



Female workers make boxes for shoes at a factory of Kaluhati village in Rajshahi's Charghat upazila. Inset, Rokeya Begum, the pioneer behind the flourishing hand-made shoe industry at the village.



PHOTO: STAR

The mother of Rajshahi's shoemakers

One woman's struggle makes whole village prosperous

ANWAR ALI with ANDREW EAGLE

Now in her eighties, Rokeya Begum of Kaluhati village in Rajshahi's Charghat upazila is well within her rights to reflect upon life. Having raised five sons and one daughter, as breadwinner and for the most part single-handedly, she could be forgiven if such reminiscence gives rise to a self-satisfied smile.

What's less well known about Begum is how this one woman's efforts brought prosperity to her entire village. And it was a matter as simple as shoes...

"In Kaluhati, most men worked as share croppers or day labourers," says neighbour Mizanur Rahman, remembering what the village 35 kilometres from Rajshahi City was like in the 1980s. "Most villagers had no land then. They lived in houses of clay and straw; the village had a reputation for harbouring thieves."

"It's a past long forgotten," he adds.

Today, almost every family in Kaluhati is solvent and self-reliant. Many families which once had next-to-nothing now live in brick homes with electricity. To accommodate visiting bankers, wholesalers and retailers, the village roads are in good repair. "It all began with Rokeya Begum," says Rahman.

Begum never set out to revolutionise the village economy. At the start of her married life she was a

housewife much like any other. Her husband Ekkabor Pramanik was a farmer who spent days cultivating their three bighas of land and worked as a sharecropper.

Theirs were village lives of the common variety, and it lasted until the day 35 years ago when Pramanik fell from a mango tree. Including a broken leg and hip, injuries were serious.

"I took care of my husband as Rupban did for Rahim," says Begum poetically, referring to the devotion of characters from a well-known folk drama. "From Rajshahi to Mymensingh I took him for treatment, holding him on my lap. I did everything to save him."

"When he died from his injuries years later," she continues, "I saw darkness all around."

She never lost hope. From the day of Pramanik's fall, responsibility for the family belonged to Begum. Although her parents had offered to take her family in, she refused, wishing to forge her own way. At first she travelled to Rajshahi to sell vegetables but it wasn't easy or too profitable. And then, she had an idea...

As it happened, Begum's brothers living in her hometown in Kishoreganj's Bhairab upazila were busily engaged in footwear manufacture. Could she not send her three sons, she thought to inquire, to learn that trade?

Brothers agreed, and

when sons returned three months later as newly-trained cobblers, Begum sold her marriage jewelry to set up a shoe-making business in the family home. She could barely have imagined, but on that day, big changes for both family and village, began.

The shoes proved popular. "People saw them making money and asked to work for them," says local Sohel Rana. "I joined at age 12, later setting up my own factory." Many others did likewise.

"The village has around 40 shoe factories employing in total around 600 people," says Said Abdul Mannan, president of the Kaluhati Shoe Industry Cooperative, of which Sohel Rana is the current general secretary.

"Kaluhati factories take most work orders from southern and northern districts," Mannan continues, "with some orders also from Dhaka." In addition to the factories, support industries supplying raw materials, including a shoe material shop established by neighbour Mizanur Rahman, have prospered. Even shoeboxes are made locally.

Jalangi Hossain has been another villager to benefit. "I started the shoe business on a part of my land," he says, "just as my cousins Chandan Ali and Tuhin Ali did. When I started I had almost nothing. Now I have land and a

nice, concrete house."

Indeed some of Kaluhati's shoe businessmen have been so successful they have since moved to pursue affluent urban lives in Dhaka.

Kaluhati's flourishing industry wasn't all the work of Begum, of course. The Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation and a private bank have been active in providing training, loans and other support to footwear entrepreneurs over the years.

But it was Begum, in the search for a solvent life for herself and her children, who first thought to try, to see, if any shoe business could succeed in Kaluhati.

She's sitting in the yard now, of her youngest son Joyal Abedin's home-and-footwear-factory. She's sporting attractive golden earrings and a delicate gold chain, comfortable in her twilight years and with her memories, quietly pleased about how things turned out.

"Success was not made in a day," she says proudly, "I passed many difficult days in sorrow. There was lots of hard work also." She's referring to her family life when she says this, but as well she could be narrating the much broader story of success that she started, that swept through, captured and irretrievably improved the lives of the villagers of Kaluhati.

BOMB BLAST CASE Huji man jailed in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A court here yesterday sentenced a member of banned outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (Huji) to seven years rigorous imprisonment in a case for hurling bombs targeting Nawab Bari in Kultura upazila on February 2, 2005.

The convict is Maruf Ahmed Ishak, 22.

The court also fined him Tk 10 thousand, in default, he is to suffer six months more in jail.

Judge Alim Ullah Chowdhury of Special Tribunal-2 also acquitted two--Kamrul Islam, 30, and Lutfar Rahman Harun, 35--as the charges brought against them could not proved.

Advocate Kripasindhu Das, also the assistant public prosecutor, said police arrested the trio the same day.

Criminal killed in 'shootout' with DB men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

An alleged criminal was killed in a 'gunfight' between detectives and his cohorts in Madhabdi of the district early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Arif, 27, son of Md Halim of Birampur area in the upazila.

Delwar Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of the district detective branch, said law enforcers, being informed about a mugging, went to Saikadi area and saw three youths with a motorbike.

Sensing the presence of the detectives, the youths started shooting at them, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate, the OC said. Arif was shot during the shootout while two others managed to flee, he added.

Arif was taken to Narsingdi General Hospital and died while being shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), police said.

Detectives seized a foreign-made pistol, two bullets and a motorbike from the spot.

Three cops, including Sub-Inspector Rupok Sarkar, were injured during the 'gunfight', the OC said.

A case was filed in this connection.

Two arrested for killing friend in Jessore town

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Police yesterday arrested two youths in connection with the killing of easy-bike driver Rubel Hossain from Chanchra Raipara area of Jessore district town on Sunday night.

Rubel Hossain, 25, son of Yunus Ali of the area, had been missing since Saturday night, according to family members.

Abul Kasem, officer-in-charge (OC) of Jessore Kotwali Police Station, told our Benapole correspondent that locals found Rubel's body under Bablatala Bridge in Barandipara area of the town on Sunday night and informed the police, who recovered the body at around 10:30pm.

Later, the police conducted a drive in Chanchra Raipara area and arrested Lablu Mia Tarafdar, 24, son of Babu Tarafdar, and Nayan Mahmud, 25, son of Ziaur Rahman, around 2:30am. They were friends of Rubel.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees confessed to their involvement in the killing of Rubel, the OC added.

The deceased's father filed a case with Jessore Kotwali Police Station yesterday morning.

300-year-old Meherpur shrine demolished

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

A mob demolished an ancient shrine at Govipur village under Buripota union in Meherpur Sadar upazila and ousted the devotees from there yesterday.

The shrine was established by Shah Sufi Hazrat Bagu Dewan Pir, who came from Iraq to preach Islam around 300 years ago and settled at Govipur village, according to Folk Culture of Bangladesh published by Bangla Academy.

The 2.36-acre land of the shrine is registered with the name of the shrine committee's secretary.

When devotees were in a meeting for holding the annual Urs of the shrine

scheduled for February 17, several hundred people of the village stormed there around 2:30pm yesterday, said Alamgir Hossain alias Pagla Alam, khadem (caretaker) of the shrine.

"The mob led by Shah Jamal, president of Buripota union unit of Awami League [AL], destroyed the tin-shed roof, and walls pillars of the shrine and cut off around 200 trees on its premises. They also forced out around 30 devotees from there," he said.

"We sought help from police who were staying at a short distance but to no effect," he added.

Contacted, local AL leader Shah Jamal said, "On several occasions, locals requested us to take step as

anti-social activities were running there. Now people have taken the step."

Denying the allegation of anti-social activities, Alamgir said they observed religious ceremonies including an annual Urs there in the name of Bagu Dewan.

"I am now staying away in fear of attack by the group," he said.

Contacted, Mustafizur Rahman, assistant superintendent of police in Meherpur, admitted the incident of shrine demolition.

"We have urged the devotees to file a case and we will take action. Additional police forces have been deployed at the spot," he said.



A mob ravaged this 300-year-old shrine at Govipur village in Meherpur Sadar upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Two to die for killing schoolgirl in Gazipur

STAR COUNTRY DESK

A Gazipur court yesterday sentenced two men to death and a woman to five years in jail for killing a schoolgirl in 2014, reports UNB.

The convicts are Sumon Sheikh, 22, son of Akkas Sheikh of Sirajganj district, Abdul Alim, 45, son of Golam Martuza of the district, and Shefali Begum, 32, wife Alim.

Sumon was tried in absentia.

According to the prosecution, Alim, a security guard of the victim's house, and caretaker Sumon strangled Maria, a Class IV student of a local school, over previous enmity.

The incident took place when the victim was returning home from a coaching

centre at Parijat Housing in Konabari area of Gazipur on July 14, 2014.

Aktaruzzaman, father of the deceased, filed a case with Joydebpur Police Station.

Later, police arrested Alim and his wife Shefali in connection with the killing.

After examining witnesses and evidence, District and Sessions Judge AKM Enamul Haque found the three guilty and pronounced the verdict.

Away in Sylhet, police arrested a woman in Pashchim Ashighar area under Fenchuganj upazila of the district yesterday on charge of killing a schoolgirl, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The arrestee is Rubina Begum, 22, victim's elder

brother Rubel Miah's wife, a resident of Ashighar village in the upazila.

The deceased was identified as Tahmina Begum, 7, daughter of Matoy Miah of the area, and a Class II student of Ashighar Government Primary School.

The victim's father said his daughter went to school on Monday morning and since then she remained missing.

The following day, her body was recovered from a water tank at Rubina Begum's house in Pashchim Ashighar area under the upazila, said Mir Md Abdul Nasir, officer-in-charge of Fenchuganj Police Station.

During primary interrogation, the arrestee confessed to strangulating the girl, said the OC.

CANING OF PABNA SCHOOLGIRL Accused teacher transferred to a remote school

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Shahinur Rahman Shahin, a teacher of Ramnagar Government Primary School in Chatmohar upazila of the district, has been transferred to a school in a remote area as the primary inquiry found him guilty of caning a Class VI student of the school, official sources said.

Shahin caned the girl, Ranjina Khatun Rojoni, on Saturday for not wearing a new school uniform.

An inquiry committee, headed by an

assistant primary education officer, was formed by the primary education officer of the upazila to investigate the matter.

"Shahin was found guilty of caning the girl, so he was withdrawn from the school," Md Abul Bashar, Chatmohar upazila primary education officer, said, adding that the accused teacher stood released from the school and was transferred to a school in remote area.

"We have submitted the inquiry report to the higher authority, seeking departmental action against the accused teacher," the education officer said.

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Asked by the police, a village boy gets on the tree to bring down a closed-circuit camera set up by men of a narcotic trader at Mathpara village in Dhunat upazila under Bogra district on Monday evening after police arrested illegal trader Yusb Ali, 25, and his assistant Monowar Hossain, 22, at the village. The law enforcers later placed the two arrestees before a mobile court that awarded one year's jail to each.

PHOTO: STAR

Lentil farming on rise in 6 south-western districts

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Farmers in six south-western districts have increased cultivation of lentil this year due to unexpectedly good price and because they incurred massive losses in paddy farming.

Besides better prices, the cost of cultivating lentils is less than for other crops.

Pest attacks have decreased and lentil plants are more immune to diseases, said farmers and officials of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

In the current season, the target was to grow lentils on 7,0771 hectares in the six SW districts of Jessore, Jhenidah, Magura, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur, while the achievement was 10,0475 hectares.

The production target in the six districts is expected to be 92,002 tonnes, and the production target for each hectare is 1.30 tonnes this year.

Kuddus Ali, a lentil grower of Raigram village in Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila, said he has cultivated 4



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer sprays pesticides at his lentil field at Raigram village in Kaliganj upazila under Jhenidah district that sees increased cultivation of the crop this year.

bighas of lentils this year at a cost of Tk 12,000. He expects that he will reap around 40 maunds, which he will sell at Tk 2,800 per maund, earning Tk 1,12,000.

Farmer Arif Hossain of Magura said he has cultivated 2 bighas this year at a cost of Tk 7,000. He

expects to produce around 18 maunds of lentils, which he will sell at Tk 2,700 per maund, earning Tk 48,600.

Shafiur Rahman of Chuadanga district said they will not cultivate paddy next year. He will grow paddy on one bigha only in the coming year, for his own consumption.

Nitya Ranjan Biswas, additional director of DAE in Jessore region, said farmers in the SW districts earned good profit in the last few years by cultivating lentils. The better prices encouraged the farmers to expand lentil farming in the region.