



Portuguese connections: agave flower and St. Nicholas Tolentino church.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

# The Portuguese Connection

I admire the agave plant. Its tall leaves are sleek and elegant; its bright yellow flowers delightful. When the flowers wilt and drop, new plants sprout from them. But I have often wondered how this plant, so distinctively American, came to be here.

Then I discovered, in *The History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, that it was the Portuguese who brought the agave from the New World to our shores. Reading the book, I realized that the Portuguese connection with our land runs deep. The first Europeans in Bengal, they brought not just agave but many other fruits and vegetables and left lasting influences on our culture and life.

My curiosity in this matter was sparked recently when Shakhawat Hossain, Honorary Consul of Portugal, mentioned that the first Bangla grammar was written by a Portuguese missionary. It was written in a village that was actually discussed in this column last year. Nagori, about thirty kilometres from Dhaka in Kaliganj, is the site of the annual St. Anthony's festival.

The Portuguese church at Nagori, St. Nicholas Tolentino church, dates back to 1663. While serving as bishop there from 1734-1742, Manual de Assumpcao wrote the first grammar of Bangla language. It was published from Lisbon in 1743 in two volumes: a Bangla grammar and a Bangla-Portuguese dictionary.

The Portuguese arrived in Bengal in the early 1500s. Seafaring traders came first; missionaries soon followed. This region was, at that time, undergoing political upheaval and power struggles. The powers included the Sultans of Bengal, the Moghuls, Tripura kings and the Arakans near Chittagong. The Portuguese built settlements in inland (mainly Hooghly) and coastal parts of Bengal (mainly Chittagong) and

traded in spices, muslin and rice from there.

Because of shifting balance of powers and their search for better trading opportunities, the Portuguese, particularly in and around Chittagong, often became involved in local conflicts. They sometimes fought on behalf of one power group or another – or for their own interest – occasionally attacking ships which earned them notoriety as pirates.

They were, however, different from other European visitors in a number of ways. They exported our goods instead of shifting manufacturing to their homeland. Portuguese men married local women and assimilated into our culture after converting their wives. Many Bengali Catholics have Portuguese surnames, such as D'Costa, Pinheiro and Rosario, reflecting these conversions.

The Portuguese were also instrumental in introducing New World ingredients into our cuisine. The fruits and vegetables they brought include pineapples, potatoes, guava, cashew nuts, and *kamranga*. Balachao, a dish made from shutki, is derived from Bacalao, the salt-cod dish of Portugal and Spain, and “pudding” made from eggs is a variation of flan which is popular in Portugal and Spain.

Perhaps nowhere is the Portuguese connection more evident in our daily life than in our language. Numerous Bangla words are derived from the Portuguese, including everyday words such as closet (*almari*), key (*chabi*), nail (*perek*), and window (*janala*.) Food-related words include pineapple (*anaras*), cauliflower (*kopi*) and bread (*pauruti*.)

So, while it may seem like a far-away country, Portugal is not that far after all, is it?

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## OVERSEAS JOB REGISTRATION ENDS TODAY

# Job seekers' figure drops two thirds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The second phase of the countrywide online registration for overseas jobs under government and non-government arrangements beginning September 22 ends today with the number of jobseekers reaching barely one third of the first phase's figure.

The registration closes today in Khulna and Chittagong divisions, where it began on October 6. Registration for the country's remaining five divisions, Dhaka, Barisal, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet has already ended.

Only around 5 lakh jobseekers registered their names till yesterday, according to statistics of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

In the first phase, held in January for plantation jobs in Malaysia, around 14.5 lakh jobseekers registered.

Of them, 20,000 were selected but only 455 migrated till September, states the BMET. Visas of another 679 arrived on Thursday and they are expected to leave by October 25.

Many believe that the government failure to find work for most of those registering in the first phase is one core reason for the low response in the second phase.

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain blames the private recruiting agencies for allegedly spreading propaganda for not being able to beat the government's low cost offer.

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## Criminal's body found

Scuffle while recovering it injures 5 cops; 6 arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Five policemen suffered minor injuries while six persons were arrested yesterday during a scuffle while the former were recovering the body of an alleged fugitive criminal accused in 17 cases filed over murder, extortion, robbery, drug peddling and others.

The accomplices of Shawkat Ali, 35, tried to prevent police from recovering his body, found lying by a road in Gutiaobo area of Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila, said Rugganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Asaduzzaman.

Shawkat's father Abdul Latif of the upazila's Masimpur area said Shawkat went missing 15 days ago when men claiming to be Rapid Action Battalion members picked him up from the area.

# NEWSINbrief

## Off-duty cop mugged in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

“Aggyan party” members doped an off-duty policeman and took away a cellphone and Tk 4,000 from him in a passenger bus in the capital's Abdullahpur yesterday.

Abdul Hamid, a sub-inspector of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, was travelling to his sister's Gazipur residence.

Police rescued him around 3:30pm and took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

After regaining his consciousness, Hamid could not say anything about the incident, said police constable Hasan Ali, who took him to the hospital.

## 150 Shibir men sued for attacking police in Jhenidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Police yesterday filed a case against 150 pro-Jamaat Islami Chhatra Shibir activists on the charge of attacking the law enforcers near Jhenidah Press Club Thursday morning.

Jhenidah Police Station Officer-in-Charge Kazi Jalal Uddin Ahmed said the Shibir men brought out a procession on Kabi Sukanta road at about 9:00am on that day.

As police barred them near the press club, they hurled brick chips and stones at police, leaving two law enforcers injured, he added.

## Peasant beaten to death in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A peasant was beaten to death for allegedly stealing a cow in Sadipur village of Benapole yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Mohammad Bulu, 38, of the village.

Quoting Selina Khatun, the victim's wife, police said her husband was working in the field of a family of the village when their cow went missing.

Suspecting Bulu to be the thief, Abura, son of Abdul Latif, and brothers Nasir Morol and Nazim Morol beat him to death, they added.

No case was filed.

## UCBL holds programme on remittances

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,Ctg

United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL) organised a programme on foreign remittances at the bank's Anwara branch in Chittagong yesterday.

The programme will also be held in 49 branches of the bank throughout the country that have accounts of Bangladeshi expatriates, said bank officials.

Mohammad Ali, managing director of UCBL, said foreign currency earners are the lifelines of the country's economy.

Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed, local AL lawmaker and chairman of UCBL executive committee, among others, was present.

## Nine women arrested for stealing valuables from Hindu temples

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moultribazar

Police yesterday afternoon arrested nine women at a Hindu temple at Kadipur in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar for their alleged involvement in stealing valuables from temples at different times in the country.

The arrested are Sokina Begum, 32, Swapna Begum, 25, Alsuma Begum, 28, Suhena Akhter, 20, Asma Begum, 20, Robina Akhter, 25, Hosna Begum, 32, Rina Begum, 28, and Halima Akhter, 32, of Brahmanbaria district.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Md Alamgir Hosain confirmed the incident.

## Hafiz Yard opens at DU

CITY DESK

Dr Mohammad Baquer Khurram Shad, Iranian state minister for cultural affairs and chairman of Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation, and Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique, vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, inaugurated “The Hafiz Yard” at the university on Thursday.

The Hafiz Yard was launched under “Bangladesh-Iran Academic and Research Exchange Programme”. Under the project, five rooms were constructed for the Persian Language and Literature Department at the Dhaka University Arts Building. The rooms will be used as a classroom, a seminar room, a teachers' room, a computer lab and for the language club.

The Iranian state minister and DU vice-chancellor also talked about further collaboration between DU and Iranian higher education institutes in the latter's office. They discussed strengthening the brotherly relationship between Bangladesh and Iran.

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Bangladesh Mr Hussain Aminian Tousi, DU Pro Vice-Chancellor (Administration) Prof Shahid Akhtar Hossain, Chairman of the Department of Persian Language and Literature Dr Tarique Ziaur Rahman Sirazi and Iranian Sadi Foundation representative Mohammad Reza Darbandi, also were present at the inauguration.

## Govt official shot in his house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A government official was wounded seriously after unidentified criminals shot and stabbed him storming his residence in the capital's Mohammadpur early yesterday.

With a bullet injury to the left leg and stabs to the left hand, Abdullah Mamun, 50, is being treated in a hospital at Dhanmondi.

Three men forced their way into the house the moment Mamun along with his wife and another person entered his home in a car around 2:00am, said Biplob Kumar Sarkar, deputy commissioner (DC), Tejgaon Division, Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The gang attacked Mamun when he tried to place a call, he said, adding that the motive of the attackers, who fled without taking anything, was not immediately known.

## 2 murdered in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Two men were hacked to death in separate incidents in Bogra town on Thursday and yesterday.

In Malotinagar Southpara, some youths yesterday hacked to death Raihan Ali, 24, son of Shajahan Ali of Thanthania Paschimpara of the town.

Quoting locals, police said the deceased was quarrelling with a group of people just before the incident. At one stage, they hacked him to death before locals who were too scared to help him, they added.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (A Circle) Nazir Ahmed Khan said the deceased is an accused in four cases including a murder case.

He suspects Raihan quarrelled with his accomplices and they are the ones who killed him.

The body was sent for an autopsy.

A rickshaw-puller was killed allegedly by his landlord and the landlord's son in Sultanganipara on Thursday evening.

Locals claimed Ranju Mia, 45, of Boromahar village under Kahaloo upazila, was having an extra-marital affair with his landlord's wife.

Incensed after learning about the affair, the landlord, Sarowar Hossain, and his son Rahat killed Ranju, they added.

Police said the duo fled after the murder and the body was sent for an autopsy.

### Campaign

Work for a Better Bangladesh Trust will organise an awareness raising campaign on preventing the practice of throwing stones at running trains; Venue: Kamalapur Railway Station;Time:10:00am.

### Discussion

Centre for Palliative Care will hold a discussion marking “World Hospice

and Palliative Care Day” to be observed tomorrow; Venue: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University premises;Time:11:00am.

### Roundtable

China Bangladesh Study Group will organise a roundtable, “China Bangladesh Relation: Potentials in coming decades”; Venue: Jatiya Press Club;Time:10:00am.



A distraught trader desperately tries to revive his bull, which fell sick due to the heat following a ride from Kushtia, outside a market for sacrificial animals in the capital's Kamalapur yesterday. He was planning to sell the animal for Tk 2.3 lakh.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# One lakh IT learners to get certificates

BSS, Dhaka

The government plans to award certificates to over 1 lakh Information Technology (IT) learners so that they get recognised and can build themselves as entrepreneurs.

The certificate recipients will be selected through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), a method of assessment practiced in many countries.

The government's move came at a time when over 1 lakh people, especially youths, educated in information technology are involved with various businesses, said Deputy Secretary of ICT Ministry Dr Mohammad Abul Hasan.

He said a significant number of learners had taken Competency Based Training (CBT) informally and they could not build themselves as entrepreneurs due to lack of certificates.

The plan was disclosed during an opinion sharing meeting on "Strengthening BTEB for Providing Certificates to the IT Learners" held at the ICT ministry on Wednesday with its Joint Secretary Gazi Mizanur Rahman in the chair.

After introduction of RPL, over 50,000 learners who received basic computer training informally from the 3,775 UIISCs, 68,000 enumerators of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and different projects of the information and communication technology (ICT) ministry, including 15,000 freelancers who were imparted outsourcing training under Learning and Earning Programme of the ministry, will be awarded certificates on the basis of assessment, Hasan said.

As part of the plan to implement National Skill Development Policy 2011 and ICT Policy 2009, the ministry has taken an initiative to empower and equip

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