

# Tobacco calls the shots

Everything is done in exchange for tobacco in 50 Lalmonirhat villages

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

As tobacco harvest is going on in some 50 villages in Lalmonirhat district, people are using dried tobacco leaves to meet their daily necessities instead of money.

As homesteads are awash with tobacco here, everybody—from hawkers to shop owners—takes tobacco in exchange for commodities. Even, beggars get tobacco as alms.

The footage showed the surprise, madrasa students in Khuniyagachh village under Sadar upazila are collecting tobacco from farmers to raise funds for their upkeep.

Moulana Ashraf Ali, principal of the madrasa, said the institution is being run with the locals' largesse. Farmers are helping them as per their capacity.

"We get some 100 to 125 maunds of tobacco leaves every year and raise funds for the madrasa after selling them," he added.

Shahjahan Miah, a madrasa student, said, "We gather tobacco from the farmers during the harvest period every year. We give the money coming from the tobacco sale to the madrasa funds."

"We get around four maunds of tobacco leaves a day," said another student Abdul Quddus.

Farmer Asir Uddin of the same village said, "We donate tobacco leaves, we give beggars tobacco leaves and we are also using the leaves, instead of money, for purchasing daily commodities from hawkers and village shops."

Schoolteacher Atiar Rahman, also a tobacco trader of Purbo Kalmati village, said villagers are swapping the leaves for daily commodities.

Mohor Ali, who makes a living hawking goods in Anandabazar village, said he sells different commodities like dried fish, clothes, cosmetics, toys and baby foods in exchange for tobacco leaves.

"The leaves are considered money during the peak period of tobacco harvest in many villages in Lalmonirhat," he asserted.

Rahela, 62, a beggar in Kalmati village, said she gets tobacco as alms from the locals during the period.

"I collect 10 to 12 kilograms of dried tobacco leaves every day. I earn Tk 180 to Tk 210 by selling them," she observed.



Madrasa students taking tobacco leaves as donations at Khuniyagachh village in Lalmonirhat. They later sell the tobacco and give the money to the madrasa funds.

PHOTO: STAR

## Abductors free Abu Bakar

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Narayanganj on his way to the capital.

A rescue operation began soon after and it continued throughout Wednesday night and yesterday, but law enforcers failed to make any headway.

Investigators, however, identified the blue microbus used in the abduction from images captured around 2:53pm on a CCTV camera at Mayor Hanif Flyover in Gulistan.

The footage showed the vehicle was heading towards Chankharpul in the capital. Toll collectors said they also saw the vehicle going in that direction.

Police said they were yet to track down the microbus that used a fake registration number.

Siddique is the managing director of Hamid Fashion, a Narayanganj-based garment factory owned by Awami League lawmaker and State Minister for Power Nasrul Hamid Bipu.

Early on the day, 43 rights activists and civil society members yesterday expressed deep concern over his abduction.

"People are passing days in anxiety as abductions are taking place one after another. If we allow the culture of impunity to continue, we all will be

victims one way or the other," said Sultana Kamal at a press conference in the city's Brac Centre Inn.

The rights activists said people were losing confidence in law enforcers as such incidents were happening in broad daylight. They demanded that the government stop it.

Citing newspaper reports, advocate Hamida Hossain said at least 39 people were abducted in the first three months this year, but the enforcers rescued only four.

Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International, Bangladesh, read out a statement at the press conference. Information Commissioner Sadeka Halim, columnist Syed Abul Maksud and NGO Federation Chairperson Syed Ibrahim also spoke on the occasion.

"It is the duty of the law enforcers to stop such incidents from happening. And if they fail, they should be held accountable," said Sultana Kamal, executive director of rights body Ain o Salish Kendra.

Speaking there, Rizwana reiterated that a number of companies whose interests were hurt because of her filing cases against them might have links

with her husband's abduction.

Regarding the rescue efforts, she said, "So far, I have been getting support from the law enforcers."

Asked whether she got any threats following the abduction, she said she did not but received calls from unknown people who offered clues about the abduction.

She would not divulge the information and said she already shared those with law enforcers.

"He [Siddique] had no fault. If he had any fault, it was his support for my work," said the lawyer and environmentalist, who won Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2012 for her roles in protecting environment through legal means.

A number of longtime friends of Siddique also endorsed her statements.

"He is a modest, amicable and trustworthy man, and I have no clue why he was abducted," said Nasrul Hamid Bipu, a school friend of the victim.

Contacted by The Daily Star, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan said all the intelligence and law enforcement agencies were doing their utmost to rescue Siddique. "We are

## US for greater political inclusion

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created real opportunities for regional stability. "But we can't ignore the security challenges posed by the drawdown of Nato forces and the transition in Afghanistan," she added.

She, however, did not mention anything about the recently held elections in Bangladesh. But in her testimony before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on February 11, she had termed the January 5 parliamentary polls "a deeply flawed election" that did not credibly express the will of the Bangladeshi people.

Biswal said Pakistan conducted its first civilian transition of power last year, while Afghanistan was in the middle of successful and broadly participatory elections.

Nepal had also made huge strides, building democratic institutions after

years of conflict, she said, adding that last November's elections saw a historic turnout of more than 70 percent.

She said one must acknowledge the important gains Bangladesh had made in improving health, food security and economic opportunity for its citizens.

Biswal added, "Bangladesh is the only country where we're implementing all three of President Obama's development initiatives on health, food security, and climate change and with US assistance, Bangladesh is one of the few countries on track to achieve its Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] related to child and maternal mortality."

Speaking about political transition in the region over several years, she said Bangladesh in particular stands to develop tremendous commercial ties with the rest of Asia and had begun to break down trade barriers with India.

On the collapse of the Rana Plaza building and Tazreen factory fire that focused world attention on inadequate labour safety measures, Biswal said Washington along with European partners had engaged in an intense effort with labour, industry, civil society and the government to have great improvements in the garment sector in Bangladesh.

On security cooperation, she said the US security cooperation with both Bangladesh and Nepal had grown over the years, not only on international peacekeeping front, but also on border security, counterterrorism and High Availability Disaster Recovery.

"We are particularly focused in supporting Nepal and Bangladesh as they build capacity to respond to natural and humanitarian disasters," Biswal said, adding that in Bangladesh they had built more than 500 cyclone

## Literary pioneer Márquez dies

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Márquez was considered the supreme exponent, if not the creator, of the literary genre known as magic realism, in which the miraculous and the real converge.

Magic realism, he said, sprang from Latin America's history of vicious dictators and romantic revolutionaries, of long years of hunger, illness and violence.

"One Hundred Years of Solitude" would sell more than 20 million

copies. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda called it "the greatest revelation in the Spanish language since 'Don Quixote.'" The novelist William Kennedy hailed it as "the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race."

Márquez made no claim to have invented magic realism; he pointed out that elements of it had appeared before in Latin American literature. But no one before him had used the style with such

artistry, exuberance and power. Magic realism would soon inspire writers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Suffering from lymphatic cancer, which was diagnosed in 1999, Márquez devoted most of his subsequent writing to his memoirs.

In July 2012, his brother, Jaime, was quoted as saying that Márquez had senile dementia and had stopped writing.

Besides his wife, Mercedes, he is survived by two sons, Rodrigo and

## Bergman unhappy as trial begins

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international crimes tribunals.

It yesterday said it has found "prima facie elements of contempt" in his write-ups.

Bergman was also directed yesterday to show cause within 15 days as to why he should not be punished under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act-1973 for making "derogatory comments" that questioned the number of people killed during the Liberation War.

Bergman defended his write-up as "fair criticism" that "does not tantamount to contempt".

On February 18, Supreme Court lawyer Abul Kalam Azad filed a contempt petition with the tribunal alleging that Bergman in his article "Sayeede indictment-1971 deaths" on November 11, 2011, had "questioned" the figure of deaths of martyrs in the war that "belittled" the authority of the court.

Tribunal-1 on October 3, 2011, in its indictment order in the case against condemned Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayeede said three million people were killed, more than 2 lakh women were raped, and about 10 million people had to take refuge in India as a result of the actions of the Pakistani military and their collaborators.

Tribunal-2 on January 21, 2013, in its verdict in the case against condemned



David Bergman

Abul Kamal Azad mentioned the same figures.

The petitioner alleged that Bergman had "made relentless efforts to justify that the tribunal was absolutely wrong in saying that three million people had died and 2 lakh women had been raped in 1971 and he referred to various unsupported, inconsistent and contradictory sources".

The petition also cited Bergman's analysis posted in his blog on January 28, 2013: "It is simply to point out that if the tribunal is supposed to be an adjudicator of truth, it would have been appropriate for it to have dealt with the issue of the number of dead in a more judicial manner -- rather than repeating a mantra that has little or no factual basis."

However, this quote was retracted from the blog after Bergman was served with a notice regarding the contempt of court petition.

The tribunal on February 20 asked Bergman to explain.

Submitting Bergman's response, his lawyers on March 31 said their client had written the article for "fair criticism" and "it was not tantamount to contempt". The intention of Bergman's write-ups was to assist the court, they claimed.

The tribunal, in its yesterday's order, said, "We are not convinced with the explanation."

"Rather, we are in agreement that the

conduct and attitude of the opposite party by making above comments prima facie appear to have tended to bring the authority of the tribunal and administration of the law into disrespect or disregard....," it said.

Bergman was present at the courtroom yesterday.

In a statement issued afterwards, he said, "I am very disappointed by today's [yesterday's] tribunal decision to initiate contempt proceedings against me relating to three articles I have written on my blog, Bangladesh War Crimes Tribunal."

Questioning why actions were being taken based on articles written well over a year ago, he said, "I will be vigorously contesting the claim by the tribunal that these articles are in contempt of court -- though without any specificity to the allegations, defending oneself is difficult."

"I am also very concerned that I will have no right to appeal against my conviction for contempt, as the International Crimes Tribunal does not provide any right to appeal in such cases...."

Bergman's case would be the second where Tribunal-2 started contempt of court proceedings for making derogatory remarks about the tribunal.

Last year, the tribunal convicted and sentenced three Jamaat leaders, including its acting secretary general, for the offence.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam yesterday

## Death sought for Khokon

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the court wishes to consider the matter).

During the closing arguments, prosecutor Mokhlesur Rahman Badal claimed that he had proved all the charges against the Nagarkanda municipality mayor of Faridpur "beyond any shadow of doubt".

"We are seeking his [accused] capital punishment," he said.

Tribunal-appointed defence counsel Abdus Shukur Khan claimed that his client MA Zahid, the mayor of Nagarkanda, and MA Zahid Hossain Khokon, who committed war crimes, were two different people.

Over the debate on the name of the accused, Justice Jahangir Hossain said the prosecution had given the defence the opportunity to raise the question.

"You have mentioned MA Zahid Hossain Khokon alias Khokon Razakar alias Khokon Matubbar alias Molla," he said, adding that the prose-

cution could not submit necessary documents in support of the long name.

Khokon, believed to be living in Sweden with his son and daughter, is facing 11 charges for his alleged involvement in killings, genocide, torture, abduction and confinement of people during the Liberation War in 1971.

At least 24 prosecution witnesses, including the investigation officer, testified in the case. There were no defence witnesses.

Khokon was a close associate of Abul Kalam Azad, a condemned war criminal from Faridpur. He had campaigned for a Jamaat-e-Islami candidate in the 1970 elections and had been involved in Jamaat.

He later joined the BNP and as the vice-president of Nagarkanda BNP unit, Khokon contested the municipality election in 2011 and became its

mayor.

MOBARAK CASE

The war crimes case against Brahmanbaria Awami League leader Mobarak Hossain has entered the closing argument stage.

His defence will not produce any more witnesses before the court and defence counsel Tajul Islam told the tribunal that he could not produce the third defence witness for various reasons.

He then prayed the tribunal to pass any order it deemed fit.

The tribunal then fixed May 11 for the beginning of the closing arguments by the prosecution.

The defence had produced two witnesses including the accused and his son.

Mobarak is facing five charges for his alleged involvement in war crimes, including genocide, committed during the Liberation War.

## Story of torture same

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been beaten up or verbally abused for not doing what their husbands asked them to do.

Only four percent of 20,832 women interviewed were aware of the "right to express opinions" and six percent of the "right to self-respect and dignity".

The findings portray the women rights situation in those areas where MJF and 14 of its associated organisations have been working for at least five years to combat domestic violence.

As part of their programmes, the non-government organisations have designed a model to make these villages free of violence against women in the next five years.

"It is not possible for us to keep watch and prevent incidences of domestic violence in every single village household every day. That is why we need to work with village communities that will act as pressure

groups to fight against domestic violence," said Shaheen Anam, executive director of MJF, who chaired the seminar.

Communities in these villages must demonstrate that they will actively work to raise people's awareness of issues related to domestic violence, said Banasree Mitra Niyogi, coordinator of MJF.

Another assessment will be done after three years from now to learn the improvements in the women rights situation there, she told The Daily Star, adding fifteen factors such as marriage without dowry and reduction of domestic violence would be considered indicators of achievement.

Muhammad Shahadat Hossain Siddique, associated professor of the economics department of Dhaka University, who had led the survey, read out the highlights of the report.

Children should be taught to respect their mothers, sisters and other women by including stories on ethics in the primary education curriculum, said Riti Ibrahim, former secretary of the statistics and informatics division of the planning ministry.

Speaking of ethics, Ruchira Tabassum Naved, a scientist in the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh, said interviewers must be careful while conducting any survey that female respondents do not experience pain and distress when they are asked to recollect incidents of violence, torture and humiliation.

Chief guest Tariqul Islam, secretary of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, and special guest Ayesha Khanam, president of women's organisation Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, insisted that the government and national and international NGOs should work together to combat