

# Baishakhi sales pick up in Thakurgaon markets

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Different markets in the district town and surrounding areas are buzzing with customers as Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year, draws near. People are mostly buying babywear, punjabi, fatua, sari, salwar-kameez, cosmetic items, ornaments (both genuine and imitation) and footwear before the festival joined by people irrespective of social classes or creed.

Expressing happiness with satisfactory sales centring Thakurgaon Railway Station in the municipality area on Monday and Tuesday, this correspondent saw shop owners and employees passing busy time amid rush of customers.

"Like every year, clothing traders have stocked sufficient amount of items including saris, salwar-kameezes, and fatuas ahead of Pahela Baishakh. This year's sale is better than previous years and we hope to make a good business," said Sohrab Hossain Ashik, owner of Pakija Printing Saree on North Circular Road.

Chandana Das, owner of Karupanya, a popular boutique house in the town, said she has made 2000 pieces of dress including

and boutique houses of North Circular Road, Old Bus Stand areas and markets of Thakurgaon Railway Station in the municipality area on Monday and Tuesday, this correspondent saw shop owners and employees passing busy time amid rush of customers.

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saris, salwar-kameezes, fatuas and baby wear ahead of Pahela Baishakh and over 1500 pieces have already been sold.

"Last year I could not sell even 500 pieces of clothes during Pahela Baishakh as the market was dull," she said.

Santosh Agarwal, owner of Santosh Bostraloy, a famous three-piece and saree store in Thakurgaon Station area, said this season their sale saw a rise as the government employees were sanctioned festival bonus for Pahela Baishakh.

"I bought dresses for my two minor sons on the occasion," said Nazmun Nur, headmaster of a government primary school.

Dressmakers are also passing busy time before the traditional festival.

However, presence of rural people is low in the markets, said shopkeepers.

Low prices of paddy and wheat has kept most of rural customers away from visiting town for Baishakhi shopping, said Md Farid, president of Thakurgaon traders association.

Md Shafiqul Islam, president of Alpana Sahitya Sangsad, continued organising Baishakhi Mela (fair) on the occasion of Pahela Baishakh on the Public Library premises during the last 31 years.

Like other years, shop owners from different districts including Dhaka, Bogra and Jessore will set up over 200 stalls of different items including handicrafts, books, boutiques, traditional foods, and toys at the mela this year, he hoped.



PHOTO: STAR

Customers look for their favourite clothes at a shop on North Circular Road in Thakurgaon town yesterday as preparations are on to celebrate Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year.

# Despite amputated legs, man pursues a dignified life

HABIBUR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

When Abdur Rob Akan, now 55, of Charani Pattashi village in Pirojpur's Zianagar upazila was 28 years old, he lost his right leg to gangrene. Twelve years later his left leg met the same fate. Although such circumstances might commonly a beggar make, Rob soldiered on, determined to create a dignified life and always support his family.

Rob studied to class 10, after which his family's poverty meant he couldn't continue. He worked as a day labourer, but when his first leg was amputated that became impossible. But he

found that he was able to catch fish in the canal, using rods and nets cast from a boat. He would work as a fisherman for the next five years.

"In those days I could always get enough fish in the river and my family expenses were nicely covered," he remembers. "The work was difficult, especially during rough weather."

"Ultimately I established a grocery shop instead, in front of my house," he continues. "It ran for about eighteen months." While the work was easier the business faced losses due to some customers not paying their accounts. Rob returned

to fishing.

It was at this time that Rob lost his remaining leg. Yet he continued fishing in his boat on the canal at night.

"Those days were really miserable," he says, "When I think of it my heart leaps with fear. I can't imagine how I actually worked in a boat without my two legs! Somehow I did."

He is thankful for the support of local people at that time. In the market, there were many willing to help him get in and out of the boat. But ultimately, with the construction of a sluice gate and many canals filled in, he had to retire for a second time from his fishing profes-

sion. "The boat couldn't even move in the canal anymore," Rob says.

Again he turned to groceries. "I took a loan of Tk 20,000 from a non-government organisation for a grocery store as I had no other way to generate an income," he says of the business he has been engaged in for the past eight years.

Renting the shop premises for Tk 700 per month, the father of two sons is well-known in the area. "Most people in our village help Rob," says local Md Aliur Rahman Khan.

"Morning and afternoon I visit Rob's shop," says another local Md Hanif Talukder. "Rob is a shining example of what physically challenged people can do."

"It'd be difficult to run my business without the help of local people," says Rob.

While his elder son, 25, now lives with his wife in Chittagong, Rob's wife Aklima Begum and younger son, who studies in class 7, are also supportive of his efforts. "My wife brings my lunch to the shop every day," Rob says fondly, "and my younger son brings my supper. He also helps out at the shop after school."

"I am proud of my husband," says Begum. "He bears all our family expenses in spite of his physical problems."

A life of struggle, Rob is determined to run his business and support his family for as long as he can. "My main concern for the future is that I have no savings," he says while chewing a betel leaf.



PHOTO: STAR

Although he lost both his legs to gangrene, Abdur Rab Akan of Charani Pattashi villager in Zianagar upazila under Pirojpur district has always been determined to live a dignified life. Through fishing and running a grocery store, he has supported his family over the years, despite his particular challenges.

# UP member aspirant found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Police recovered the body of an aspirant for the post of member of Paindu Union Parishad (UP) under Ruma upazila from a residential hotel in Bandarban town yesterday, 36 hours after he went missing.

The victim was identified as Mong Nu Marma, 35, son of Aung Ching Marma of the union.

He was a candidate from Ward No 4 of the union in the election scheduled for April 23.

Informed by Hla Ching Prue Marma, manager of Hotel Prue Abashik, police recovered the body from a room of the hotel at noon and sent it to Bandarban Sadar Hospital for autopsy, said Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bandarban Police Station.

Mong had been missing since Monday night when he went to the district town to bring posters for his campaign. His mobile phone was switched off, said his brother Mong Wai Nu Marma.

Police recorded a general diary when Mong was reported missing, said Md Shariful Islam, officer-in-charge of Ruma Police Station.

No case was filed with the police station concerned as of 3:00pm yesterday.

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# Boy commits suicide for not getting Baishakhi dress

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A schoolboy allegedly committed suicide for not having new dress ahead of Pahela Baishakh in Bera upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased is Shahin Rahman, 13, a Class VIII student of Bipin Bihari High School in the area, and son of farmer Anjel Ali of Bonogram village in Bera municipality.

"My son demanded a new dress for the Bangla New Year but I could not manage to buy it due to my poverty," said the boy's father.

Police and family sources said Shahin went to bed on Monday night and the following day, family members found him hanging from the ceiling of his room.

On information, the law enforcers rushed to the spot and recovered the body, said Officer-in-Charge of Bera Police Station Md Firoz Ahmed.

A case was filed in connection with the incident, said the OC.

# Madrasa girl raped by teacher

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A madrasa student was raped by her teacher at Goga Khadijatul Kobra Women's Hafijia Madrasa in Sharsa upazila of Jessore district on Monday afternoon.

Police and her family members said Altaf Hossain, 43, a teacher of the madrasa and son of Abdul Barik of the village, raped the girl in the madrasa after classes. The girl returned home and told her mother about the incident.

Father of the girl informed Abdur Rashid, chairman of Goga Union Parishad (UP), and demanded justice. The chairman asked Altaf Hossain to come to the UP office, but he had fled the village.

Later, villagers attacked and vandalised the madrasa and the teacher's house.

Moniruzaman, officer-in-charge of Sharsa Police Station, said they sent the girl to Jessore Medical College Hospital for medical test.

A case was filed against Altaf Hossain yesterday.

# NILPHAMARI

# Pest wreaks havoc on green mangoes, jackfruits

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The onset of summer sees rapid spread of giant mealybugs in fruit trees, causing much harm especially to immature jackfruits and mangoes in different areas of the district.

Visiting different villages, this correspondent found the soft-bodied white insects, up to one-centimetre in length, sticking in clusters at the tender stalks of green jackfruits and mangoes as well as leaves and shoots.

Within a short time, the insects suck up the fluid of the tender fruits, leaves and shoots, making them blackish within 3-4 days, farmers said, adding that the affected portions eventually fall off.

Abul Hossain, a jackfruit farmer at Itakhola village in Sadar upazila, said the

insects ruined around 600 pieces (50%) of the fruits in his ten trees and it would cause him loss of Tk 30 thousand.

"Giant mealybugs continued attacking my mango trees for the last 3-4 years, causing much harm. Their appearance usually sees alarming rise in proportionate to the rise of temperature in summer," said Samed Ali of Putimari village in Kishoreganj upazila.

The insects were also seen moving on the walls and floors of the houses adjacent to the affected trees and the residents got skin disease and allergic problems as a result.

Application of different methods suggested by the agriculture officials so far brought hardly any results to check the insects, said the affected people.

The fruit trees once

attacked by giant mealybugs are affected again in next years and it is difficult to eliminate them by spraying insecticides as the insects release a kind of viscous liquid that forms a dense coating on their body, said Keramot Ali, Sadar upazila agriculture officer.

"We suggest farmers to spray a mixture of insecticides belonging to imidacloprid and chloropyrifos groups," he said.

GM Idris, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Nilphamari, said the insects do much harm especially to jackfruits and mangoes in the summer and disappear with the start of the rains.

"As soon as we get complaint, we try to address the problem with the help of our sub assistant agriculture officers posted at the union level," he added.

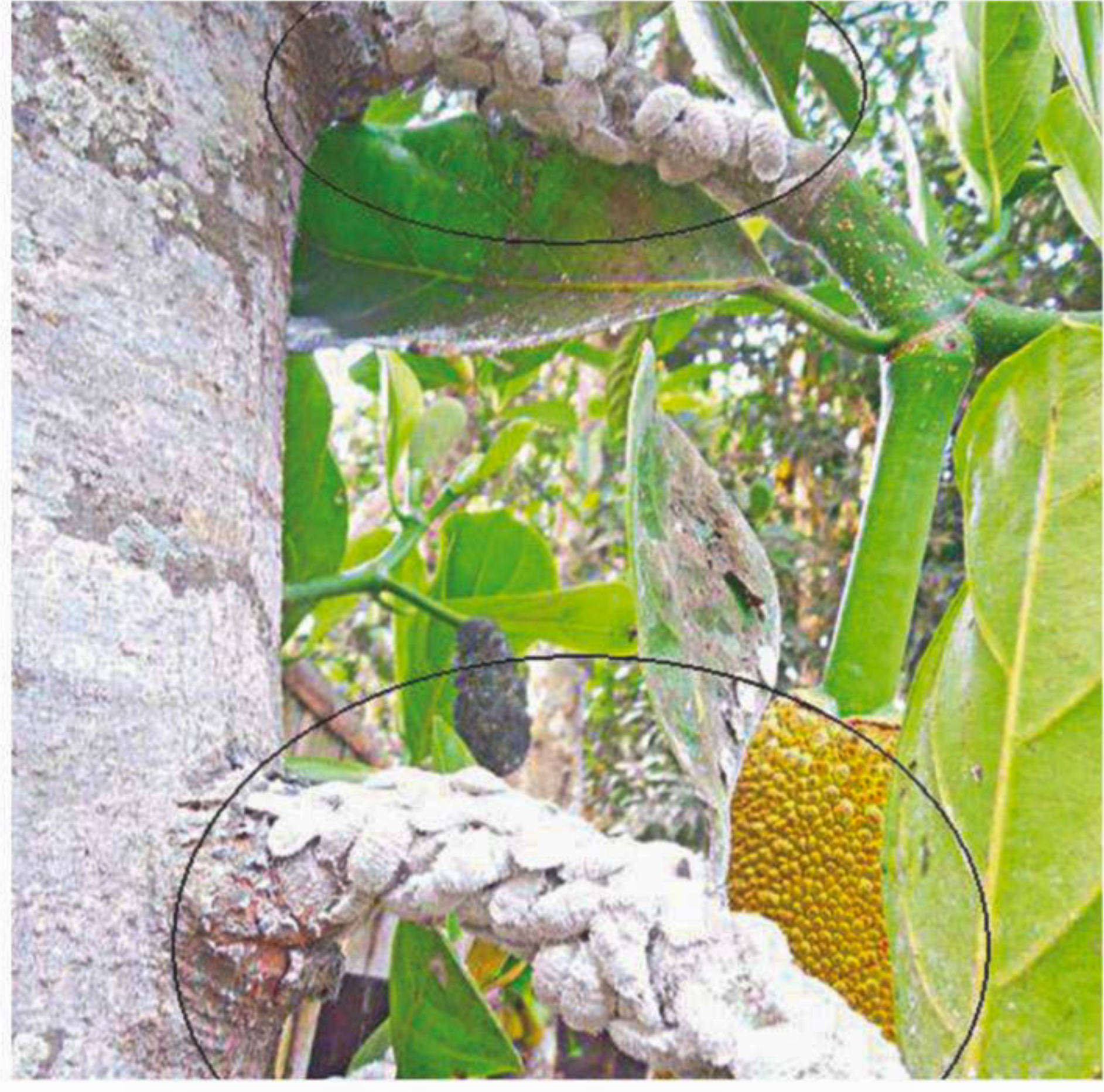


PHOTO: STAR

A jackfruit tree attacked by giant mealybugs in Nilphamari.

# 4-year-old boy abducted for ransom in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A four-year-old boy was abducted for ransom in Hakimpur upazila of the district on Monday.

The victim is Abtahi, 4, son of Mamunur Rashid, principal of Hakimpur Women's College.

Emran Kabir, inspector (investigation) of Hakimpur Police Station, said they are trying to rescue the boy and arrest the abductors.

Family members said Abtahi went out of his house at Muharapara in the upazila to play with other boys of the neighbourhood. At around 11.00am, his mother found him missing. When family members failed to trace Abtahi, his

father filed a general diary with Hakimpur Police Station on Monday night.

At around 11:00am yesterday, Abtahi's father received a text message, which demanded Tk 30 lakh for release of the abducted boy.

The incident triggered panic among the residents of Hakimpur upazila because it is close to the Indian border and is used for trafficking children, locals said.

There were several abduction cases in the district in the last few months. Of them, two children were murdered for non-payment of ransom.

Afroza Mimi, 8-year-old daughter of Mahbubur Alam of Dinajpur Satellite Town, was abducted on

December 26. Later, the gang phoned her father, demanding Tk 8 lakh as ransom. Police recovered her body from near her house on January 1.

Porosh Chandra Saha, four-year-old son of Keshab Chandra Saha of Kadimnagar village under Ghoraghat upazila municipality area, was abducted early November last year. Police recovered his body the next day. Victim's father said his son was killed because of delay in paying the ransom.

Nasima Akhter, 15, a Class IX student of Tanga Adarsha High School of Khansama upazila of the district, was abducted on March 19 afternoon. She has not been found yet.



PHOTO: TRIBENI CHAKMA

With bouquets of flowers in hands, indigenous people stand in a long queue on the premises of Rajbana Bihar to float those on water in Kaptai Lake beside Rangamati town as the ethnic communities in the hill region start celebrating their traditional Boisabi festival marking the Bangla New Year yesterday.