

## One killed as 2 gangs trade gunshots

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A man was killed during a gunfight between two rival groups of criminals on Jessore-Jhenidah highway in Jessore Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Azadur Rahman Tokon, 37, of the upazila.

Police said, being tipped-off that two criminal groups were trading gunshots near a filling station on Jessore-Jhenidah highway the law enforcers went to the spot around 2:30am.

After reaching the spot, police fired several blank shots to disperse the clashing groups, Officer-in-Charge Elias Hossain of Sadar Police Station said.

At one stage, police rescued a bullet-hit man from the spot and took him to Jessore Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.



As in many other areas of Lalmonirhat, eucalyptus trees grown along the edges of a paddy field at Palashi village in Aditmari upazila badly affects crop production as the foreign trees consume huge water, depriving the plants in surrounding areas.

PHOTO: STAR

## DILAPIDATED ROAD

# Commuters suffer most in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The nine-kilometre-long road connecting Gaibandha town and Sadullapur upazila headquarters has become virtually unfit for vehicular movement due to lack of renovation for long.

The road has become awfully dilapidated, causing untold sufferings to thousands of commuters.

Motorised vehicles, three-wheelers and rickshaws have to move very slowly to avert accidents as large potholes have appeared on the road.

Despite repeated pleas, the authorities concerned are yet to take any steps to renovate the dilapidated road, said Nurunnabi, a resident of College Road area.

The situation worsens in the rainy season, as the road remains under knee-deep water for a long time.

Pedestrians, especially school going kids suffer the most as they have to wade through knee-deep water to attend their classes.

"I have to cross the road very carefully and slowly amid risk of accidents," said Shahidul Islam, a rickshaw puller of Hamindpur village.

Shamsuzzoha Ranga, president of Sadullapur Alokito Nagarik Parishad, said the road has been causing sufferings to thousands of commuters of several villages due to the negligence of the authorities concerned for nearly 10 years.

Sadullapur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Ahsan Habib said they would take immediate steps to repair the road.

## 'Profitable' eucalyptus an ultimate loss

The trees consume huge water, affect crop yield

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A section of farmers in the district cultivate eucalyptus trees around their crop fields to earn good profit, ignoring the long-term negative impact on crop production caused by the giant foreign trees that consume huge water.

"I planted 120 eucalyptus trees surrounding my two bighas of crop field two years back with the hope of earning Tk 7-8 lakh from selling these 6-7 years later," said Didarul Islam, 48, a farmer at Palashi village of Aditmari upazila.

"It is true that I am getting less crop after planting eucalyptus trees around the field as they consume huge water," he said.

Didarul's neighbour Shahidul Islam, 50, said yield from his three bighas of land is affected after planting of eucalyptus trees along the borders of his neighbour's crop field.

"Leaves falling from eucalyptus trees on crop fields create problem as those do not rot. On the other hand, other tree leaves easily rot and turn into organic fertiliser," he said.

Ahmed Ali, 56, a farmer at Kulaghat village in Lalmonirhat Sadar, said, after planting 25 eucalyptus trees around his homestead five years back, fruit trees there are getting too weak to give expected yield.

Mahir Ali, 56, a farmer at Kakina village of Kaliganj upazila, who planted 80 eucalyptus trees around his crop field, said he does not know about its bad effects.

"A eucalyptus tree consumes water that is sufficient for 40 other trees. It badly affects underground water, leaving long-term impact on crop production. We conduct motivation campaigns to discourage farmers from planting eucalyptus trees," said Biplob Kumar Mohanto, Aditmari upazila agriculture officer.

Following a government decision, the forest department stopped producing eucalyptus plants in 1995, said Mahbubur Rahman, forest officer in Lalmonirhat.

But nursery owners are still producing eucalyptus seedlings and these are sold in the local market. There are at least 55-65 species of eucalyptus in Bangladesh.

"The government took decision to ban eucalyptus, but in absence of specific direction from the authorities, we can't take action against nursery owners for preparing eucalyptus seedlings," he added.

Shafiqul Islam, owner of Bhai Bhai Nursery at BDR Hat in the town, said he prepares 35-40 thousand of eucalyptus seedlings every year and sells those at Tk 5-7 each.

"I prepare eucalyptus seedlings as there is huge demand in the local market. But I never plant eucalyptus around my nursery for other plants as it consumes huge water, affecting other trees there."

# Pirojpur NGO depositors left high and dry

HABIBUR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

A decade ago, Hasia Banu, 50, of Coalbuniya village in Pirojpur's Bhandaria upazila thought she made a wise decision when she began to save money with non-government organisation Sonali Unnayan Foundation (SUF). Along with many others she was assured that after ten years her savings would double; but ten years on, SUF is nowhere to be found.

"I deposited Tk 100 per month with SUF's Tushkhali branch every month from 2005 until 2015," Hasia explains. "A year has passed since my savings were supposed to mature but I haven't received anything."

"It's not only the doubling of the savings that I was promised," she adds. "I'm worried I won't get back the money I deposited."

Md Shahidul Islam from Dhanisafa village in Mathbaria upazila is in the same boat. He began to deposit money with SUF in 2007; but from 2015 the NGO

stopped taking his funds. "Like other depositors I'm really stressed about getting my money back," he says, adding that mostly poor people, especially women, operated savings plans with the NGO.

On 16 July 2015, SUF had their microcredit licence cancelled by the Microcredit Regulatory Authority. The regulatory authority's website states the licence was cancelled due to SUF's failure to operate in a manner consistent with relevant legal provisions. Subsequently SUF closed at least four of the ten branches in the area, including those with which Hasia and Shahidul had dealings.

The total number of affected SUF savings plan subscribers could not be known.

According to SUF workers, the NGO started its activity in Mathbaria upazila in 2000. Development workers were appointed to collect money and branch managers encouraged to build an atmosphere of trust between locals and the NGO. For the next five

to ten years SUF collected monthly deposits of between Tk 100 to Tk 500 from subscribers. They offered some people loans which in turn attracted more depositors.

"We offered six-month loans from savings funds and collected regular instalments," says Baby Akter, who was manager of the Tushkhali Branch of SUF. "But we sent all the money to our Dhaka office." She said SUF management ordered a halt to all savings activities last year, without providing a reason.

According to her, the Tushkhali Branch received deposits worth around Tk 12 lakhs, including deposits from some impoverished women who ran savings plans without the knowledge of their husbands.

In response to the great anxiety felt among depositors over the fate of their savings, Baby Akter went to Dhaka to speak directly with SUF management. "At the time, they promised to give the money back," she says, "but now they don't receive our phone calls."

Last month depositors from several branches, facing the same situation, formed a human chain in Mathbaria to protest the failure of SUF to either deliver on its promises or even return their money. Anger has boiled over and several former SUF development workers now live in fear.

"These days we're vulnerable," says one development worker from Tushkhali Branch, Md Khalilur Rahman Akan. "When any depositor sees us they demand their money." Khalilur admits he has paid some money back from his own pocket.

"We gave all the money collected to the NGO," he continues, "not realising they would cheat us."

SUF workers say the previous regional manager responsible for Mathbaria upazila has resigned, with the job now undertaken by a man named Awal. The Daily Star attempted to contact this individual by phone on several occasions but he refused to comment, saying he would talk to The Daily Star later.

## Jahid lured Tanvir into militancy

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Kaderi in a statement made before a court on September 22 under section-164 of the CrPC.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the statement.

He said his mother did not initially agree to the hijrat but she agreed to it later on and on one day "We went out of our Uttara home saying we would visit Malaysia".

They, however, only moved to rented flats in Pallabi, then to one in Bashundhara, one in Rupnagar and in Azimpur in the capital.

Tahrim, known in the "Neo JMB" as Russell, Anik, Muayaz and Ismail, also said that before the hijrat, all four of their family, his parents and his twin Asif Kaderi Adar, took oath at their Uttara home.

They placed hands on his father's hands and pledged that they would be loyal to this Caliph until any Kuffri [disbelief in Allah] touched him.

According to him, he and his twin brother, who is known in the organisation, as Abir are students of Class-VIII at Milestone School and College in Uttara.

Before they moved to Azimpur from Rupnagar, his father kept his twin brother at another unknown location so that none could know that he has a twin, said the 14-year-old.

He said his father had opened a business firm named As-Sabina. His mother had worked for a few NGOs. He said his father obtained master's degree from Dhaka College while his mother got hers from Dhaka University.

"We were a very happy family," said the boy in his statement.

Tanvir was so radicalised that he killed himself when police raided their home.

Tahrim was captured in the September 10 raid of the Azimpur flat. His mother Abidatul Fathima Asha, known in "Neo JMB" as Khadiza and two other female militant suspects -- Shaila Sharmin, wife of key militant suspect Nurul Islam Marzan and Ferdousi Afrin, wife of another suspect Basharuzzaman Chocolate -- were wounded.

Two girls, aged between six and one, were rescued from the flat.

Chocolate also used to reside there but was not there during the raid. Jebunnahar Shila, wife of "Neo JMB" military commander major (ret'd) Jahid also escaped arrest as she was not there during the raid.

In his confessional statement, Tahrim said he saw changes in his parents after they performed Hajj in 2014.

According to the boy, Jahid and Maynul Musa, with whom his father had a friendship for a long period of time, used to visit their Uttara home with their spouses and children.

He got introduced to Jahid and Musa through his father. Musa used to tutor them Mathematics, English and Science. Another man named Rashed Ryash used to visit the flat with Jahid.

"After Hajj Abbu dreamt one night that he is standing in a desert with firearms," the confessional statement reads. His father discussed the matter with a hujur "preacher" who asked his father not to disclose the matter to anyone.

Tahrim said when they moved to the Pallabi home, Musa and Ryash used to visit there. Ryash also got them introduced to Basharuzzaman Chocolate and Akifuzzaman, killed during a raid at Kalyanpur on July 26.

Musa, a bearded man aged

around 38, used to give Tanvir "jihadi videos on Syria war". They were also given copies of Dabiq magazines, some written in Bangla, to read.

Dabiq is the propaganda magazine of global terror outfit Islamic State.

CAFÉ ATTACKERS In the statement, Tahrim said during Ramadan his father rented a flat in Bashundhara on the instruction of Ryash and Chocolate. They moved in at the beginning of the holy month. Eight to 10 days later, Chocolate brought in two people first and then three more.

The organisational names of the five were Saad, Mamun, Umar, Alif and Subho.

A few days later, Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury, the "Neo JMB" Gulshan café attack coordinator, a Canadian of Bangladesh descent, and Marzan went to that flat. The same day militant suspect Jahangir with his wife and two sons moved in along with Chocolate.

## Mission Saarc minus Pakistan

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2014], he made it very clear that we would like to go forward with regional connectivity and other initiatives with all Saarc member countries if possible, and with only some if necessary," MEA spokesperson Vikas Swarup said on Wednesday.

"So if there is one country that doesn't want to be part of the initiatives, then we have no choice but to work with those who share our vision," he added, pointing to the motor vehicle movement agreement, railway linkages, and the Saarc satellite programme for which all Saarc countries apart from Pakistan have signed up.

With Afghanistan, which cannot be accessed by land, the two governments have discussed a separate "air corridor" for cargo.

A bigger articulation of

## Mission Saarc minus Pakistan

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that vision is expected in mid-October, when India hosts the BIMSTEC outreach summit on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Goa. The initiative for Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal is expected to see proposals on transport as well as electricity and broadband connectivity being discussed.

This week, another grouping of India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka met for the South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) programme in Delhi to release the first SASEC Operational Plan 2016-2025.

SASEC's lead financier, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has already approved about 40 infrastructure and IT projects worth about \$7.7 billion.

India also received criti-

## Mission Saarc minus Pakistan

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bilaterally too, India has been busy with its "Saarc minus Pak" programme. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Modi played host to his Nepal counterpart Prachanda and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, while Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is expected in Delhi from October 4-6.

However, analysts say India's push for a South Asian isolation of Pakistan is also driven by the fact that it received less than expected support on the world stage and at the UN General Assembly for the Comprehensive Convention on International Terror (CCIT), which it had hoped to corner Pakistan, and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj referred to her disappointment over that in her speech.

India also received criti-

## Mission Saarc minus Pakistan

FROM PAGE 1

cism at the UN Human Rights Council over Kashmir, although Pakistan failed to have any resolutions or references passed against India.

However, Pakistan continues to receive support from several other countries outside of the Saarc, most notably China, and also has a new relationship with Russia that conducted its first-ever military exercises in Pakistan just days after the Uri attack. Iran too sent four naval warships to the Karachi port to participate in a Passage exercise (PASSEX) this week.

The US, which joined many countries to condemn the terror attack in Uri, also issued statements calling on India and Pakistan to resume dialogue, an outcome that now seems as remote as the rescheduling of the 19th Saarc summit in Islamabad anytime soon.

## Bus strike called off

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

Transport workers in Barisal and Jhalakathi called off indefinite strike.

The decision to withdraw the strike was taken after a meeting at the conference room of deputy commissioner's office in Jhalakathi on Wednesday evening said Jhalakathi Bus Sramik Union Secretary Md Bahadur.

Md Mojibur Rahman, president of the union, said they called the strike on Tuesday, protesting torture on a bus driver by the chairman of Pirojpur Sadar Upazila Parishad on September 24.

The road communication between Barisal to Jhalakathi, Pirojpur, Khulna, Bagerhat and Barguna was badly hampered for the strike.

## Save nesting grounds for birds

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breeding ground for one globally threatened species anywhere is considered a place of great conservation value.

The places we are talking about are the newly accreted chars (shoals) in the Padma river in Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi. We are delighted to observe the breeding activities of the three species of globally threatened birds here this summer.

The globally threatened birds that we saw nesting on the chars of the Padma are Black-bellied Tern, Indian Skimmer and Bristled Grassbird.

The population of Black-bellied Tern has been declining sharply over the past decades and is now seen in Bangladesh only over the Padma river in Chapainawabganj. It is a

globally endangered bird and considered "critically endangered" in Bangladesh. We were pleased to see it nesting on the chars in the Padma. The Indian Skimmer, a globally vulnerable bird, is also considered "critically endangered" in Bangladesh. Previously, our researchers tried very hard to locate the nesting grounds of these two threatened species in Bangladesh, but could not find any.

While Black-bellied Terns and Indian Skimmers nest on the bare sand, the Bristled Grassbird nest in the scrub jungle growing on the chars and along the riverbank. Bristled Grassbird is a globally vulnerable bird, which is "endangered" in Bangladesh. It nests on the ground covered by grass or bushes. The only place where this bird was known earlier to breed is Tanguar Haor. Due to early

flash flood, the grassland of Tanguar Haor was not a safe breeding place for Bristled Grassbird.

The breeding grounds, mainly the chars of Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi, for the three threatened species of birds must be protected. The land, known as Khas land, is owned by the government. The ground-nesting birds need to incubate eggs and raise chicks on the bare ground. The birds need the char land for at least two to three months -- June to August -- to raise their chicks.

But cattle traders, fishermen, farmers and their domestic animals often hamper the breeding activities of the birds there.

One day, 20,000 cattle coming to Bangladesh from India were seen stampeding through the char where

Black-bellied Tern and Indian Skimmer were nesting. We checked later only to find that all nests were abandoned. No chicks of any of the two species were found on our repeated visits there this year.

In Rajshahi, we witnessed similar incidents of breeding grounds getting damaged. Hundreds of grazing cattle rampaged through the nesting grounds of Bristled Grassbird. The damage there, however, was not as extensive as it was on the chars of Chapainawabganj.

We all should try to protect these uninhabited chars for the conservation of the endangered birds. And it can be done only if we know their conservation value. We also urge the government to take steps to protect the chars before the three precious birds perish completely.