

Teenage girl violated in Dinajpur

Rapist sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police arrested a youth on Monday night on charge of raping a 13-year-old girl in Parbatipur upazila of the district the same afternoon.

The arrestee is Anwar Hossain, 25, son of Abdus Sattar of Rustamnagar village in the upazila.

The victim, a Class VI student at a local high school, was sent to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital for medical test yesterday.

Quoting victim's family members, police said Anwar entered the girl's house when none of her family members were present on Monday afternoon. He later forcibly raped the girl and fled the scene, police said.

Officer-in-Charge Mahmudul Alam of Parbatipur Police Station said following a case filed by the victim's mother with the police station the law enforcers arrested Anwar from his house the same night.

Police produced Anwar before a Dinajpur court yesterday that sent him to jail, the OC added.

Man to die for killing wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A Jessore court here yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing his second wife in Jessore town in 2001.

Judge Nitai Chandra Saha of Special Judge's Court also fined the convict, Helal Uddin of Shikarpur area in Bogra town, Tk 20,000.

According to the prosecution, an altercation took place between Helal and his second wife Rupali Khatun, 19, at their Barindapara residence over a family feud on June 14, 2001.

At one stage, Helal strangled Rupali and dumped her body inside a septic tank of his house.



A brick kiln, illegally set up on a farmland in Mojumdar Bazar area under Sadarpur upazila of Faridpur, affects crops and poses health hazard to the locals.

Day labourer beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A day labourer was beaten to death at Nijsarisha village in Ishwarganj upazila yesterday.

The victim was Abdur Rashid, 45, son of Imam Hossain of Huilakanda village in the upazila.

Quoting local people, Badrul Alam Khan, officer-in-charge of Ishwarganj Police Station, said when Abdur Hakim, uncle of the deceased, was returning home from a local market on Monday night, the light from his torch fell on the eyes of one Mozammel Haque, son of Noor Mohammad of adjacent Nijsarisha village.

Following the incident, Mozammel became very angry and allegedly beat up Hakim, police said.

The following day, Hakim along with his nephew Rashid and grandson Ziaur Rahman went to local UP member Farid Miah and informed him about the matter.

When Rashid and Ziaur were returning home, Mozammel and his men beat them mercilessly.

Critically injured Rashid later died at Ishwarganj Upazila Health Complex.

PHOTO: STAR

Brick field on farmlands

Aklas sets up two brick fields without DoE permission

A CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A brick field is being set up on farmland in Mojumdar Bazar area of Krishna Nagar union under Sadarpur upazila of the district before getting permission from the Directorate of Environment (DoE).

Locals allege that Md Aklas Fakir of Shoildobi village has started setting up the chimney and the brick yard of MAF Brick Field-2 on farmland without any permission from the DoE. He had built another brick field 50 yards away three years ago, they added.

Sources at the DoE of Faridpur said Aklas applied to them on September 6 for permission to build the second brick field, but they have

not given permission yet. Locals said production of crops has decreased in the last three years due to the smoke, ash and dust of the brick field. If he builds another brick field here, they will not be able to cultivate any crops, they added.

Farmer Shahidul Khan said, "I have a piece of farmland between the two brick fields, so Aklas is putting pressure on me to sell it to him."

Tapon Toyli of the area said he would get 200-250 maunds of eggplant on his one bigha of land before the first brick field was built, but now he got only 30-40 maunds. The smoke, ash and dust from the field destroyed all the flowers and leaves

of the vegetables, he added. Agriculture Officer of Sadarpur upazila Md Faradul Miraj said he will visit the area and try to find out the problems that the farmers may face in future.

Sub-director of Faridpur DoE Md Safate Ullah Talukdar said he did not know how Aklas got permission to build the field on farmland. He added that Aklas had applied to DoE for permission for a second brick field, but they have not given it yet.

He added that they would take steps after visiting the spot.

Aklas said he had followed all the rules of the DoE when building his first brick field.

Schoolbags for Teesta river basin students

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Several hundred students of different schools in the Teesta river basin area of Hatibandha upazila are now attending their classes with joy as new schoolbags reduced their fear of damaging books and other educational accessories by rain or river water.

With a vision to reduce dropouts and helping char children of poor families to educate non governmental organisation SKS under Safe School Project (SSP) started distributing the schoolbags in June this year.

At least 1,588 students of 25 schools, including 21 primary schools and four high schools, in eight villages under two unions of the upazila have received the schoolbags, funded by PLAN International Bangladesh, till September last.

The students in the char areas always remain worried as their books and other accessories may get damaged by rain and river water on way to their schools.

Aklima Akhter, a Class V student at Purbo Sinduma Government Primary School, said, "During the rainy season we have to travel on small boats to attend our classes while in dry season we wade through knee deep water and so, there is chance of damage to our books and other things."

Shafiqul Islam, project coordinator of SSP, said students from most poor families have been given the schoolbags.

Hatibandha Upazila Primary Education Officer (IUPEO) Hassan Atiqur Rahman said NGO is doing a helpful work by providing the schoolbags for the students in char areas.

Betel leaf business makes Khasi women self-reliant

Money brokers initially tried to disrupt their business, would-be customers laughed to see the women at work

MINTU DESHWARA with ANDREW EAGLE

Housewife Mira Yangyung, 45, from Jaintapur Khasi Para village in Sylhet's Jaintapur upazila used to be bound to money brokers, snared in a debt cycle. In her area it's a common scenario. But like an increasing number of other Khasi women, Mira took her future back. She became a businesswoman.

"The initial loan was to help meet family expenses," Mira says. "My husband was the sole income-earner and his earnings were insufficient." With the broker's loan stipulating that by way of repayment the family's betel leaf could only be sold to the broker, at a rate well below market prices, it proved a loan trap. Mira's life became one of crises and insults.

Like many Khasi women in her position, the future looked bleak. Mira saw only one way out: to realise the grand dream of financial independence.

Starting with another small loan from an NGO, Mira established her own betel leaf business. Finally she could take advantage of the higher bazar prices for her family's produce. But working in the market wasn't easy. Khasi women traders were a small minority there, in a world of Bengali

men. "It was hard to build good relationships with the Muslim betel leaf traders in the Jaintapur bus stand market at first," she says, "but I was determined. I just kept trying." She says that the money brokers initially tried to disrupt her business, while some would-be customers laughed to see a woman at work; they bought their betel leaf elsewhere.

Times have changed. That was five years ago and gradually Mira and several other Khasi women have become regular faces in the bazar. These days she earns Tk 20,000 per month, an income that contributes much to her family.

Archona Ryumbai, 50, from the same village, shares a similar history. "Only after I took a loan from the money brokers did I understand they would give only a minimal price for our betel leaf." She then cut connection with the brokers; but to take a more beneficial path wasn't straightforward. "I lacked capital. Fortunately, I found some of my relatives were willing to give me a loan."

Within six months Archona had paid her debts and now she also sells betel leaf in the bazar. "I find the other

Muslim traders are helpful," she says. "They give useful suggestions about how to run my business."

Neighbour Biva Suchiang, 48, took assistance from a bank to start her betel leaf trading business. "At first I faced problems because the banks are reluctant to provide finance to poor women, especially to an uneducated woman like me. They imposed difficult conditions like producing title documents to prove home and property ownership. But I got used to their systems."

According to assistant professor of plant pathology and seed science at the Sylhet agricultural university, Monirul Islam, betel leaf farming is more profitable than many other crops, if it's grown properly. As a traditional crop, it's an activity in which many Khasis have more than a little experience.

"Locals prefer my betel leaf," says another Khasi woman trader, Koruna Suchen, 50, who is busy washing leaves in the bazar as she speaks. "My betel leaf is fresh. Per bundle of 144 small betel leaves, what we call a kanta, the price is Tk. 30; for large size, Tk. 40. On average I earn from Tk 200 to Tk 300 per day."

Chondra Nongtuh, 51, also from Jaintapur Khasi Para, says many locals visit her home to buy the betel leaf direct. The rest of the crop she sells along with the other ladies at Jaintapur bus stand bazar. "Selling betel leaf makes us self-reliant," she says.

Monjur Hosain, a betel leaf trader from Jaintapur bus stand bazar told The Daily Star that along with his colleagues, he is happy when the Khasi women trade beside them. "Their system of business is very clean," he says. "They are helpful and for that, we like to cooperate with them."

"Some banks and NGOs have come around to the idea of Khasi women entrepreneurs," says Jaintapur upazila's chairman, Joyanal Abedin. "Arranging microcredit is now easier. It's a crucial development that has helped many Khasi women to become financially independent. I hope their efforts can inspire yet more."



Cheerful students of Dawabari Government Primary School at Dawabari village in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat are on way to school hanging newly distributed schoolbags around their shoulders.

PHOTO: STAR

Bamboo game on Devi Briddheshwari puja

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Hindus of seven villages in Mahendranagar union under Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila celebrated "bamboo game" on the occasion of Devi Briddheshwari Puja on Sunday, the first day of the Bangla month of Kartik.

The game has been celebrated in these villages for 200 years, when the puja for Devi Briddheshwari, locally known as Buri Puja, was started at Burirbazar Temple, Hindu devotees said. The area got its name -- Burir Bazar -- after the puja, they added.

The villages that celebrate Bamboo Game are Burir Bazar, Satpatki, Majhipara, Chinipara, Telipara, Mahendranagar and Majapara.

A member of Burir Bazar Devi Briddheshwari Temple Committee Dhirendranath Roy said the game is played in these villages in presence of many devotees who come from different areas. "At least one thousand bamboos from these villages are placed in the temple. They are taken away by the villagers after completion of the month-long puja," he said.

Shesob Chandra Roy, 68, a devotee of Majhipara, said he has been celebrating bamboo game every year since his childhood. "My late grandfather told me he also played the game from his childhood," he said, adding that only male devotees take part in the game.

Atul Chandra Roy, 48, of Chinipara, said they place the bamboos in front of the Devi Briddheshwari after playing the game, and pray for the Devi's blessing. "Mainly we pray for our children, and we believe Devi Briddheshwari blesses our children," he added.

A month-long Buri Fair is held during Kartik. Hindu devotees come from different areas in Lalmonirhat and neighbouring districts Kurigram, Gaibandha, Rangpur and Nilphamari. They come to seek blessings from the Devi for their children.

Priest of the temple Kanai Chandra Chakrabarty said it is a religious custom in these villages to celebrate bamboo game on the occasion of Devi Briddheshwari puja every year. "All devotees take part in the puja and pray to Devi Briddheshwari for receiving her blessing," he added.

Elderly woman found dead

A CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

An elderly woman was found dead at Pashchim Bhashanchar village in Faridpur Sadar upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased was Helana Begum, 60, wife of late Abdur Sattar of the village.

She went out of home on Monday and did not return since then, said the victim's son Md Tokon.

Informed by locals, police recovered the body from the spot and sent it to Faridpur Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy, said Assistant Superintendent of Police SM Mahiuddin.

Someone might have killed the woman and dumped the body in the area, said the ASP.



Khasi women sell betel leaf at Jaintapur bazar in Jaintapur Upazila of Sylhet. The photo was taken a few days ago.

PHOTO: STAR