

Indigenous man found murdered in Joypurhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police recovered the slit-throat body of an indigenous man from a pond at Dumurpur village in Akkelpur upazila of Joypurhat yesterday.

The deceased was Mohallah Pahan, 55, son of Shallah Pahan of Pashchim Sealpa in the upazila.

Locals found the body floating on the pond and informed the police around 5:50pm.

The body was later sent to Joypurhat Modern Hospital morgue for autopsy, said Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Akkelpur Police Station.

The reason behind the killing could not be known immediately, said the OC.

However, Babul Ronidas, president of Joypurhat unit Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, claimed that the killing took place over land dispute for Bangalee settlers of the area.

There were several clashes between indigenous people and Bangalees over the land, he said.



A growing vegetable field at Baniary village in Nazirpur upazila under Pirojpur district. Inset, bitter melon cultivated on the bank of a pond grows well on a bamboo platform set over the water body, a means adopted to maximise land utilisation for vegetable farming.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Vegetables bring tidy profits

HABIBUR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Bitter melon, ribbed melon, snake melon and cucumber: the farmers from Baniary village in Matibhanga union of Pirojpur's Nazirpur upazila are reaping the benefits of vegetable cultivation.

"We've always farmed vegetables a little," says grower Ujjal Akarshon, "but for the last four years all the farmers have become committed to vegetable cultivation on account of the good money to be made." Ujjal has grown bitter melon this year, fitting out his 50 decimals of land with beams and racks suitable for the crop.

"From April to August vegetable cultivation keeps us busy," says another farmer Parimol Mojumder. "During these months we sow the seeds, tend the plants and collect the harvest." Every morning vegetables are produced at various local markets, primarily for selling to wholesalers.

"In the past, we bought vegetables from other areas," says Juran Bala, another grower from the area. "But now our village supplies vegetables."

Another advantage of vegetables is the potential to grow them over ponds, which engages pond land in a dual agricultural production of both vegetables and fish.

According to farmers as the paddy price has decreased, growing rice is increasingly liable to incur losses, while vegetables are certain to make a tidy profit, at least seven times higher than what might be possible with paddy.

In addition, the increasing use of sex pheromone traps to replace pesticides keeps farmer expenses to a minimum.

Nazirpur upazila agriculture office sources estimate around 1,300 farmers in Baniary cultivate vegetables, including raised above 400 hectares of fish project land.

Faridpur flood damages crops worth Tk 17cr

A CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

With the receding of floodwater, crops on 3,189 hectares of land in five upazilas of the district have been damaged.

Of them, 1,182 hectares are of aus paddy fields, 1,079 hectares of bonga aman paddy fields, 18 hectares of ropa aman seedbeds, 798 hectares of ropa aman and 121 hectares of vegetables.

Total value of damaged crops is estimated to be Tk 17 crore while thousands of farmers have been directly affected, said G Aubbud Rouf, sub-director officer of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Faridpur.

The worst affected upazilas are Faridpur Sadar, Char Bhadrashan and Sadarpur.

Stop inhuman acts with tea workers

HR boss asks garden owners

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

National Human Rights Commission Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque asked the authorities of Baikunthapur Tea Garden to stop unfair activities with workers of the tea garden, and urged the owners to respect the workers' dignity.

He said this while visiting Baikunthapur Tea Garden in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj yesterday.

He said, "They are among the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Bangladesh, living in small, thatched-roofed mud houses where they are allowed to stay as long as a family member is working."

Nripen Paul, general secretary of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union, Lashkarpur valley, said they have not been getting their wages for 15 weeks. "What type of justice is this?" he asked.

Swapon Santal, central committee member of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said, "Tea workers are Bangladeshi citizens and they have voting rights, yet they are among the most deprived people in the country. A registered worker gets a meager Tk 82 as a daily minimum wage, which ranks among the lowest in the world."

Ramnath Keut, president of Baikunthapur unit of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union, said the workers were not getting proper treatment as the lone hospital of the garden has remained closed for the last six months.

Meals on schedule but treatment scant

Patients allege at Kushtia hospital

AMANUR AMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Complaining about hospital food is a cliché worthy of cinema. On-screen, less than tasty food might well be tolerated in light of its relative unimportance next to quality treatment. But in the real world, at Kumarkhali upazila's health complex in Kushtia, food of any quality is the highlight. Meals are served regularly. It's treatment that's hard to find.

"We get meals," says Akram Uddin, 62, a day labourer who was admitted at the health complex with severe abdominal pains several days ago. "We get meals regularly. But there is no treatment."

He says he saw a doctor on the Saturday of his admission; but from then until he spoke with The Daily Star at midday on the following Tuesday he had not consulted any doctor.

Meals, meanwhile, are delivered on schedule, bedside. Several other patients described identical circumstances.

The government health complex, which was upgraded to a 50-bed facility in 2008, has a severe staff shortage. With 25 employment positions vacant, the complex can rely at a maximum on the efforts of six doctors. But that is only according to the register, as two are on deputation to Kushtia. On an average day another two will be away from the hospital or on leave. The stark reality is that the complex commonly relies on just two on-duty doctors to attend to patients.

Patient numbers meanwhile are overflowing. Along with an over-capacity 80 inpatients, the complex attracts around 200 outpatients daily. With no other option, the hospital has unofficially employed several medical assistants, who even prescribe medicine in doctors' names.

The Daily Star observed the chamber of one of the doctors, Dr Mithun Kumar Chakrabortee, to find at about 2:30 p.m., 45 patients were waiting for a consultation.

According to Dr Chakrabortee, he had already attended to about another 45 patients since his chamber opened at 10 a.m.

"How can I give my patients due medical attention?" Dr Chakrabortee asks. "That is the proper meaning of treatment."

The complex has no senior medical consultant, no senior orthopaedic surgeon, no junior orthopaedic consultant, no junior gynaecologist, no junior cardiologist, no junior anaesthetist and no emergency medical officer. These positions have been vacant for a long time. There is also no ear, nose and throat specialist and no eye or skin specialists, according to hospital authorities. They do have a junior dentist but he has no work due to the absence of a dental surgeon.

Despite an operation theatre being constructed in 2008 it remains but a showpiece under lock and key, with no operation being performed there due to the lack of staff.

Moreover, although the health complex has an ambulance there is no budget for fuel.

Patients must cover fuel costs for ambulance services.

The only x-ray machine meanwhile has been in a state of disrepair since 2012.

"It's very difficult to run the hospital with such a small number of doctors," says upazila health officer Akul Uddin. "We do our best to provide good service but the shortage of doctors, staff and equipment makes it all but impossible."

Kushtia's civil surgeon Dr Mustafizur Rahman says he is trying to appoint doctors to the hospital and will do so as soon as possible.

Baby elephant rescued from well in Garo Hills

A CORRESPONDENT, Sherpur

Officials with the help of locals rescued a baby elephant from an old well in the Garo Hills in Jhinaigati upazila under Sherpur district yesterday.

The calf, separated from its herd, had fallen into the well in the early morning near the Garo Hills at Gurucharon Dudhoni village in Jhinaigati upazila, said locals and forest department officials.

After failed attempt to the rescue it, villagers informed forest department and fire service officials in Sherpur.

Teams from the two departments went to the spot and arranged digging to increase the diameter of the well.

Then they threw a strong rope on the calf.

The calf clasped the rope around its body with its trunk and the rescue workers with the help of villagers pulled out the baby elephant from the well after trying for two and a half hours, said Md Mostafizur Rahman, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence office in Sherpur.

Afterwards, the unharmed calf ran towards the forest, said Md Ashraf Islam, an official of Tawkucha forest office.

A herd of around fifty elephants continued roaming around in the Garo Hills for quite a long time. The calf possibly got detached from the herd and fell into the well at night, he said.

Pregnant woman stabbed for dowry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A seven-month pregnant housewife was brutally stabbed allegedly by her husband for dowry in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj on Monday night.

Critically injured Saheda Akther, 20, daughter of Abdus Sattar of Sreerampur village in the upazila, is now undergoing treatment at Habiganj Sadar Hospital with critical stab injuries on her entire face and other parts of the body.

Victim's father Abdus Sattar said Saheda was married to Sujon Mia, 25, son of Kajal Mia of Balikhil village in the upazila about a year ago.



Patients wait in queues in front of a doctor's room at Kumarkhali Upazila Health Complex in Kushtia district while the only operation theatre, inset, remains under lock and key since its construction in 2008 due to lack of staff.

PHOTO: STAR



This elephant calf, rescued after its fall into a well (below), going to the forest in the Garo Hills in Jhinaigati upazila under Sherpur district yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

4 female 'JMB activists' held

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Mahmudul Hasan alias Hasan, he said.

The arrestees are Aklima Rahman Moni, Khadija Parveen Meghla and Ishrat Jahan Mou—all fourth-year Pharmacy department students at Manarat International University (MIU) — and Istishna Afroz Oishee, an intern at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

They were allegedly spreading extremist ideologies among other females in the name of teaching Arabic.

"Their current objective was to strengthen the female unit and collect funds for terror activities," Kabir said while replying to a query.

The elite force came to know about the existence of the female unit after it arrested the JMB leader, Mahmudul, in Gazipur on July 21.

Based on information gleaned from him, a Rab-4 team kept a close watch on Aklima for days, and finally arrested her from her home in Signboard area of the district around 2:00am yesterday.

Oishee was arrested from her home in Moghbazar, and Meghla and Mou from their residences in separate areas of Mirpur later, he added.

Rab also claims to have recovered a huge number of jihadi books, documents, video clips and other write-ups from their homes, laptops and mobile phones.

These were put on display before the media at yesterday's briefing.

A Rab press release issued yesterday said Aklima had passed her SSC examination from the capital's Uttara High School in 2010 and HSC examination from Holy Child College in 2012. She later got admitted to the MIU in the capital.

Recently, she handed over Tk 12,000 to JMB leader Mahmudul. She had collected the money from several places during the month of Ramadan, it said.

Similarly, Oishee handed over Tk 8,000 to the same man.

The release said Oishee's parents are doctors. She got admitted to Dhaka Medical College after passing her HSC exam from Viharunnisa Noon School and College in 2010.

Mou and Meghla passed their HSC exams from BCIC College and Cambrian College in 2012 and the next year, before getting admitted to the private university, added the press release.

At yesterday's briefing, Kabir, the Rab-4 chief, claimed that Aklima had been "involved" in militant activities for several years. She became "active" recently after she was given the responsibility to form the female unit of the JMB, he claimed.

Oishee was "inspired" by a "foreign friend" to get involved in militant activities four years ago. The other two were "radicalised" around seven months ago, he added.

Although Rab claimed that Aklima and Oishee used to take the vital decisions of the female JMB unit, the crime buster could not say anything exactly about their positions or the structure of the unit immediately.

Kabir also claimed that during their primary interrogations, the arrestees told Rab officials that they supported the terror attacks and all the secret killings carried out in Bangladesh in recent years.

"They think themselves the 'ideological followers' of the so-called Islamic State. They believe the only 'punishment' for those who are progressive and secular is death, the Rab official claimed.

"They also believe that the death should be awful so that it creates panic among other people."

Replying to a query whether the arrested students of the MIU were propagating extremist views among other students at the private university, Kabir said their investigation was at an "initial" stage.

"We will give our topmost priority to the issue during our investigation as we had a bitter experience in case of North South University," he said, adding that none of the culprits would be spared.

Rab officials said they had already got names of several people, including some students of the MIU, who have links with the arrestees. They said they were verifying the information.

The officials also said they would try to find out whether the female JMB unit was formed to carry arms from one place to another as "it was noticed in the past that different militant organisations used females to carry arms and ammunition before their operations."

On July 24, police arrested four women in Sirajganj who they say were taking preparation to carry out a "massive attack" in the district.