

## Hilsa glut at Barisal markets

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Large hilsas are now available in Rasulpur wholesale market and other markets of Barisal but prices are high.

While visiting the Rasulpur wholesale market on Tuesday, one of the biggest wholesale markets for hilsa, this correspondent saw that large hilsas caught from the Meghna, Arial Khan, Tentulia, Bishkhali and Kalabadar rivers have flooded the market.

Nirob Hossain Tutul, secretary of Hilsa Fish Wholesalers' Association, said,

"We find 1,500-2,000 maunds of hilsa in the wholesale market every day. Fishermen are catching a large quantity of hilsa from the local rivers, including Meghna, in Bhola, Tajumuddin and Mehendiganj areas."

This correspondent also found that per kg of hilsa below 500 grams was being sold at Tk 600-700 in retail, while per kg of hilsa weighing between 600 and 800 grams was going for Tk 1,100-1,200 and the fish weighing 800 grams and above was Tk 1,500-2,000 a kg.

Abul Hossain, of Mehendiganj upazila, said, "I caught two maunds of hilsa and most of the fish were around one kg each."

Farid Mia, a fish trader in Barisal, said he bought 10 maunds of hilsa from Ullania under Mehendiganj, adding that most of the hilsa were medium in size.

Mohammad Wahiduzzaman, district fisheries officer, said as they launched anti-Jatka (Hilsa fries) drives every year strictly, the hilsa size increased.

## BNP calls

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after the formation of the Rapid Action Battalion in 2004.

Extrajudicial killings in the name of "crossfire" became prevalent following the formation of the Rab. Faizullah, 18, was killed in a "shootout" with police on Saturday, four days into his capture while fleeing after the attack on the teacher.

Briefing journalists at the party's Nayapalton headquarters, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "The government is carrying out the extrajudicial killings in a planned way to cover up the truth and the identity of the perpetrators of secret killings."

After the briefing, this correspondent asked him whether the BNP demanded investigation into all the extrajudicial killings since 2004. In reply, he said he was talking about the recent killings in the name of "crossfire".

About the killings of Faizullah, and Shariful, prime suspect in blogger-writer Avijit murder case, Fakhrul said, "It naturally raises a question in the public mind whether the government itself is behind militancy."

Shariful was killed in a "shootout" with police early yesterday.

The BNP leader also alleged it was an evil design of the government to blame the opposition activists for the killings so that they can suppress them.

He accused the government of playing with fire over a big problem like militancy.

"They're [government] now trying to avert their responsibility by shifting the blame on the BNP and other opposition parties without any investigation."

Fakhrul said over 13,000 people were arrested in a weeklong combing operation. "Of the arrestees, the government claimed that they've identified only 179 as militants. So, the rest are common people. For whose interest and why they are being arrested?"

Rejecting the prime minister's allegation that BNP's Senior Vice-chairman Tarique Rahman, now in London, issued a death threat to British MP Tulip Siddiq, he said Sheikh Hasina brought the allegation only to mislead the people.

Earlier on Saturday, Hasina criticised the British government for giving shelter to Tarique, alleging that he has links with the killings in Bangladesh and also with the issuance of the threat to Tulip, granddaughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.



A trader taking a basket of hilsa fish from a boat at a Kirtankhola river ghat in Rasulpur area of Barisal. Large hilsas have started to flood the wholesale and other markets in the district but prices are high. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Not so happy with the state

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accountable and try to address it. Take the case of Limon, for example. The NHRC took up the matter when this college-going student was shot point-blank by Rab. We fought for two years and then the government was compelled to withdraw all fabricated and false cases lodged by Rab against him. That was I think a litmus test for the NHRC and we passed the test, I think, in a manner that the number of extra-judicial killings in the country came down drastically.

However, another symptom emerged in the country -- forced disappearances. The rise in its number is a matter of concern. Whether there is a correlation between the reduction of extra-judicial killings and the rise of forced disappearances is something that the researchers have to find out.

However, the state actors are directly and flagrantly perpetrating and violating the human rights of the citizens.

There was noticeable change in the attitude of the state actors. When party politics is involved, the NHRC has more difficulties in playing a role. There we find that the executive response is rather at very low ebb.

Yesterday [Tuesday], we submitted our annual report 2015 to the president along with a memorandum where we gave a long list of pending cases concerning either extra-judicial killings or forced disappearances or custodial tortures.

Some of these cases have been pending for three to five years. We have been seeking reports repeatedly from the home ministry, but it did not even bother to send us any response whatsoever or even acknowledge the receipt of our letters. I think it is a disgrace for the home ministry that it did not pay any heed to serious questions that we raised about the safety and life and liberty of the citizens.

TDS: Dozens of free thinkers, bloggers and religious minorities came under attack and were killed in the last two years. How do you look at it?

Mizanur: The space for free thinking is shrinking not as much because of intervention by state actors as much by non-state actors. We immediately expressed our concerns and protested each of the killings and demanded the state take effective and quick action so that the perpetrators are brought to justice. But, we were not happy with the way the state responded.

On the contrary, we found some people holding high positions in the government coming up with statements, which in our opinion rather encourage, stimulate the killers than protect and secure the bloggers. So, the NHRC is very critical of what is happening.

On religious minorities or even a sectarian movement within a particular religion, we believe there are certain attempts from certain quarters to create instability, chaos in society and

in the country. We think the state should have taken more safety measures and protective measure. Unfortunately, we have had words and statements but no noticeable action on the ground.

The way the religious minorities are being treated, I don't think the state response to that is adequate. If it goes on, I think within 15 years there will be no Hindus in Bangladesh. We don't want to see that Bangladesh which is of one particular religion and other religions would be ignored. Here the state has to take a more pro-active role that is visible.

TDS: How effective was the NHRC? Could it really bite?

Mizanur: Well ... you see human right is something which makes a society civilised. Whether we are civilised or not can be measured on the basis of your respect towards human rights. If the recommendations we made are not respected, it shows probably ours is not yet a civilised country. However, if we claimed ourselves to be civilised, then whether I have the teeth to bite should not be the real question. Rather it should be whether my recommendations were taken seriously and with due gravity.

Yes I cannot bite but I can make noise. I can shout. When I shout my voice reaches to the farthest corner of the state. I must say that over the six years we have been extremely fortunate to have the support of the media to reach to people. And it has become so that when we name and shame someone, it really means naming and shaming that also has an impact in a civilised society.

In the world, you will see majority of the human rights commissions have recommendatory jurisdiction, not mandatory. On an occasion, I met the chair of the Canadian Human Rights Commission and asked what they do when their recommendations are not implemented. He just stared with big eyes and asked what are you talking about? He said how can you think that human rights commission has made recommendations and it is not respected?

That is the level of respect to human rights. It depends on the human rights culture. Our long-term strategy is to create a human rights culture. We are working on it.

TDS: The long-term goal is fine. But, addressing each violation of human rights is important. That's how violations can be prevented. Isn't it?

Mizanur: I completely agree. But you see if you talk about certain compliance that will lead to systemic change, it becomes very difficult. But when you talk about some individual cases, then compliance is there.

For example, if I tell the police or the home ministry, any custodial death must be reported to the NHRC within 24 hours with pictures and video, that is not complied. It is because it leads to

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systemic change and is a very sensitive area and probably they are deliberately taking too long ... We are gradually progressing. It is slow and steady, and that gives us hope.

TDS: You are leaving the NHRC at a time when countrywide crackdown has just ended, and many innocent had allegedly been arrested and harassed.

Mizanur: If there is massive and mass arrest without distinction whether someone is really guilty or not, without having adequate evidence, even any kind of suspicion, I think that is a disgrace for the legal system of the country. I think the judiciary must be more careful, and there are certain situations where the judiciary probably has to come up with a proactive role, what we say judicial activism.

And, in this rare opportunity if judicial activism is not visible, I don't know any other situation where judicial activism should be more applicable. In such operations, at times if some innocent people are detained, they must be released at the soonest, and must not be tortured or harassed.

Dissenting opinion is the beauty of democracy. If there is no space for dissent, then democracy does not sustain. I also say you can have astonishing economic development, you can have infrastructural development, but it is not true development. True development always denotes human development, and it cannot happen without respect to and for human rights.

TDS: What did you find the most disgusting thing that you cannot accept?

Mizanur: It is the mindset of the bureaucracy, especially of the law enforcement agencies. They think that any critic of their action is done with malafide intentions only to disgrace them and so the human rights commission is not doing anything good for the country. We should be open to dissenting opinion, and that is what is lacking. That is a bit frustrating in the country's culture.

TDS: What has made you cry?

Mizanur: When I find that the state is so unresponsive to the very poor needy people of this country. When I see that an eighty-year-old lady comes all the way from Madaripur to the NHRC because her only one-room house was taken away by the land grabber and the law is of no use. No

state institution is coming forward to protect this lonely lady. And there was none to see the human face of the lady. That is what brings tears to my eyes.

TDS: What reforms do you suggest to improve HR situation of the country?

Mizanur: There should be more civil society participation in the selection process of the commissioners. Now it is a seven-member commission, but only two are full-time, while the rest are part-time. Since they are part-time, it is very difficult for them to serve the commission full-time. Let it be a four-member commission, but they all should be full-time members so that they can properly concentrate on the work of the NHRC to make it a vibrant institution.

Independence of the NHRC must be preserved and respected at all levels. There is a tendency of the ministry of law, justice and parliamentary affairs to look at the NHRC as an institution that is subordinate to the ministry. Independence of the NHRC must be upheld both in spirit and practice.

For the state, I believe that the state must take necessary practical steps to establish the rule of law. In a weak rule of law or absence of rule of law, there cannot be any place for human rights.

TDS: Do you think justice was delivered to Limon?

Mizanur: No ... I don't think that. He has been relieved of the fabricated false charges, and that is only one part of justice, but that Limon has lost his leg, made disabled for the rest of his life. He should have been compensated by the state. We demanded it, but unfortunately this country is yet to establish this culture.

TDS: Did you take any initiative that you failed to achieve?

Mizanur: I wanted to involve and engage all the law faculty and students of the public and private universities to reach out to the furthest corners, to the remote villages of the country and carry the message of human rights and inform the people what the citizen rights are. But, I could not do it. Until and unless you are aware of your rights, you cannot claim your rights.

And you don't know if the state is at fault or not and whom you claim to and what you claim. Sometimes you simply become fatalistic. We don't want people to be fatalist. We want that every single individual of the country must reap the benefits of the Liberation War that gave us independence, the constitution and the fundamental freedom.

But, I was not able to do it.

TDS: What is your future plan?

Mizanur: I go back to Dhaka University and continue teaching. My hands-on experience has given me a new perspective of the real world. I also want to concentrate on writing books. And, finally if the state thinks

## 32 more gun magazines found in Uttara canal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered 32 more gun magazines scouring a canal at Uttara in the capital for the second straight day yesterday.

The magazines were kept in a box. Eight barrel cleaning kits were also found in the canal after the drive resumed around 9:00am, said Mahmudul Haque, an inspector of the fire service and civil defence.

The drive ended around 3:00pm, said police and fire service sources.

Some police members remained deployed on the scene on the fringe of Sector-16.

Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque along with some senior police officials visited the spot around 12:45pm.

Later, they went to Turag Police Station. Talking to reporters there, he said they believe the arms and ammunition were kept in the canal with an intention to carry out subversive activities later.

He said criminals threw them into the canal fearing arrest during the ongoing combing operation across the country.

He also said the arms and ammunition might belong to any militant organisation.

Acting on a tip-off, the police with the help of the fire service recovered a large cache of firearms and ammunition from the canal on Saturday. The drive began around 4:00pm and ended around 11:25pm that day.

As many as 97 foreign pistols, including two 9mm pistols, about 1,060 bullets, 452 magazines and 10 bayonets were found in the canal, claimed police and fire service sources.

Quoting police sources, Bidhan Tripura, deputy commissioner (Uttara division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they came to know that a black sport utility vehicle went near the canal, someone got down from it and threw the bags into the water.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Mahbube Khoda, officer-in-charge of Turag Police, said a general diary (GD) was filed in connection with the recovery.

However, no one was arrested. This correspondent has talked to some workers, who were working at a construction site near the canal. They said they have seen Rapid Action Battalion and police members on the scene.

## Our son

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with cops and his cohorts during an operation to nab some other suspects.

Faruk said Faizullah used to say his regular prayers at the mosque close to their house most of the time, but had started spending up to half an hour with that boy after prayers only recently. His mother saw him at least twice with that boy since late last month.

Faruk said his son had been pious all along, always saying his prayers, reciting Quran and other religious books.

Asked whether he had any link with Islami Chhatra Shibir, Faruk said his son was always against Shibir or Tablig Jamaat.

After his arrest, Madaripur Superintendent of Police Sarwar Hossain claimed that Faizullah said he was a member of banned militant outfit Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

The name of Hizb-ut-Tahrir came up for the first time in connection with the string of targeted killings following the attempt on the life of Ripon, who survived the attack.

Over the last three years, suspected militants have attacked and killed university professors, writers, publishers, secular bloggers, gay rights activists, foreigners, policemen and members of religious minorities, including Shia and Sufi Muslims, Christians and Hindus.

Reportedly, terror group Islamic State claimed responsibilities for many of the attacks. But the government maintains the group has no presence in the country, and squarely blames the opposition parties such as the BNP and Jamaat for this.

Asked about the "crossfire," Faruk only said his son was killed after torture. He would not elaborate further.

After Faizullah left home abruptly on the morning of June 11, Faruk filed a general diary and went to police and Rab for two days, asking for information about his son.

"But instead of giving me any clue, they rather asked me if I had any news," he said.

While leaving the house, Faizullah said he was going to a friend's in Tongi to make preparations for the next day's exam.

But he later sent an SMS to his father, saying he was going abroad and that they would meet again if he was alive.

On that night, they found his phone open for some time, but it was found switched off after his father called him twice.

Later, tracking his phone, police found the location to be in Sylhet.

Meanwhile, Faizullah was buried at his village home of Dariapur in

## Garlic price stays high

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In Dinajpur, one of the areas that produce garlic, the price went further up due to stocking and bulk purchase by traders.

During visits to different wholesale and retail markets in the district, it was found that each kilogramme of local garlic was being sold at Tk 170 to Tk 200, depending on the size and the quality.

"The rate is nearly double than it was last year" said Azahar Imam, a wholesaler at Bahadurabad, Dinajpur.

But farmers who produced garlic this year in the district did not get

higher margins on sales because of the middlemen.

Wholesalers and retailers are making good profit from selling garlic at exorbitant rates, said Golam Kibriya, a schoolteacher in Dinajpur town, adding that the high price forced him to cut consumption.

Consumers might have to come to terms with higher garlic prices after wholesalers yesterday hinted further increase in price in the days to come.

Officials of the state-run Department Agriculture Extension in Dinajpur said at least 2,810 hectares of land were brought under garlic

farming, producing 22,357 tonnes of garlic this year.

Golam Mostafa, deputy director of the DAE, earlier told The Daily Star that the production target exceeded this year and farmers tried their best to fetch healthy yield.

Garlic is produced more or less everywhere in Dinajpur, but it is widely grown in Chirirbandar and Khansama upazilas. Harvesting ended in mid-May.

Abdul Jabbar, a farmer in Chirirbandar who farmed garlic on one acre of land, said he got better price this year compared to last year.

Nazrul Islam, another farmer in

the upazila, said he cultivated garlic on a bigha of land this year spending Tk 36,000. He sold each maund at Tk 2,600 at local markets, fetching him Tk 65 for a kg.

"It is the middlemen that are pocketing the profit," he said.

The price of garlic went up ahead of Ramadan on the expectation of high demand in the fasting month.

Prices of essential commodities such as rice, wheat, pulses, sugar, edible oil, ginger, garlic, onion and potato account for more than one-third of the annual household expenditure of the bottom 20 percent of the

population, according to the 2005 Household And Income Expenditure data.

Researchers blame inflation, price hike in international market and business syndication for the price spiral.

Ahead of Ramadan, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed had said supply of all items, including rice, sugar, edible oil, lentils, onion, garlic, ginger, and dates, was higher than the demand.

So there was no reason for their price hike on the occasion of Ramadan, he added.