

# Good prices bring smile to brinjal growers

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The brinjal growers in the district are happy to get good prices of the vegetable amid high demand during this Ramadan,

"Now we are selling one kg of brinjal for Tk 20 to 22 in the field but we sold it for Tk 8 to 10 just before the Ramadan. I have already sold 800 kg of brinjal from my two bighas of land and hope to sell more 500 kg during this holy month," said brinjal grower Mansur Ali at Fulgachh village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

"A farmer can get 600 to 800 kg of brinjal from each bigha of land and the cultivation cost stands between Tk 2000 to 2500. Due to favourable weather we have got good yield of brinjal, and we are also getting its

fair prices," said Atoar Rahman, another brinjal grower of the same village.

"We all the six family members work together for farming brinjal and other vegetables in our 50 decimals of lands. Mainly we use vermicompost, and sometime we use pesticides to kill the insects in the brinjal field," said Nur Hossain of Durakuti village in Lalmonirhat Sadar.

"I have already earned Tk 14 thousand from selling 700 kg of brinjal and hope to earn Tk 6 thousand more from selling the remaining brinjal in the field," he said.

A brinjal retailer at Durakuti Bazar in Lalmonirhat Sadar said they purchase brinjal from the growers in the field, and sell it for Tk 25 to 28 per kg in the local market.

"Brinjal chop is a favourite iftar item of my family and so, I purchase brinjal regularly," said Rafiqul Islam, a school-teacher at Saptana in the town.

Abdus Salam, a wholesaler of brinjal at vegetable market Goshala Bazar in Lalmonirhat town, said he and other wholesalers in the area sent the best quality brinjals to capital Dhaka and other parts of the country this time.

After the month of Ramadan, the price of the vegetable will fall, he said.

Brinjal is mainly a winter vegetable but many farmers cultivate this crop during off period to earn good profit, said sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Lalmonirhat, adding that this time brinjal has been cultivated on 700 hectares of land in the district.



Farmers harvest brinjal at a field of Fugachh village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

## In Search of Teknaf's Elephants

ANDREW EAGLE

The Teknaf Peninsula is ruggedly beautiful. With the rise of the rocky range that divides the land strip between the Naf River and the Bay of Bengal it's impossible not to feel elated, to know that Teknaf is quite the destination.

It's an environment unique in coastal Bangladesh for hosting wild elephants. It's really something to consider how the bulky beasts negotiate such uneven terrain. A significant section of the range has been declared a game reserve.

To search for the elephants, one could do worse than enlist the assistance of 18-year-old Jahangir Alam, a local and youngest of eleven siblings, who works as a guide at Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary.

Although Alam has no training, the sanctuary is his backyard. He's been guiding tourists since he was 8 years old. Along with income from a brother who went to Malaysia by trawler, income from guiding helps the family.

"People arrive nearly every day," he says, "Many ask for me."

By Alam's estimate there are 30 elephants in the reserve and he commonly sees a family of ten, though pachyderms offer no guarantees. The best season to see them is winter when they are more active of a daytime.

I ask if the animals are dangerous and he mentions three villagers were trampled to death recently while defending paddy. "Elephants are 'heavy' dangerous!" he says.

Yet Alam insists there's no risk: elephants are by temperament gentle. He's often been within five metres. "They don't harm us if we don't disturb them."

It's quite a trek: into scrubby parched

forest following valley contours where small bridges ford thirsty streams. The day is hot, the humidity burdensome. I'm wishing I'd brought water.

We're hardly the first to search for elephants. Once there were commonly tenders for elephant catching, for domestication.

Offering royalties of up to 750 rupees per elephant, according to the Chittagong District Gazetteer, the so-called "kheda" operations, named after the corral in which wild elephants were trapped, were commonly slated for Teknaf winters.

"Elephants are not like cattle that can be goaded down to a desired place. No force can be applied; they move on their track at their own whims."

A kheda operation could involve 100 people including 50 skilled labourers to build the camouflaged forest stockade in 8 - 12 days. They could wait weeks for elephants to appear.

Fire lines and loud sounds like gunshots would make the elephants "blindly and senselessly" proceed into the trap. Care had to be taken because "once scared no earthly force can control the herd."

Once trapped the elephants would routinely turn against and kill their leader, who was blamed for their fate. But if the leader was strong others might die while fighting. In the panic baby elephants could be trampled dead.

The trapped elephants were starved and given no water for 24 hours to weaken them. Then, using mahouts on trained female elephants called "kunkis" the wild elephants would be noosed, legs tied.

"The leader of the trained brigade is always a strong, healthy, powerful and

skilled tusker," reads the Gazetteer. This male elephant would fight captured individuals, eventually establishing his claim as new group leader.

A kheda operation in 1965 in Ukhiya Upazila netted ten elephants; in the 19th century up to 150 elephants were caught annually.

As we negotiate uncarved slopes slippery with leaf litter, from heat exhaustion I'm ready to collapse.

Bangladeshis, according to Alam, rarely reach the hilltops. "Bengalis can't climb," he says, "They walk a short distance. When foreigners come, they always go to the top."

Our situation is reversed. Gasping for air, I'm struggling while Alam climbs the hills as readily as an escalator at a shopping mall. "We are forest people," he says, "We live here."

Alam's regret is he has difficulty communicating with foreigners. "I want to speak more to them but can't." He completed study only to class 2.

From the summit the view is impressive. In front the range continues with higher, more artistically-shaped rocky peaks. There's little evidence the Bay of Bengal is beyond. On the Naf side are sweeping views across salt fields to Myanmar's mountains.

Along the ridgeline the path is narrow. On a hot day the elephants will not climb the hills. "They'll be at the waterfall," says Alam. Without drinking water I decide not to go further. We head back.

When I ask Alam how much he wants for guiding, he suggests a paltry sum. Greed is not among his faults. "It's fun to see them," he says, describing how when elephants take dust baths and are lying on the ground it's sometimes hard to imagine they're even there.



Teenage Jahangir Alam serves as guide for tourists eager to see elephants at Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary.

PHOTO: STAR

## 10 held while returning from India illegally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Jessore

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) on Tuesday night arrested 10 Bangladeshi nationals while they were returning home from India through Boro Achra border under Benapole Port Police Station without passports.

Nayek Subedar Abdur Rahim, camp commander of BGB 26 Battalion, said a team of the border guards, acting on a tip-off, conducted a drive in the area on Tuesday night and detained five women, four men and a child.

BGB arrested the Bangladeshis while they were entering the country without valid documents, Rahim added. They hail from different areas of Jessore and Narail districts.

The arrestees were later handed over to Benapole Port Police Station. A case was filed in this connection.

## Minor girl abducted for ransom

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A minor girl was abducted from a mosque at Achintapur village under Sadar upazila on Tuesday.

The victim is Monira Khatun, 5, daughter of Ramjan Ali of the village.

Ramjan Ali said he fell asleep in the mosque close to his house after Asr prayers. At the time his daughter Monira was by his side. When he woke up he did not find his daughter there.

At around 10:00pm, an abductor phoned Ramjan and demanded Tk 3 lakh as ransom for release of his daughter.

Biplob Kumar Nath, officer in charge (OC) of Sadar Police Station, said an abduction case was filed with the police station yesterday morning.

Law enforcers have already launched a drive to rescue the girl and arrest the abductors, the OC added

## Woman killed over family feud

UNB, Gazipur

A woman was killed allegedly by her son-in-law over a family feud at Narayanpur village in Sreepur upazila on Monday.

The deceased was identified as Marzia Begum, 45, wife of Shahjahan of the village.

Locals said Anwar locked in an altercation with his wife Sonia and her mother Marzia over a family feud on Monday afternoon.

At one stage, Anwar stabbed the duo with a sharp weapon, and fled the scene.

Locals rushed them to Sreepur Upazila Health Complex where Marzia died while undergoing treatment. Asaduzzaman, officer-in charge of Sreepur Police Station, said.

## Fratricide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A young man was killed allegedly by his elder brother at Baghasura village in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj district on Monday.

The deceased was identified as Uzzal Miah, 18, son of Phul Miah, 45, of the village. Police said Kashem Miah, 28, hit his brother Uzzal with a steel jug following a family feud.

Seriously injured Uzzal was rushed to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital where the on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Kashem went into hiding soon after the incident, said Md Monir Mollah, officer-in-charge of Madhabpur Police Station.

A case was filed in this connection, said police.



PHOTO: STAR

Artistic wood works, a model sailing boat and an easy chair, made by Abdus Sattar Fakir for presenting to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

## KUAKATA BEACH

# Artistic furniture from areca wood delights tourists

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Fancy furniture made from areca nut trees has drawn attention of locals as well as tourists from home and abroad, thanks to the innovative pursuit of Abdus Sattar Fakir.

"Usually areca tree is used to make fence or sako (a small bridge) or as fuel but I am making nice-looking furniture from it, to the surprise of many people," said Sattar, 65, at his workshop in Zero Point area of Kuakata beach in the district.

He makes different types of furniture including chair (priced at Tk 10,000), easy chair (Tk 18,000), tea-table (Tk 8,500), rocking bed (Tk 25,500), and four-seated sofa-set (Tk 32,500).

"The items made from areca tree are very strong and durable. Lastly I have made an easy chair and a model sailing boat to gift to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," Sattar said.

"The three feet and three inches long and ten inches high sailing boat and five feet long and two feet five inches wide easy chair are very nice-looking and people come to my shop to see it, he said.

"There is a two feet eight inches long baitha (paddle) attached to the boat while setting of cockle and shell of snail adds to its beauty."

"I submitted a letter through the Patuakhali DC on May 17, seeking appointment of the prime minister and still waiting for the opportunity to meet her with the gift," said Sattar, adding that in 1975, he was charmed to hear the speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at a meeting in Kalapara.

"Many locals, even tourists from home and abroad, buy furniture from my workshop as the items are very stylish. I cannot make furniture as per demand as I have to work alone," he said.

Sattar said he initiated making such furniture as a hobby five years ago and started the work on commercial basis in July last year.

Earlier he worked as a motorcycle mechanic.

"I bought a rocking bed from Sattar's shop as the nice-looking thing beautified my house," said Dulal Karmaker of Kalapara upazila town.



PHOTO: STAR

Law enforcers arrest eight troublemaker brokers on the premises of Pabna General Hospital yesterday.

## PABNA GENERAL HOSPITAL

# 8 brokers jailed, fined for harassing doctors, patients

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A mobile court awarded imprisonment and fine to eight outsiders arrested from Pabna General Hospital yesterday.

"The arrestees, working as brokers, often harassed doctors and patients of the hospital. They were punished following specific allegations," said Executive Magistrate Saidul Islam, who conducted the drive in the morning.

Of the convicts, Jahangir Hossain, 55, Nazmul Hossain, 26, Swapon Hossain, 28, and Rawshan alias Babu, 38, got six months' imprisonment and fine of Tk 10 thousand each while Rani Hossain, 19, Rafikul Islam,

20, Abdul Momin, 25, and Monir Uddin Moni, 27, were fined Tk 10 thousand each.

Brokers aided by outsider criminals often pressure the doctors to refer the patients to their chosen diagnostic centres, sources said.

They often harass patients and their attendants inside the hospital, even extorted the patients' relatives during release of dead bodies, said victims.

A meeting of the hospital management committee held at the hospital auditorium on Monday decided to take tough action against brokers and outsider troublemakers. Drives will continue to keep the brokers and outsiders away from the hospital premises, said an official.

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