

Meeting loved ones at the border

Pahela Baishakh brings people of two Bengals together despite barbwire fence

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, *Thakurgaon*

The beginning of the Bengali New Year is a special day for all Bengalis. But it's more so for some individuals who only get to see their loved ones on this day. Mangoli Rani, 75, of Kholishakuri village in Thakurgaon sadar upazila sat under a tree about five hundred yards away from the barbwire fence. Like her, many had gathered at the Omarmkhana border in Panchagarh sadar upazila early Tuesday morning. Mangoli stared at the border fence and eagerly waited for a chance to see her loving son Ananta Barman, 45, living in Shiligurdi of Jolpaiguri district in West Bengal, India. Pahela Baishakh brought thousands of Bangla speaking people on either sides of the border here, waiting for the moment when border guards of the two countries would allow them to go near the barbwire fence to see and talk to their loved ones for a few hours.



Mangoli Rani, 75, and her son Ananta Barman (seen in white Panjabi on the other side of the fence), 45, finally met on Pahela Baishakh this year after about ten years at the Omarmkhana border in Panchagarh sadar upazila.

At 10:30 am, the border security forces announced that people of both sides are allowed to go near the fence and stay there till 2:00 pm. People rushed to the border fence. Standing across the wire fence between pillars 743, 744 and 745, stretching almost 3-4 kilometre along the border, people of Bangladesh and India exchanged greetings and spoke heartily with their dear ones.



Pahela Baishakh brought thousands of Bangla speaking people on either sides of the border, waiting for a chance to go near the barbwire fence to see and talk to their loved ones.

Thousands of people in both the countries, especially those who cannot afford to visit their relatives through actual travel, eagerly wait for this special day. The day has become an annual event of congregation for Bangla speaking friends and relatives who no longer live in 'one Bengal'. People from different districts of the two countries were seen exchanging various things including biscuits, small snacks (i.e. chanchur), cigarettes, pens, clothes and towels. Many of them cried out at the sight of their loved ones. But, some people were seen to be frustrated as they could not find their relatives.

As residents of the same country before the 1947 partition and creation of India and the then Pakistan, people of the area were related in various ways. Mangoli Rani and her son Ananta Barman finally met on Pahela Baishakh this year after about ten years. Due to financial constraints, he cannot travel to Bangladesh.

Saidur Rahman, 58, son of late Abdur Rahman of Rajnagar in Panchagarh municipality came with other family members to meet his niece Nehar Begum, 40, daughter of Samsul Alam of Forejdarpara in Bahadur Police Station of Jolpaiguri in West Bengal, India. They met each other after decades. Lalit Mohon, 62, a freedom fighter of Moidandighi village in Boda upazila of Panchagarh met his nephew Binoy, 50, son of late Deben Mohon Rajganj Bhumivita in Jolpaiguri district of West Bengal, India.

Nurul Islam Proddhan, 65, of Pathkata Paharpur in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, India, said "Following the 1947 partition, relatives of many became residents of a different country. I'm one of them". He thanked the authorities of BSF and BGB for giving people like him the chance to meet their loved ones across the border every year on Pahela Baishakh.

When contacted, Commanding Officer of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in Panchagarh Lt. Colonel Ariful Haque informed this correspondent over cellphone that considering emotions and requests of the people of both countries, they made this arrangement through interaction with the BSE. On the same day, a similar meeting of loved ones took place at the Dabri-Betna border area under Haripur upazila, Thakurgaon from 8:30am to 2:30pm, according to the BGB and local sources.

Association creates innovative solutions to support villagers



PHOTO: STAR

One of the many activities of the Badonpur Village Development Association include the 'Badonpur Model Community Bio Gas Project', from which it generates Tk 5,000 per month.

AZIBOR RAHMAN, *Jhenidah*

A village association named Badonpur Village Development Association under sadar upazila is making significant contributions to improving the lives of villagers. The villagers are pleased with the association's activities.

The association was formed with 30 members in the beginning in July 2006. The membership has grown to 150 now. Each member contributes Tk 100 per month, pooling in Tk 15000 which is deposited in the bank. The association is spread over 25 decimals of land and there are three shades and an office room. Of the 25, 14 decimals of land have been purchased by the association while the rest 11 are on a 20 year lease. The office room is equipped with recreational apparatus. But the three shades are used for rearing cattle. There is an arsenic-free water plant and a bio gas project. The association owns 10 cows, and earns Tk 5,000 from bio gas, Tk 20,000 from vermin-compost and Tk 25,000 from milk sales per month. "We will not be poor in the future if our village development association's projects stay alive. We need not worry when in danger," commented a member.

Masud Rana, President of the association informed that the Badonpur village is neglected as it is not well known to neighbouring villages. The association wants to introduce this village as a model and ideal village to the whole country where no one either rich or poor will be in economic crisis. There will be no poor men in the village. They will receive overall assistance whenever they need. The association provides a stipend for poor students of the village. Also, it distributes winter clothes among the poor and help poor patients with financial support. They also extend financial support in marriage of poor family's daughters. Ahead of religious festivals, they distribute different food items among the underprivileged. Besides, they provide loans to poor villagers on easy installments.

They have founded a "Maa" foundation for taking care of ill mothers. A Saudi expatriate named Zahurul Islam contributed Tk One lakh to the Maa foundation for better service towards taking care of mothers. A villager Osman Mondol of Badonpur village said, "We are very happy that this samity exists. It stands by us at times of need, assists us financially and provides us food ahead of Eid." Sanwar Hossain, a student, said that he passed the SSC exam last year. Before the exam he could not fill the form of the exam since he didn't have money. But the association came to his aid and enabled him to register for the exam.

Project Coordinator Gazi Nazrul Islam of Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP) said that he supervises 75 associations in Jhenidah sadar upazila. Of them, the association of Badonpur is the most successful due to relentless effort of its members. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shafikul Islam of Jhenidah said that he visited the association office recently to observe its activities. If villagers form such groups and work together they will certainly succeed in life and will be able to their communities.

Import of Indian rice affects local production

700 of 850 rice mills in Pabna halt operation

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR

TOPU, *Pabna*

Commercial husking in the famous rice producing district sees drastic fall for the last couple of months amid large-scale import of cheap Indian rice.

"Over 700 of the 850 rice mills in the district have already suspended production due to poor sale of local rice. More than 10,000 workers have become jobless due to the situation," said Idris Ali Biswas, president of Pabna rice millers associa-

tion. "During the first three months of this year, BNP-led 20 party's non-stop blockade hampered rice production. Now relief from the blockade fails to make us happy as import of cheap Indian rice continues," he said.

Each 50-kg bag of imported Indian rice is selling for Tk 1500 to Tk 1700 while one has to pay Tk 1750 to 2000 for the same variety of local rice, stakeholders said, adding that at retail

level, imported coarse rice and similar local variety are selling at Tk 28-29 and Tk 35-36 per kg respectively.

"I kept my two mills closed from last February due to the poor sale of local rice. Still I have to pay Tk 50 thousand per month as rent for two mills. Besides, I am spending Tk 40 to 50 thousand as labour payment and electric bills. To recover the loss, I am now using the rice mills for corn processing to sell it as poultry feed," said Anwar Hossain

Nantu, a rice miller of Joynagar village in Ishwardi upazila.

The upazila alone has 650 rice mills, over 500 of which are now out of production due to poor demand of local rice, said Fazlur Rahman Malitha, president of Ishwardi Rice Producers' Association.

Rice millers have appealed to the government to stop importing Indian rice to save commercial rice production industry in the district.



PHOTO: STAR

A number of rice mills, like these ones at Joynagar village in Ishwardi upazila under Pabna district, have remained closed for the last couple of months as demand for the locally produced rice has fallen due to large-scale import of cheap Indian rice.

BCL leader stabbed at BRUR

OUR CORRESPONDENT,

Rangpur

Criminals stabbed a leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur (BRUR) unit on the campus yesterday.

The victim, Nakibul Kayes, organising secretary of the unit, is now undergoing treatment at Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH).

Police said a group, led by Mohammad Ali Raj, an expelled vice-president of the unit, were selling fake question papers to the admission seekers at the university gate.

Hearing the news, another group, led by Mehedy Hasan Shishir, president of the unit, rushed to the spot and protested their illegal activities. At one stage, Raj's men attacked them with sharp weapons, leaving Nakibul injured.

Contacted, Mehedy Hasan said Raj was expelled from the party for his criminal activities on the campus.

Elephant kills youth in Rangamati

UNB, *Rangamati*

A youth, who was injured by a wild elephant at Madhyam Ghanmor village in Longdu upazila on Monday night, died at Longdu Upazila Health Complex early yesterday.

The deceased is Joyprakash Chakma, 38, a resident of the village.

Police said a wild elephant from the adjacent hills entered the village and attacked Joyprakash while he was guarding his paddy field around 8:30pm on Monday night, leaving him critically injured.

Villagers rushed him to Longdu Upazila Health Complex, where he succumbed to his injuries around 6:00am.



PHOTO: STAR

People of Puthmari enclave in Boda upazila under Panchagarh district distribute sweets after hearing the news that the Indian cabinet approved a constitution amendment bill to operationalise India-Bangladesh land boundary agreement meant for exchange of 111 Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves inside India. The arrangement will enable people of the adversely possessed areas to avail themselves of the basic civic amenities as new citizens of the respective countries.

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