

Smugglers use women to carry illegal Indian drugs

100 gangs active in Lalmonirhat border areas

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Over a thousand poor women are engaged in carrying smuggled Indian drugs through 22 border routes in five upazilas under the district as around 100 gangs of a drug syndicate hire the women, often making them wear veils, in a bid to dodge law enforcers.

The drug smuggling cartels coax these hard-pressed women to get involved in the act by giving some money to them as well as their male family members, said Mohor Ali, 55, a NGO worker in Mogholhat border area under Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

Thirty-five women drug transporters were held with Indian phensidyl and hemp in Lalmonirhat Sadar, Patgram and Hatibandha upazilas in last six months, said officials of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) in Lalmonirhat.

Tahmina Begum, 46, of Mogholhat village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, confessed to DNC officials that she was hired for Tk 2,000 for transporting 40 bottles of phensidyl from Mogholhat border to Rangpur city a few days ago.

"Like me, many poor women in the border area are working as transporters of contraband drug just to make some contribution to the ultra poor families," she added.

"We only transport the

drugs, we don't own or sell them. I do this twice a week and get Tk 2,000 for transporting 40 to 50 bottles of phensidyl or 10 kg of hemp from Mogholhat border to Rangpur city," said Dulali Begum of the same village.

"Women living in border areas are hired to transport drugs as law enforcers do

not suspect us. We can easily carry the items by train or bus. Around 10 drug gangs are active in Mogholhat border for smuggling illegal items like phensidyl, hemp and wine from India," she told DNC officials.

Ataur Rahman, sub-inspector of DNC in Lalmonirhat, said, "For

transporting smuggled Indian drugs, the hired poor women wear veil. DNC officials are keeping strong vigilance on veil-wearing women in border areas. At least 100 gangs are active along the border areas of Lalmonirhat district to smuggle Indian drugs."



PHOTO: STAR
A poor woman hired by a gang transports smuggled drug from Indian Jaridharla village through Mogholhat border of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila recently. Inset, two veiled women held for carrying Indian contraband drug phensidyl from Mogholhat to Lalmonirhat town a few days ago.

Kumrabori makers pass busy time in Bogra

They want incentive to keep the tradition alive

MAMUN-UR-RASHID, Bogra

A good number of people in Dupchanchia upazila under the district are passing busy time preparing kumrabori, a dried paste of maskalai pulse, potato and cauliflower paste.

The paste, mostly comprising the pulse, is made into small balls and dried in the sun, especially in

winter.

The curry and soup made from the item is favourite among the locals as well as people of some other areas.

Many people mostly belonging to Hindu community at Zianagar, Chamrul, Gobindapur and Talora villages of the upazila are engaged in making kumrabori that sells in different markets in the

district.

Talking with this correspondent on Monday, several kumrabori makers including Adari Majhi, Aroti Mohanta, Ranjana Basak, Tara Rani and Bidhur Rani of Talora area said the work no longer brings good profit as the prices of the ingredients have risen.

The item sells for Tk 150-200 per kg to the wholesal-

ers and retailers and Tk 200-250 per kg to the common buyers, leaving a very small profit for the makers, they said.

The government and non-government organisations should provide financial support for continuation of the traditional business, said Krisno Das, an elderly resident of Talora area.



PHOTO: STAR
Two Hindu women dry kumrabori, a locally made popular food item, in the sun at Talora village in Dupchanchia upazila of Bogra district. The photo was taken a few days ago.

31 shops gutted in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least 31 shops were gutted in a devastating fire at a bazar in Agoiljhara upazila town on Tuesday night.

Quoting locals, Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of

Agoiljhara Police Station, said the fire originated from an electric short circuit at a garment shop around 10:30pm and soon engulfed 30 other adjacent shops.

The affected stores include stationery, garment, shoe, medicine, cosmetics

and rice shops.

On information, four firefighting units from Gournadi, Wazirpur and Barisal rushed to the spot and doused the blaze after two hours of hectic effort.

Four people, including SI Raju of the police sta-

tion, sustained injuries when they tried to extinguish the fire.

Dhala Mia, president of the bazaar committee, claimed that the loss caused by the fire could go up to Tk 1.5 core.

Indian police detain three Bangladeshis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Uttar Dinajpur police in the Indian state of Paschim Banga arrested three Bangladeshi nationals from near Nagorvita border in the Indian territory yesterday on charge of intrusion.

The arrestees were identified as Bhutto, 28, of Bihari para village in Baliadangi upazila of Thakurgaon, and Md Ripon, 40, and Enamul Haque, 25, of Jahibad Check-Post Colony in Ranishankoil upazila of the district.

Major Touhid-Bin-Ishaq, intelligence officer of BGB 30 Battalion, said Indian police of Goalpukur Police Station detained the three Bangladeshis from Dharmapur village, about 17 kilometres inside India, for not having valid documents. They were later sent to jail.

Away in Naogaon, Indian Border Security Force (BSF) picked up a Bangladeshi youth from near Patari border in Sapahar upazila early Wednesday, reports UNB.

The victim is Yousuf Ali, 35, son of late Israil Ali of Dakkhin Patari village.

Lt Col Rafiqul Hasan, commanding officer (CO) of BGB 14 Battalion in Naogaon, quoted locals as saying that the BSF troops from Rangamati Camp picked up Yousuf when he went near the border around 12:15am.

Assault on garment worker sparks protest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Workers of a readymade garments factory in Jamirdia area of Bhaluka upazila yesterday staged demonstration, protesting assault on a fellow worker by an official of the factory.

Police quoted witnesses as saying that Sujon, production manager of Saad-Sun Apparels Ltd, allegedly engaged in a scuffle with Akhtar Uddin, a worker of sewing section, over a trifling matter on Tuesday noon.

At around 9:00pm, Sujon along with some other employees of the factory again attacked Akhtar.

Hearing the news, the workers of the factory staged demonstration inside the factory yesterday morning, demanding punishment to the attackers. They also allegedly attacked some factory officials.

On information, police rushed to the spot, but could not enter the factory due to workers' agitation.

The workers resumed their duties at around 2:00pm following an assurance given by the factory officials of investigating the matter properly, said Golam Sarwar, officer in-charge of Bhaluka Police Station.

Alleged criminal found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police recovered the body of an alleged criminal from Daulatdia Char in Rajbari district yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Imran Hossain Pramanik, 20, son of Mojibur Rahman Pramanik of Uttar Daulatdia in Daulatdia upazila.

After receiving an unknown phone call on Thursday night, Imran went out of house and remained missing since then, said his elder brother Firoj Hossain Pramanik.

Locals found his body in the area yesterday afternoon and informed the police who sent it to a hospital morgue for autopsy.

Imran might have been killed by his rivals, said AKM Nasir Ullah, officer-in-charge of Daulatdia Ghat Police Station.



PHOTO: STAR
The documents, books, and furniture lie charred in the office room of Dakkhin-Purbo Jolagati Government Primary School at Jolagati village in Kaukhali upazila under Pirojpur district as criminals torched the schoolhouse on Tuesday night.

Criminals torch primary school in Pirojpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Miscreants torched 41 No Dakkhin-Purbo Jolagati Government Primary School at remote Jolagati village in Kaukhali upazila under the district on Tuesday night.

The bamboo made false ceiling of the tin-shed four-room building, most of its benches, tables and chairs, and papers and books kept in the office room were burnt into ashes.

"Around 8:30am today [Wednesday], a student informed me that the school was torched," said Mahmuda Khatun, an assistant teacher of the school.

Md Matiar Rahman, who lives near the school, said he informed the union parishad (UP) chairman, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), and police after knowing the incident around 9:00am.

Kaukhali UNO Md Shahidul Islam, Pirojpur Sadar Circle Assistant

Superintendent of Police (ASP) Md Abdul Quader Beg, and Shialkathi UP Chairman Sikder M Delowar Hossain visited the spot.

"We will continue classes of the kids at a kachari (guestroom) of our house adjacent to the school until the school is repaired," said Shefa Sultana, acting president of the school managing committee.

Around seventy students of classes I to V read in the school.

The Paharis of Dinajpur

ANDREW EAGLE

Pahari or "person of the hills" is a commonly heard term used to refer indiscriminately to the many minority peoples of the Hill Tracts. But in Shahargachhi village of Dinajpur's Ghoraghat are about 400 households of ethnic Paharis.

"I took the title from my father," says Laluram Kabiraj Pahari, approaching 60. "We are flatland Paharis." What that means is unclear - the 'flatland' as likely added to distinguish their ethnicity from any of the Hill Tracts peoples to whom they are unrelated.

As Ghoraghat's Pahari community is very poor with low rates of education, much of the clarity of their ancestral origin has been lost. Laluram says his forefathers came from a place called Dumkai.

Members of the small community speak the Pahari language, a term used to describe a wide group of Indo-Aryan languages spoken from Kashmir through the Himalayan foothills to

eastern Nepal. Nepali, Kumaoni, Garhwali, Jumli and Palpa are all considered Pahari languages.

Pahari was also an ancient language with origins in Jammu and Kashmir at the time it was a Hindu state. As Buddhism spread across the region, Buddhist priests searched for a new language to replace Sanskrit which was aligned with Hinduism. They created the Pahari language in about 400 BCE. Various scripts developed for writing Pahari, one of which is said to have been introduced by King Asoka.

But with the fall of Buddhism and return to Hinduism, Pahari came into disuse. Its unique scripts were abandoned and the language gradually became infused with words from languages spoken by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

Nonetheless, the majority of people in Pakistan-administered Kashmir are considered to be Pahari-speaking, with the language formally acknowledged as distinct from Punjabi in 1969.

As far as Laluram knows, the Hindu Pahari community first settled in Ghoraghat during the British era, when the area was jungle. "There were tigers here," he heard.

Laluram remembers that even at the time of the birth of his elder son much of the surrounding area was uncleared. "When my son was born I only had a tiny place to sleep with him and his mother and I thought, 'What will become of us?'" This realisation of responsibility he names as the most frightening moment of his life.

Over the years Laluram gradually improved the family home, relying on his work as a kabiraj, a traditional healer, the profession inherited from father and grandfather. He also keeps pigeons.

"Most Paharis work as day-labourers or farmers," he says of the small community still struggling to find its way out of poverty's grasp. According to the 1991 census there were 1,853 Paharis in Bangladesh.



PHOTO: STAR
Laluram Kabiraj Pahari feeds pet pigeons in the yard of his house at Shahargachhi village in Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur district.