



A group of Khasi people guarding their houses at Jhimai Punji in Moulvibazar's Kulaura at night. Seventy-two families of the indigenous community there are living in fear of eviction by a local tea garden authority. PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Jhimai Khasis still in fear of eviction

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making attempts to cut trees," said Rana Surong, head of Jhimai Punji at Kulaura in Moulvibazar.
The hillock has 406 acres of land, where Khasis cultivate betel leaf to earn their living, three religious institutions of the Adivasis and a primary school.
Local government officials suggested that each of the 72 Khasi families keep two acres of land and hand over the rest to the tea garden as part of a compromise with it, Rana said.
"We disagreed."
To protect the land from grabbing, males of the families guard their houses and betel leaf plantations at night, he added.
Like many other indigenous groups, Khasi people have no records of land ownership, and so the government is the owner of the land.
"We have betel leaf gardens on our traditional property. It is our only source of income. If we hand over our areas to the tea garden, we will not be able to manage two meals for our families," said Willbong Surong, of the punji.
Khasis are ready to sacrifice their lives, but not land, she said.
Zakir Hossain Sarker, manager of

Jhimai Tea Garden, however, denied all allegations against the tea garden authorities.
"We have taken lease of 661 acres of land from the government for setting up the tea garden. But we are yet to take control of 371 acres of land. As per our contract with the government, we have to extend the tea garden area by 2.5 percent each year. So, we have no alternative to extending our garden," said Zakir.
He said the owner of the tea garden was not interested in extending the garden area by evicting Khasi people. "As the problem is a complex one, high-ups of the government should take decision in this regard," he said.
Flora Bably Talang, general secretary of KUBORAZ (Kulaura, Juri, Borolekha and Raznagar upazilas) Inter Punji Development Association of Khasi people, told The Daily Star that the indigenous people had been living there for years and that the ownership of the land was their traditional right.
Karmul Hasan, deputy commissioner (DC) of Moulvibazar, also refuted the allegation that the administration had proposed a compromise with the tea garden authorities.
On the eve of Indigenous Peoples'

Day, Adivasi leaders and rights activists said that not only the land, languages and traditions of indigenous people were also on the verge of extinction.
They demanded that the authorities take initiatives to protect those.
International Indigenous Day Celebration Committee at a press conference at Mymensingh Press Club yesterday demanded separate land commission and ministry to settle land disputes and other rights of indigenous people.
Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Commission, meanwhile, expressed concern over what it said was the continuing lack of political will to ensure the rights of indigenous people as citizens of Bangladesh.
Article 6(2) of the constitution directly denies indigenous people as citizens of the country and Article 23A differentiates them from Bangalees and makes them second-class citizens, it said.
It demanded full constitutional recognition of indigenous people, including CHT leaders in all meetings related to security and development of the CHT, enacting Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Rights Act and full implementation of the 1997 CHT accord.

LEAKY GAS PIPE BLAST 3 of a family burnt in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Three people of a family suffered serious burns when a fire, apparently caused by a leaky gas pipe, broke out at a flat on Central Road in the capital yesterday.
The injured, Fazlur Rahman, 45, his niece Panna Akhter, 28, and nephew Delwar Hossain, 26, were taken to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.
Seriously injured Panna suffered 95 percent burns, Fazlur 28 percent and Delwar 4 percent, said resident surgeon Partha Sangkar Paul.
Their domestic help was in the kitchen during the fire and had escaped unhurt.
Delwar said he was lying in bed when he heard a "very loud explosion and saw flames engulfing different corners of the flat. But it was over within moments".
His elder sister Panna was near the kitchen at the time, he added.
Deputy Assistant Director of Fire Service Abdul Halim who sent the injured to the hospital suspects the explosion occurred when accumulated gas leaking from a pipe came into contact with fire.
"We saw a pipe of Titas Gas Company on the ceiling and smelt natural gas in the flat, meaning there might be a leak," he said, adding that all windows and doors were closed when the incident took place.
Two windows along with the iron bars were blown away by the blast, while the door was broken, he said, adding that wall plasters were also damaged in some places.
A four-member investigation committee, comprising representatives from the administration, detectives, firefighters and Criminal Investigation Department, was formed and asked to submit a report on it in four days.
Officer-in-Charge Md Iqbal of Kalabagan Police Station said he visited the flat to examine if there was any evidence of explosive substances at the scene.

Farida Yasmin

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singer, who could have become a major cultural icon had she pursued her career in music for long time," Ferdousi said, adding that Farida became irregular in the cultural circle in the late 60s after her marriage and gradually retreated from the spotlight.
Her four sisters Nilufar Yasmin, Fauzia Yasmin, Nazma Yasmin, and Sabina Yasmin are all famous singers of the country.

Priyabhashini

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Niloy by suspected Islamist militants in the capital.
Niloy was an acquaintance of Priyabhashini, said the sculptor's daughter Rajeshwari Priyoranjini.
The war heroine filed a general diary with the Dhanmondi Police Station in this connection last night and police were trying to identify the caller, said Nur-e-Azam, officer-in-charge of the station.
Following the GD, a six-member police team was deployed near her Dhanmondi residence to ensure security, said Rezaul Karim, assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Dhanmondi zone).
Citing the general diary, the OC told The Daily Star that Priyabhashini got a call from an unknown number around 5:00pm. When she received the call, the caller used abusive language and hung up.
At 5:07pm, another call came from the same number to Priyabhashini's son Kazi Rubaiat Titas. When he picked up the phone, the caller again used offensive language and threatened him of a fitting punishment and then hung up, the OC said.
Earlier in May and June, banned Islamist militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team issued death threats to several eminent personalities, including two ministers.
Priyabhashini said she was at Bengal Gallery when she received the call and her son was at their Dhanmondi house when he got the call.
Rajeshwari said the caller threatened both her mother and brother with life.
She added her mother did not understand everything the caller said, but at one stage the caller said, "In a short time, I will make sure that you and your family members get a befitting punishment."

Mali hotel siege ends; 12 killed

AFP, Bamako
Twelve people including a South African and another foreigner were killed in a hostage siege at a hotel in central Mali that ended early yesterday when government troops stormed the building, the army said.
"There are 12 dead in all," an army officer told AFP after the operation at the Hotel Byblos in Serevo, listing the fatalities as five "terrorists", five soldiers and two "white people".
The body of one of the foreign victims had lain in front of the hotel since Friday when the gunmen stormed the building, the officer said.

Thousands of Iraqis protest corruption, poor services

AFP, Baghdad
Thousands of Iraqis vented their anger Friday at rampant corruption and abysmal electricity services as the country's first protest movement in years increased pressure for officials to be held accountable.
Top Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani called earlier in the day for Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to take a tougher stand against corruption and name and shame those impeding reform.
Aside from Baghdad, all the demonstrations took place in the Shiite south -- the power base of many of Iraq's top political parties. Combined with Sistani's calls for change, that poses a potentially serious challenge for the Shiite-led government.
"All of you together to the court, all of you are thieves," chanted protesters in Baghdad's Tahrir Square.
"Friday after Friday, we'll get the corrupt out."
Many demonstrators held Iraqi flags, while some carried a coffin covered in black fabric representing the death of the consciences of parliament and politicians, as well as the demise of electricity and other services.
Thousands demonstrated in the southern port city of Basra as well, chanting slogans such as "No, to the

parties," and carrying signs including one that read: "It is time for your departure, O you corrupt."
Protesters also aired their grievances at demonstrations in the southern cities of Najaf, Karbala, Hilla, Nasiriyah and Diwaniyah.
Baghdad and other cities have seen weeks of protests against the poor quality of services, especially power outages that leave Iraqis with only a few hours of government-supplied electricity per day as temperatures top 50 degrees Celsius (120 degrees Fahrenheit).
The demonstrators have blamed the services crisis on corruption and incompetence across the political class.
People have protested over services and corruption before, but the demonstrations failed to bring about significant change.
Baghdad's heavy-handed response to the country's most recent protest movement -- by Sunni Arabs demonstrating against their marginalisation by authorities -- helped set the stage for the jihadist takeover of a third of the country last year.
Nabil Jassem, an organiser of the latest protest in Baghdad, said their demands include improving electricity service and finding a new means of combating corruption.

Pompeii set

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Pompeii's transformation includes a new special exhibition of around 20 victims of the eruption, preserved in plaster with their expressions and positions fixed at the very moment they met their fate, carbonised by the intense heat of a 300-degree Celsius gas cloud.
Displayed for the first time, the bodies of men, women and children from Pompeii and neighbouring Herculaneum -- which was also engulfed by the eruption -- are laid out in a wooden pyramid in the middle of an ancient amphitheatre.
A series of nighttime visits until September 27 give visitors the chance to explore the site by moonlight, with guided tours, video installations and wine tastings based on an ancient Roman recipe.
"We have followed UNESCO's advice to extend projects beyond the initial deadline of 2015," said Osanna.
"We have the resources and we will carry on working."
A NEW ERA
With 2.7 million tourists visiting the ancient city last year, the ruins are the second most visited attraction in Italy after the Colosseum in Rome, and are seen as a symbol of the challenges in preserving Italy's cultural heritage.
"This is a new era for Pompeii and our efforts are bearing fruit," said Italy's Minister for Culture Dario Franceschini, as he inaugurated the Palestra Grande (Large Gymnasium) on Tuesday, after seven years of restoration work.

The enormous space surrounded by columns is where young Romans played sports until Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79AD.
Restorer Paola Zoroaster said, "We are all specialised in different areas, some in stone work, plaster, frescos and mosaics."
"The conditions here on the site are good because, before we started our work, the area had already been inspected and repaired to ensure that it was secure," she said as she finished working on a site just metres away from the Agora, the spectacular main square.
Osanna said the region's economic problems -- it is one of Italy's poorest -- makes Pompeii a particularly complex site to work on, and he hopes the bid to improve conservation efforts will be echoed by investment in the surrounding region.
"We want a fast train which goes directly to Pompeii's archaeological site. We want the area surrounding the site to be just as beautiful as the site itself," he said.
His optimism, however, comes against a backdrop of a series of shut-downs at the site which left angry tourists locked out and seriously embarrassed the government.
Some 120 workers sparked controversy two weeks ago when they went on strike over overtime pay and closed the doors.
"Our actions have been twisted" by the press, said one of the workers who did not want to give his name.

Over 12,000 foreigners

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different jail terms while 393 are under trial. And processes were on to deport the rest 80.
NO SYSTEM, NO MONEY
Officials cannot give the exact number, but SB sources say at least 12,000 foreigners are illegally staying in Dhaka and elsewhere since 2000. About half of them are believed to be from African countries.
Unlike other countries, Bangladesh has no mechanism to deal with illegal immigrants. There is no fund for deporting those captured by police. Moreover, there is no deportation centre where the foreigners can be taken for quizzing. Bangladesh law does not permit confining foreign nationals without formal charges. So, law enforcers have no choice but to put them in jail, SB officials said.
Under the law, the maximum punishment for overstaying in Bangladesh is five years' jail term and unspecified amount of fine.
The Security Control Organisation (SCO), an SB wing that deals with foreigners, prefer to deport these immigrants after their arrests. The wing deported around 100 foreigners last year, 30 in November alone, on its own initiative.
But most of them refuse to be deported and ask the police to put them in prison instead. Also, many of them destroy their passports and other valid documents to hide their nationalities and thus avoid deportation. Only a few want to go back and manage tickets with the help of their compatriots living in the country, said an SCO official, requesting not to be named.
"When we arrest illegal immigrants, they say they have no money to buy tickets. We need to keep them in custody for a few days for questioning but,

sadly, we have no facility for that," he added.
Moreover, no African countries except for Morocco and Egypt have embassies in Bangladesh. So it is difficult to find out their nationalities and arrange their deportations.
It is very urgent to update the Foreigners Act with provisions for setting up a detention centre and empowering law enforcers to confine illegal immigrants for a certain period to verify their identities, said a police official working in the immigration.
"The government should also allocate fund for this [deportation]," he added.
HOW THEY ENTER
Many of these immigrants enter Bangladesh as football players, students and tourists, but continue to stay even after the expiry of their visas or permits. Others sneak into Bangladesh through India.
Football clubs usually invite three to four times more players than they need. After a two or three-week practice session, they hire the best performers only, said another SB official.
As the poor performers cannot manage return tickets from the clubs, they either join little-known or district-level clubs or start working illegally. Some get involved in criminal activities for money.
Contacted, Nurul Alam Chowdhury, president of Sheikh Russell Krira Chakra, claimed they collect passports of the foreign players upon their arrival. After the trial match, they return the passports of the poor performers and send them home.
But it is not the case with all the clubs, police said.
Detectives say some foreigners collude with some Bangladeshi lawyers to find ways for staying in the country.

US, UK

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freedom of expression," it added.
Meanwhile, UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister Hugo Swire in a release yesterday called for an urgent investigation into the killing and bringing the perpetrators to justice.
"The freedom of speech is a universal right which must be protected. The UK stands together with the people and the government of Bangladesh in the face of extremism," Swire said.
"I was appalled to learn of the violent murder in Bangladesh of blogger Niloy Neel, the fourth such death this year. It was a horrifying and cowardly crime. My thoughts are with Niloy's family and friends."
He urged the Bangladeshi authorities to investigate the death of Niloy urgently, and bring the perpetrators to justice.
Assailants hacked to death the blogger inside his Goran house in the capital's Khilgaon on Friday.

Five women

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long time, holding them responsible for... various misfortunes," Pradhan told AFP.
"The whole village is ganging up against the police now saying they all killed the women," he said, adding that an investigation was underway.
Experts say belief in witchcraft and the occult remains widespread in some impoverished and remote areas in India, where women are sometimes accused of being witches to settle disputes or grievances.
In some cases women are stripped naked as punishment, burnt alive or driven from their homes and killed.
In July, machete-wielding villagers in the northeastern state of Assam dismembered and beheaded a 63-year-old woman after accusing her of being a witch and casting evil spells on her village.
According to India's National Crime Records Bureau, around 2,000 people, mostly women, were killed between 2000 and 2012 on suspicions of practising witchcraft.
Jharkhand accounted for 54 of 160 "witch hunt" murders in 2013, government data showed.
Some Indian states including Jharkhand have introduced special laws to try to curb crimes against people accused of witchcraft.
Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das condemned the latest killings in a statement yesterday, urging society to "ponder over it".
"In the age of knowledge, this incident is sorrowful".

It's a political

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Addressing a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, Mahubub, also president of Supreme Court Bar Association, further said, "I believe Niloy has been killed as part of a government's political trick."
Meanwhile, BNP spokesperson Asaduzzaman Ripon, at a press conference at the party's Naya Paltan central office, said the ruling Awami League had been trying to portray Bangladesh as a country of militancy and fundamentalism for its "own interest".
Replying to a query, Ripon, also BNP's international affairs secretary, said, "It is the government that has been publicising that Bangladesh is a fertile land for militancy." He, however, did not elaborate.
Criticising the killing of Niloy, Ripon said such killing and brutality against children and women were taking place due to the ongoing "culture of impunity and the state of lawlessness" in the country.
"We want bloggers' freedom of expression as well as their freedom of expression. But we also want that no

one hurts people's religious feelings in the name of freedom of writing," Ripon added.
Niloy was hacked to death in his Goran home in the capital on Friday.
Mahubub, at the discussion, said the killings of bloggers took place one after another, but the mystery behind the incidents was yet to be unearthed. "How come the trial of any of these murders could not be held? That means the government is patronising the killers."
BNP Vice-Chairman Abdullah Al Noman, at a programme in front of the Jatiya Press Club, said there was no rule of law in the country as criminals now think nothing will happen to them after committing crimes.
JAMAAT'S STATEMENT
Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday in a statement called blogger Niloy as Niloy Hossain.
Criticising the killing, Jamaat, a key ally of the BNP-led 20-party alliance, termed the killers of Niloy criminals.
In the release, the party mentioned his name four times and every time it was mentioned as Niloy Hossain.

Dhaka reiterates

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recognition, he mentioned that there must be some other factors or forces at play beyond Bangladesh's immediate control that create vulnerability or false incentives for people to risk their own lives at sea.
In this regard, the foreign minister sought the support of the security forum to address this problem.
Mahmood Ali led the Bangladesh delegation at the 22nd ASEAN

Regional Forum (ARF) Retreat and Plenary Sessions held at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, said a foreign ministry press release yesterday.
He appreciated the programmes and activities being undertaken by the ARF in building confidence among the countries and to take the forum towards its second stage of preventive diplomacy with the ultimate aim of conflict resolution.

Build public opinion

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to form public opinion against the brutalities.
After the meeting, the discussants paraded to the National Museum at Shahbagh, where Imran announced the next protest programmes.
"We are giving the government seven days to arrest the assailants of blogger and online activist Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy," he said.
"Next Friday, we would observe Mourning Day across the country and hold a commemorative rally at the Central Shaheed Minar at 3:00pm. There, we will announce tougher movement if the government's progress in arresting the killers is not satisfactory," Imran said.

Today, a portrait of Niloy will be put at Shahbagh, for people to pay their last tributes to him.
"I call upon everyone and the progressive organisations with their respective banners to come and pay their respects from 4:00pm," he said.
A mass procession will be brought out from Shahbagh at 4:00pm on Tuesday, demanding arrest and trial of the killers, Imran told reporters.
Representatives from cultural and student organisations Udichi, Khelaghar, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, Bangladesh Jubo Union and Jubo Maitree also spoke.
Around 6:30pm, they brought out a torch procession from Shahbagh intersection towards TSC.