Md Mosarraf Hossain, a retail rice seller of Bahadur Bazar in Dinajpur municipality.

Reza Humayun Farukh Chowdhury, owner of an automatic rice mill in Dinajpur and other major rice producing districts like Joypurhat and Naogaon saw a price rise as the millers could not produce enough rice due to adverse weather during the last few days.

"However, the situation is improving as the sunny days are back. Now the rice prices are likely to fall," he added.

Several retailers, however, alleged that the husking mill owners often raises the prices of different kinds of rice intentionally.



PHOTO: STAR

Locals along with teachers and students of different educational institutions in Kanaipur union under Faridpur Sadar upazila block Dhaka-Khulna highway at Kanaipur Bazar yesterday, demanding immediate arrest of the culprits, who killed schoolgirl Zakia Akhter Champa after rape on December 13 last year.

CHANPA RAPE, MURDER IN FARIDPUR
Protesters block highway, reject autopsy report

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Locals along with teachers and students of different schools of Kanaipur union in Faridpur Sadar upazila blocked Dhaka-Khulna highway in front of Kanaipur Bazar yesterday for half an hour from 10:30am demanding immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the culprits, who they said, killed schoolgirl Zakia Akhter Champa after rape on the night of December 13 last year.

They also formed a human chain on the road and then took out a procession in the Bazar area. Addressing a rally at the bazaar, the protesters rejected the autopsy report that revealed that Champa committed suicide. Terming the report false, they demanded punishment to forensic expert Doctor Anjan Kumar Das of Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Zakia Akhter Champa, 15, a class nine student of Pordia Girls' High School in Kanaipur union, went missing from a wedding ceremony at her relative's house near their residence at Kashemabad village in the same union on the night of December 13.

The following morning, her body was found hanging from a tree at the village. Police recovered the body and sent it to Faridpur Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Champa's elder brother Hasibul Islam, also a student of Jagannath University in Dhaka, filed a rape and murder case with Faridpur Kotwali Police Station the same day, accusing their neighbour Salam Matabbar, his wife Parvin Akhtar, their son Babu matabbar, relative Shamim Mondol and villagers Abul Kha and Hashem Kha.

Soon after filing of the case, police arrested Abul Kha and Hashem Kha while the rest four are still at large.

In the case statement, the complainant stated that Salam and his accomplices used to tease Champa on her way to and from the school and they were involved in the rape and murder of her. Parvin Akhter was an abettor of the culprits, he said in the statement.

The autopsy report, submitted by Doctor Anjan Kumar Das to the Judicial Magistrate's Court, said no signs of rape and murder were found on the Champa's body. She committed suicide, the report revealed.

In the inquest report, Sub-Inspector Kamruzzaman of the police station mentioned that signs of rape were found on the Champa's body.

As per court order, Champa's body was exhumed on January 5 in the presence of Executive Magistrate Shahidul Islam. Viscera were sent to Dhaka for fresh autopsy.

Seven drug addicts punished in Jhalakathi

UNB, Jhalakathi

Two mobile courts in the district Sadar and Rajapur upazilas on Wednesday sentenced a drug addict to jail and fined six others on charge of taking and possessing drugs.

In district town, police arrested three youths along with six packets of hemp and a few sedatives in front of Ittadi Library in Chandkati area at noon.

Arrested Sujan, 20, son of Sunil Hawlader, Robi Islam, 17, son of Harun-or-Rashid and Prince, 25, son of Fazlu Mahari, all residents of the town were punished by mobile court.

M Rezaul Karim, assistant commissioner (land) of Sadar upazila and executive magistrate who conducted the mobile court in the town, sentenced Prince to six months' jail and fined Sujan and Robi Tk 5,000, each on charge of taking and possessing hemp.

In Rajapur upazila, police arrested four people along with eight packets of hemp in front of Sadar Hospital.

A mobile court conducted by upazila nirbahi officer Mahbuba Akther, also executive magistrate, fined them Tk 1000 each for taking and keeping hemp.

The convicts were identified as Sohle, 30, son of late Nurul Haque Mridha, and Nasir Morol, 32, son of Lehaj Ali, both residents of Sangor village; Mustafizur Rahman, 32, son of late Abdul Barek, and Jafor Talukder, 35, son of Nur Mohammad Talukder, both residents of the hospital intersection area.



PHOTO: STAR

Three students of Rajshahi Bohumukhi Girls' High School are among the firsts to win a chance for the divisional round of The Daily Star Spelling Bee competition. Story on Page 20.

HAJEE DANESH UNIVERSITY
BCL drives away Shibir activists from campus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) drove away the Islami Chhatra Shibir men from the campus of Hajee Danesh Science and Technology University (HSTU) yesterday, following alleged threat by a Shibir leader.

The BCL activists also locked the administration building protesting the HSTU authorities' alleged lenience toward Shibir activists.

The BCL activists of HSTU caught Md Arifuzzaman, former president of the university unit of Shibir, with some jihadi books and handed him over to police on Monday, but he was freed on bail the following day and threatened the BCL leaders of the university over mobile, said campus sources.

Armed with iron rods and sharp weapons, the BCL activists led by HSTU unit of BCL President Iftekhhar

Ahmed Real attacked the Shibir activists on the campus at around 12:00pm yesterday, forcing the Shibir men to go outside the campus, sources said.

Arun Kanti Roy, general secretary of HSTU unit of BCL, said, "The Shibir leaders and activists with the help of university administration and some teachers were disturbing the congenial atmosphere of the university."

And so, BCL activists drove the Shibir men away to restore the image of the institution."

Around 12:40pm, the BCL activists brought out a procession at the campus and took position in front of administration building protesting alleged softness of the university officials and teachers toward Shibir leaders and activists.

They locked the administrative building at around 1:00pm, confining the vice chancellor, teachers, officials, staff and a good num-

ber of students inside. They came out after an hour, breaking the lock.

Earlier on Wednesday, the BCL activists locked the office of the HSTU registrar.

HSTU BCL president Iftekhhar Ahmed Real alleged that Shibir leaders and activists are creating anarchy at the campus and doing 'admission business' with the help of a section of officials and teachers.

The BCL leaders threatened to start a tough agitation programme on Sunday if action is not taken against the Shibir activists.

When contacted, Dr Shahadat Hossain Khan, chief of the committee for examination for admissible students, said nobody gets any favour regarding admission to the university.

HSTU Registrar Dr Boloram Roy said they are going to form an investigation committee in this regard.

A large number of policemen have been deployed outside the campus.

Two youths shot in Panchhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Two men were shot and injured by criminals at Maratila under Panchhari upazila on Wednesday night.

The injured were identified as Sahadat Mia, 30, of Kalanipara area and Dharmandu Chakma, 28, of Shantalpara area in the upazila.

Sahadat Mia was admitted to Khagrachhari Adhunik Sadar Hospital and Dharmandu Chakma taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Quoting the victims, officer in-charge at Panchhari police station Alamgir Hossain said, a gang of criminals, number 6 to 8, opened fire on the youths at Maratila around 8:30pm of Wednesday while on their way to Matiranga from Panchhari by motorbike.

Sahadat received a bullet in his right leg and Dharmandu two in his two legs, the OC said, adding no case was filed till filing of this report yesterday afternoon.

15 cocktails seized near AL council venue

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Police seized 15 cocktails and seven machetes from near the venue of local upazila (Awami League) AL council in Sariakandi on Wednesday.

Police and locals said, the seizure was made when the annual council of the ruling party was in progress at the public library field.

A patrol team of police recovered the cocktails and machetes from a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, standing near the venue, at around 5:00pm.

However, none was arrested in this connection as the three-wheeler was found in an abandoned state, said assistant superintendent of police Mokbul Hossain.

BNP calls hartal in Comilla city demanding Fakhru's release

UNB, Comilla

Main opposition BNP has called a half-day hartal in the city for January 24, demanding release of BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir.

District unit BNP of Comilla Dakkhin announced the half-day hartal and a three-day programme at a press conference at district BNP office yesterday.

The three-day programme includes demonstration in all the upazilas headquarters on January 20, token hunger strike on January 22 and protest processions in all the upazilas of the district on January 23.

Haji Aminur Rashid Yasin, general secretary of Comilla Dakkhin BNP unit announced the programmes.

In Dinajpur, BNP-led 18 party enforced roadblock yesterday, demanding release of Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, reports our correspondent.

During the programme, the leaders, supporters and activists of Dinajpur district BNP took position at Phulbari bus terminal in the town at 9:00 in the morning and continued their agitation there till 10:30am and obstructed traffic movement.

In Rangpur, police foiled the roadblock programme enforced by Rangpur divisional unit BNP yesterday, reports our correspondent.

Earlier a meeting at Saidpur upazila of Nilphamari district on January 3, the divisional unit announced the programme from 7:00am to 12:00am.

Mozaffar Hossain, con-

venor of Rangpur district BNP, alleged that police intercepted their peaceful programme in CO Bazaar area on Rangpur-Dinajpur highway in the city.

Protesting police action, leaders and activists of BNP later formed a human chain at the same place.

Abdur Rahim, sub-inspector of Rangpur Kotwali police station, said the opposition activists in name of peaceful agitation halted vehicular movement on the highway.

As they did not heed to our request to stop unlawful activities, we forced them out of the road, he said.

However, the BNP programme yesterday disrupted road link of the district with Dinajpur, Panchagarh, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon and other parts of the country.

20 hurt, 6 of them bullet-hit, in gunfight by rival villagers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

At least 20 people were injured, six of them bullet-hit, in a clash between two rival groups over land dispute in Shibchar upazila yesterday.

Of the injured, six hit by bullets are Arshad Mathbor, Khorshed, Saddam, Abul Hossain, Saidul and Iqbal. They were

rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

Locals and police said, there had been a long standing rivalry between Mathbor group and Mollah group at Madhabkandi village of the upazila.

Taking advantage of a conflict within Mollah group, over a piece of land, some members of Mathbor group, led by Atiq Mathbor

joined hands with a faction of Mollah group.

Yesterday morning, when the rival Lal Mia Mollah and Hye Mollah groups went to take control of land, Atiq's group supported Hye. Both the groups locked in clash with lethal weapons, leaving 20 people injured, including six hit by bullets.

During the clash, Lal Mia Mollah's two sons

Azhar Mollah and Mostafiz Mollah opened fire on their rival group, locals said.

Officer in charge (Investigation) Abul Khair of Shibpur PS said, a clash ensued between two groups of the villagers over taking control of a piece of land.

At one stage of the clash, both the groups swooped on each other with guns and other lethal weapons, he added.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKU

Children of Uttar Pochakoralia Registered Primary School in Taltali upazila of Barguna district have hardly any opportunity to play as the school ground is used to cultivate paddy.