

# 'Attack on Santals pre-planned'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Santals, other indigenous people, and members of the civil society yesterday said attack on the Santal people in Gaibandha was pre-planned.

They said this at a human chain programme in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj protesting the barbaric attack on Santal families in Gaibandha.

They organised the programme under the banner of "Santal tea workers."

They alleged that Santals were victims of an attack carried out jointly by ruling party leaders, local administration and police, aiming to evict them from their land.

They demanded security of the ethnic minority people and return of their lands that were acquired to cultivate sugarcane for Rangpur Sugar Mill.

They also urged the government to settle the issue as soon as possible by giving the ownership of the lands to Santals.

The protesters demanded immediate arrest of the attackers and exemplary punishment to them.

Tea worker Sumon Murmu hails from Golapganj village under Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila, but lives in Baikunthapur tea garden of Madhabpur upazila. He was a participant in the programme.

Sumon told this correspondent that his parents had lost everything in the attack. Most of his relatives asked him to go to India, he added.

Jagoron Jubo Forum President Mohon Robidas alleged that a local ruling party member with law enforcers and sugar mill authorities planned the attack on the Santals.

Local UP member Babul Chowhan, Sadhon Chowhan, and Baikunthapur Tea Garden Union General Secretary Monib Karmakar spoke at the human chain.

# FOUR KIDS MURDER Hearing continues

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A Habiganj court yesterday recorded the testimony of the witnesses in the four kids' murder case for the sixth day.

District and Sessions Judge Md Atabullah began recording the testimony with a hearing, said Special Public Prosecutor Trilok Kanti Chowdhury Bijan.

Wahid Mia and Abdul Kadir of Sundrateki village gave their testimonies.

Monir, 7, Zakaria Shuvo, 8, Mohammad Tajel Mia, 10, and Ismail Mia, 10, went missing on February 12 after they went to a nearby playground.

Five days later, their bodies were found buried under sand near the village.

Officer-in-Charge Moktadir Alam of the Detective Branch of police pressed charges against nine people on April 5.

The District Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal issued arrest warrant against three fugitives on June 28.



Betel nut traders at Sonarpara bazar in Ukhia upazila of Cox's Bazar remain busy as huge quantities of the item are ready for supply to wholesalers from different districts. The photo was taken a few days ago. PHOTO: STAR

# Bumper betel nut yield in Cox's Bazar

MOHAMMAD ALI ZINNAT, Cox's Bazar

Farmers in the district are all smiles this season as they reaped bumper crop of betel nuts.

Health department employee Abdul Hamid has a betel nut grove on two bighas of land in his coastal village of Sonarpara, and is happy that he harvested bumper crop.

Sonarpara is famous throughout the country for producing high quality betel nuts.

Abdullah Al-Mahmud, a trader from Teknaf, said he earned Tk 1.40 lakh so far from nuts produced on 30 decimals of land in his homestead. He expects to earn Tk 50,000 more by selling the rest.

Teknaf Bazar in Teknaf Sadar upazila, Shamlapur Bazar in Baharchhara, Naya Para Bazar and Sonarpara Bazar in Ukhia, and Fakira Bazar in Ramu Sadar are the big trading centres of betel nuts.

Trader Sadar Ahmed Kaalu in Sonarpara wholesale market said betel nut worth Tk one crore is traded on each day of the hat, which sits twice a week. Traders buy high quality betel nuts and send them to other districts and also export them, he added.

Wholesalers sell 80 betel nuts produced in Sonarpara for Tk 200 to Tk 220. Medium quality

nuts are sold at Tk 150 to Tk 200 per 80 pieces.

Traders in the wholesale market at Teknaf Sadar send the nuts to wholesalers in different places of the country.

Faruk Ahmed and Rafiq Uddin Mahmud of Court Bazar said raw betel nuts are sold after being kept under water for about two months, adding that there is high demand for wet nuts in Cox's Bazar.

Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer at the district's Department of Agricultural Extension Ashish Kumar Dey said betel nut trees normally bloom in Ashar and Srabon and produce the nuts in Ashwin and Kartik.

Betel nuts are produced in almost all eight upazilas, but Ramu, Ukhia and Teknaf are very favourable for betel nut farming and most of the produce comes from there.

Ashish said 3,400 hectares of land have been brought under betel nut cultivation in the current season and about 27,000 people are directly involved in the farming. Around 1.36 lakh tonnes of betel nuts worth about Tk 272 crore are produced in the district every season.

First Vice President of Cox's Bazar Chamber of Commerce Abu Morshed Chowdhury Khoka said betel nut has a positive impact on the rural economy.

# Bean growers' hopes shattered

Virus attacks winter vegetable on 2,500 hectares of land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Bean leaves attacked by virus worry thousands of farmers in three upazilas of the district.

Leaves of the winter vegetable on 2,500 hectares of land in Belabo, Shibpur and Raipur upazilas have turned yellowish due to the virus attack, said Md Latif Hossain, deputy director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

Farmer Abdur Rashid of Khamarer Char village in Belabo upazila said as the virus infected bean is not sold in the market, it is now used as fuel in the kitchen.

They used pesticide to protect the fields from insects but all went in vain, another bean grower Md Jaher Mia of the village said, adding that local agricultural officers are yet to visit the fields after the incident.

When they went to discuss about virus attack on the bean leaves, the farmers avoided sitting with them, said the agricultural officer.



# Coral in abundance

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

It is a time for celebration for fishermen of Noakhali and Laxmipur as they are passing busy time netting coral in the Meghna river.

Fishermen of Hatya, Subarna Char and Companiganj upazilas in Noakhali and Ramgati and Komol Nagar upazilas in Laxmipur said the marine fish has recently been found in water bodies, canals and ponds in the coastal region near the Meghna.

The fish was rarely seen in the last few decades in the area, they said.

As the fish is very tasty and lucrative, people prefer coral to hilsa most of the

time, local elders said, adding that one kilogram of the fish is being sold at about Tk 500.

Fisherman Samor Jaldas of Laxmipur said the coral fish is now available in Switch Gate canal, Jugesh canal and Batir canal in the area.

He recently caught a coral weighing seven kg in Batir canal and sold it to local gold trader Josh Raj Kuri for Tk 3,500.

Helal Uddin, president of Hatya Mathshajibi Samity, said huge amount of coral was caught by the fishermen this season.

The fishes are now being sold in Dhaka and Chittagong, he said.

# NITYARANJAN MURDER 'Arrest real killers'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

People of Hemayetpur staged a demonstration in the district town yesterday, demanding arrest of the real killers of Nityaranjan Pandey and exemplary punishment to them.

They made the demand under the banner of 'People from all walks of life.'

Backed by local Awami League (AL) leaders and activists, the protesters paraded the main streets of the district headquarter and held a rally in front of the Pabna deputy commissioner's office.

President of Pabna municipality unit of AL Shajahan Mamun, district Jubo League President Sharif Uddin, and Bangladesh Chattrra League President Ruhul Amin spoke at the rally.

Nityaranjan, 60, who was the Sebayet of Anukul Chandra Shatshanga Ashram, was hacked to death on June 10 when he was taking his regular morning walk about half a kilometre away from the ashram. A militant group claimed the responsibility of the murder.

Police submitted the charge sheet after four months of investigation, accusing 11 local criminals, on October 31, which was accepted by the court last week, said Munshi Abdul Kuddus, the investigation officer of the case said.

"Earlier four of the accused gave confessional statement to the court, mentioning the names of the other accused," said Additional Superintendent of Police in Pabna Md Siddikur Rahman.

# FATHER MAIMED FOR PROTESTING STALKING OF GIRLS 14 sent to jail in Jhenidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A Jhenidah court yesterday sent 14 people to jail for their alleged involvement in stalking two sisters and maiming their father for protesting the stalking in Kaliganj upazila of the district on October 16.

The accused surrendered before the court of Jhenidah Judicial Magistrate Kazi Ashrafuzzaman. The court sent them to jail, rejecting their bail prayers.

Earlier on Tuesday, a High Court (HC) bench of Justice Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque and Justice Mohammad Ullah directed Jhenidah police to arrest the accused in two cases filed for stalking two girls and injuring their father Shahanur Alam, 52.

The court also asked Jhenidah superintendent of police and the officer-in-charge of Kaliganj Police Station to submit a report before the court in this regard by November 27.

The HC bench passed the order in a suo moto move following a report published by Bangla daily the Prothom Alo on Tuesday.

Locals, seeking anonymity, said frightened by the constant threat of the stalkers to withdraw the cases, one of the victims, a Class VII student, has stopped going to school.

The case statements said a gang allegedly led by UP member Kamal Hossain, secretary of Nalbhangra union unit Jubo League, waylaid Shahanur and beat him up with iron rods on October 16, as he complained to leaders of the village for stalking his daughters.

Shahanur's both legs had to be amputated at National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor) in the capital on November 6.

Shahanur's brother-in-law Yakub Ali filed a case with the Jhenidah court on October 18 after Kaliganj police refused to record it.

On November 9, Shahanur's brother Shamaul Islam filed another case against 16 people with Kaliganj Police Station for attempted murder.

# MINDLESS USE OF PESTICIDES IN LAMONIRHAT Growers, consumers at risk

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Indiscriminate spraying of pesticides in crop fields, especially those used for vegetable cultivation, poses serious health hazards for both the farmers and consumers across the district.

Farmers hardly use personal protective equipment (PPE) and masks while spraying pesticide, and so, they remain under high risk of different diseases, especially lung problems, headache, dysentery, vomiting, fever, and weakness.

They often use excessive amounts of pesticides in the vegetable fields with the hope of getting bumper yield, and they reap and sell it within a few hours of spraying the chemicals, putting consumers under serious health risk.

"I use pesticides to kill insects but I don't know about the quantity of using pesticide. I have never got any suggestion from agriculture officials about using pesticides," said Abdul Jabbar, 50, a vegetable grower at Karnapur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar.

"Very often we use pesticides on vegetable plants in the afternoon and harvest it the next morning to sell in the local market. It is not possible to grow

better vegetables without using pesticides," said Soleman Miah, 55, another vegetable grower at the same village.

Jobed Miah, 26, a farmer at Fulgachh village of Mogholhat union in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, was seen spraying pesticide in his cauliflower field without wearing PPE, even mask.

"I know that spraying pesticide without wearing PPE and mask is harmful. We don't have the ability to purchase PPE. I have a mask but I feel uneasy if I wear it," he said.

Saber Ali, 55, another farmer at the same village, said he does not know the necessity of wearing PPE and mask during spraying of pesticide in the crop field.

He, however, admitted that he suffers from fever, pain and headache after spraying pesticide.

Dabiar Rahman, 56, a farmer at Kamlabari village of Aditmari upazila, said he and his children spray pesticide in the vegetable fields without wearing PPE and mask.

"We feel some problems in our bodies after spraying pesticide, and we get treatment for it," he said.

"Despite knowing the health risk, we have to purchase pesticide sprayed vege-

tables from the market. It seems it is not possible to get chemical-free vegetables without growing it under our own supervision," said Sohel Rana, 55, a resident at Thana Road in Lalmonirhat town.

M Jaman Shahin, sub-assistant plant protection officer of Aditmari Upazila Agriculture Office, said, "Following our advice, some farmers have started using PPE and mask while spraying pesticides, but most of the farmers still ignore the important matter."

Dr Azmol Haque, resident medical officer in Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital, said those who spray pesticides in their crop fields without wearing mask and PPE remain highly vulnerable to attack by different diseases, especially lung problems.

Bidubhush Roy, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Lalmonirhat, said agriculture officials regularly visit fields and provide suggestions to the farmers about the safe use of pesticide but many farmers do not follow it.

Stakeholders have urged conducting awareness campaigns among the farmers about safety measures and optimum use of pesticides in crops, especially vegetables.



IGNORANCE OR CALLOUSNESS? Without any safety measure, a farmer sprays pesticide at his cauliflower field in Fulgachh village of Mogholhat union under Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. PHOTO: STAR