

# Pabna's changed farming traditions

SHYKH SERAJ

In Pabna's Ishwardi, winter, by tradition, means beans. Every year in Muladuli village, hundreds of bighas of land are dedicated to bean cultivation. Yet despite the constancy of the crop, traditions in farming across Bangladesh have changed significantly and Muladuli's bean farming is no exception.

Local farmer Babu, popularly called 'Bean Babu' in reference to his family's traditional occupation, used to grow beans on 35 bighas of land, a substantial holding. But he doesn't work in the fields anymore.

"I started some other businesses with bean profits," he says, "For example I'm a shareholder in a local health clinic."

Like many farming families across the country who used to till their own land, hiring day labourers as required, nowadays Bean Babu leases his fields to sharecroppers instead.

"I'm too busy to work in the field now," Babu explains, "and the cost of day labour has risen to beyond production costs."

"Nearly all the farmers in this region," says a local carrying vegetables on his way to the pre-winter market, "have leased the lands they farm from the landowner."

A few years ago, Hamidur Rahman Sarder worked as a labourer on Babu's land. Nowadays he has leased a sizeable area to cultivate beans on his own.

"Five years ago, I started with a one-bigha lease," he says, "and I made good profits. As Babu moved away from farming I was able to lease more land from him. I have a ten-bigha lease this year."

Sarder has also managed to buy 15 kathas of land with his bean profits. He has successfully managed this family including education expenses for his children. His elder daughter Ratri achieved a GPA 5 in her Primary School



PHOTO: STAR

Media and agriculture development activist Shykh Seraj talks to a farmer at a bean field in Ishwardi upazila under Pabna district.

Certificate this year. "In five years I earned about fifteen lacs taka," he says with pride.

It's become a familiar story. "I've leased the land I cultivate," says another farmer. "I don't own land yet but I'm saving for it."

Another farmer nearby says with her savings from leased-land production she's bought her first small plot.

Yet with increased sharecropping have arrived new challenges. According to Rumana Parveen of the agriculture extension department, sharecroppers are less concerned with land care, seeking instead to maximise short-term prof-

its. Sharecroppers can use salt in the land as part of efforts to increase production, for example, but the practice is harmful to soil health and the result is declining soil fertility, year by year.

Nonetheless, the trend towards increased sharecropping is likely to continue. "The farm owner can get Tk 12,000 per bigha in rent," says Shanto, a sharecropper. "If they had to harvest paddy they could make at best Tk 10,000 for 20 maunds of rice. Besides, they get the Tk 12,000 without expense or effort."

That's the bottom line:

in the changed economics of Bangladeshi villages, with rising standards of living accompanied by higher labour costs, with better business opportunities in other sectors, traditional land owning families are moving away from the soil. In their place, a new entrepreneurial class of sharecropper has graduated from simple day labour to take the reins of much of the country's agriculture.

"For a one-year lease I get handsome money," says one Muladuli landowner. "I can do something else with that money."



Shykh Seraj is a Media and Agriculture Development Activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and recipient of Ekushey Padak, FAO A.H. Boerma Award and many other prestigious accolades. At Channel i, he is Director and Head of News. He is also Director and Host of the popular agro-documentary, "Hridoye Mati O Manush".

## DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF MN LARMA OBSERVED

# PCJSS iterates demand for full implementation of peace deal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The leaders of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and its front organisations have reiterated their demand for full implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord and constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples.

On the 32nd death anniversary of PCJSS founder president Manabendra Narayan Larma (MN Larma), they came up with the demand at memorial meetings at Bandarban district party office at Madhyam Para in the town and Shilpakala Academy in Rangamati town.

MN Larma initiated a unified indigenous peoples' movement for establishing the rights of indigenous people in CHT and so, he will always be remembered for his valiant role in the struggle, speakers said.

Councillor of CHT Regional Council Sadu Ram Tripura Milton attended as chief guest at the programme at Bandarban where PCJSS Bandarban district unit President U Chaw Mong Marma presided.

The speakers urged the government to stop all the activities of Rangamati Science and Technology University before full execution of the peace deal.

have to take the responsibility, they said. Earlier, hundreds of people including leaders and activists of PCJSS, Pahari Chhatra Parishad and Mohila Samity from different upazilas took part in mourning processions in Bandarban and Rangamati towns.

MN Larma, also the elder brother of present PCJSS President and CHT Regional

Council Chairman Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Santu Larma, was killed on November 10 in 1983 by a group of party defectors.

Meanwhile, classes of Rangamati Science and Technology University started at its temporary campus at Shah High School in Tabalchhari in the town on Sunday, after ten months of impasse due to

political turmoil. Some 75 students from the session 2014-2015 from computer science and engineering and management departments are attending in the classes.

From the beginning, PCJSS and its front organisations opposed the government's decision to establish a science and technology university and a medical college in Rangamati.



PHOTO: STAR

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) brings out a procession in Rangamati town yesterday marking the 32nd death anniversary of PCJSS founder president MN Larma.

## KID MURDER CASE Olama League leader lands in Sylhet jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Mahi Hossain Masum, publication secretary of Olama League Sylhet district unit, was sent to jail yesterday in a case for killing schoolboy Abu Sayeed.

Masum, one of the accused in the murder case, surrendered to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal, Sylhet, and sought bail. The court rejected his bail prayer and sent him to jail.

On Sunday, the court issued arrest warrant against Masum.

Abu Sayeed, a Class IV student at Haji Shahmeer Primary School, was abducted while he was returning home from school on March 11.

Police recovered Sayeed's body wrapped in sacks from the attic of Constable Ebadur Rahman's house at Kumarpara in the city on March 14.

A case was filed with Sadar Police Station on the day, accusing constable Ebadur Rahman, police source Aaur Rahman Geda, Mahi Hossain Masum and Olama League activist Nurul Islam Rakib.

## Robbers hack 3 villagers in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Three people were hacked by robbers in Delduar upazila of the district early yesterday.

Police and local sources said a gang of 10 to 12 robbers equipped with local weapons stormed the house of Mokam Bepari at Nallapara village around 2:00am and looted Tk 1.5 lakh and six tolas of gold ornaments.

Hearing the hue and cry raised by the family members, locals rushed to the spot and swooped on the robbers, who were leaving the house with the looted items.

The gang members exploded several cocktails and hacked three villagers -- the house owner's son Rafiqul Islam, 26, Shahin Miah, 25 and Shahidul Islam, 40.

One of the robbers -- Sabuj Miah, 28, of Keraniganj in Dhaka -- was caught and injured by the villagers, said Mosharaf Hossain, officer-in-charge of Delduar Police Station.

The other members of the gang, however, managed to flee from the scene, he added.

The injured villagers and the robber were admitted to the Tangail Medical College Hospital.

Police are raiding different areas to arrest the rest of the gang.

# 52 BNP-Jamaat men held in Nilphamari

## Six more accused in Noor's motorcade attack case sent to jail on surrender

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Law enforcers in separate drives arrested 52 BNP and Jamaat-Shibir men in six upazilas of the district on Monday night.

Of them, 18 were held in Sadar upazila, seven in Jaldhaka upazila, 11 in Dimla upazila, ten in Domar upazila, three in Kishoreganj upazila and three others in Saidpur upazila.

They were arrested in different cases, including one for planning subversive activities in the areas, said Zakaria Rahman, senior assistant superintendent of police.

Of the arrestees, Babul Hossain is a fugitive member in a case for attacking the motorcade of lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor (also present cultural affairs minister) on December 14 in 2013 and killing four ruling

party men, said police.

Meanwhile, the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in the district ordered sending six more BNP-Jamaat men to jail after rejecting bail prayer as they appeared before the court yesterday in the same case for attacking the motorcade of lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor.

Magistrate Motaharath Akhter Bhuyian passed the order when the six surrendered to the court.

The attackers on the motorcade of Asaduzzaman Noor killed four activists of ruling Awami League's front organisation at Ramganj Haat of Tupamari union of Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

The investigation officer of the case, sub inspector Mostafizur Rahman submitted charge sheet in the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court on March 15 accusing the 207 people, all involved with the politics of BNP and

Jamaat-e-Islami and their front organisations.

The 62 people comprise the first batch of the accused that surrendered to court after they were declared fugitive for failing to appear before the court that issued warrant against them.

On the other hand, the prime accused Abu Helal also general secretary of district unit of Jamaat-e-Islami, and the number two accused Khairul Anam, president of Sadar upazila unit of the same party, are still fugitive.

On the night of December 12 in 2013, several thousand BNP-Jamaat activists protesting the execution of war criminal Jamaat's assistant secretary general Abdul Kader Molla attacked the houses of minority Hindu community in several villages of Polashbari and Laxmichap unions in Sadar upazila, mentioned the charge sheet.



PHOTO: STAR

Firefighters visit the remains of the exploded boiler of Southern Fishing Net Factory at Mukhtarpur in Munshiganj Sadar upazila yesterday.

# Boiler blast leaves one dead, 4 hurt in Munshiganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A worker was killed and four others sustained critical injuries in a boiler explosion at a fishing net factory in Munshiganj Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The deceased, Sajib Bepari, 28, son of Shahid Bepari, was an operator of the factory at Mukhtarpur Baghbari in the upazila.

Quoting witnesses, police said the boiler exploded at 'Southern Fishing Net Factory' around 1:00am and its broken parts

blew off to nearly half a kilometre away.

Sajib died on the spot while Delwar, 26, Aman, 28, Yusuf, 28, and his wife Mariam, 24, were injured, Nurul Islam, officer-in-charge (Investigation) of Sadar Model Police Station, said.

During the explosion, some parts of the boiler hit the 33 kilovolt power transmitter, disrupting power supply in the area for hours. Five adjacent houses were also damaged from the impact of the

blast.

Sheikh Monwar Morshed, deputy general manager of Munshiganj Palli Bidyut Samity, said they have restored the power supply around 12:30pm, over eleven hours of the incident.

Meanwhile, the factory owner Golam Mustafa went into hiding after the incident took place.

Of the injured, Yousuf and Mariam are now undergoing treatment at Munshiganj General Hospital, the OC added.

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