

Disrespect to language martyrs!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Shaheed Minar commemorates the martyrs who laid down their lives during the Language Movement of 1952 in then East Pakistan. But how do we respect our Shaheed Minar? Nasir Uddin, a fruit trader, said many people have been dumping garbage near the Shaheed Minar over the years. "Is this how we show our respect for the Shaheed Minar?" he asked. Munem Ahmed, a visitor to the Shaheed Minar, said people of the district do not come to the Shaheed Minar to pay their respect to the martyrs due to bad smell coming from the garbage. Mohammad Ali, a resident of Magura area under Kulara Municipality, said the situation worsens even after light showers. "What a way to honour the Shaheeds!" he added with a hint of sarcasm. Mayor of Kulara Municipality Shafi Alam Yunus said he was not aware of the matter. "We will take immediate action against it," the mayor said.



The protected archaeological site of Rohanpur Octagonal Tomb in Gomostapur upazila under Chapainawabganj is getting ruined due to alleged negligence of the authorities concerned. Inset, local land grabbers build several houses just beside Naoda Buruj, another archaeological site in the area.

Archaeological site in ruins

RABIUL HASAN, Chapainawabganj

The protected archaeological site of Naoda Buruj in Gomostapur upazila under the district is getting encroached by illegal occupiers, thanks to the negligence of the authorities responsible for its maintenance and preservation. Over fifty poor families from different areas have built houses at the site and people often dig soil and collect bricks from there, locals alleged. The building, also locally known as Sar Buruj, now resembles a mound and there is a signboard set by the Department of Archaeology. During a recent visit, this correspondent found a woman using the top of the mound for drying paddy while two antique black stones were seen lying on the soil. Earlier on different times, locals found some antiques from the area and after being informed, officials of the archaeology department collected those from them, they said. Mohammad Moynu, a carpenter, said he built a house at the site and started living there with his family as he is a poor landless man. Rice mill worker Razia Sultana and truck driver Johurul Islam are also among over 50 poor families who built houses around Naoda Buruj. Atikur Rahman, teacher of Yousuf Ali College in Rohanpur, said the Department of Archaeology hung a signboard but they have hardly taken any initiative to preserve the site. Some one kilometre from Naoda Buruj, there is another archaeological site of Rohanpur Octagonal Tomb, a Muslim architecture, at Gombujpara in Gomostapur upazila. It is decorated with exquisite terracotta plaques, although the designs have faded in course of time. There is only one guard to look after the two sites, said officials of the archaeology department. Nahid Sultana, regional director of the Department of Archaeology, Bogra, said, "The mound of Naoda Buruj seems to be the ruins of a Buddhist temple. We have taken a project for an excavation work that will start early next year." The department has urged the local administration to remove the illegally built houses and other structures from the site, but in vain, she said.

Attack on Santals condemned

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Several indigenous people's organisations, along with people from all walks of life yesterday urged the government to ensure the security of the ethnic minority people. The speakers said this while addressing an hour long human chain, protesting the recent attack on the Santal people in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila. Local people under the banner of 'Jatiya Adivasi Parishad', 'Adivasi Kalyan Samity' and 'Santal Students' Union' jointly organised the rally in front of Boda Upazila Parishad premises on Panchagarh-Dhaka highway. A number of leaders and activists of different political parties and other socio-cultural organisations also expressed their solidarity with the victims during a discussion at the venue. The speakers alleged that the attack was made only to evict the Santal people from their lands in a bid to grab those. They demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the attackers and urged the government to take necessary steps to settle the issue soon. On November 6, police fired several rounds of teargas-shells during an eviction drive at Shahebganj sugarcane farm in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila that left at least two Santals killed and several others injured.

Fulbaria College protest postponed

Minister promises to work for nationalisation of the college

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The ongoing movement for nationalisation of Fulbaria Degree College in the district has been postponed for one month, following discussion between the representatives of agitating teachers and students, and the political leaders and administration officials. Meanwhile, normalcy is returning in Fulbaria municipal area after withdrawal of Section 144 on Tuesday night. The local administration had imposed the Section on Sunday midnight as a flame of protest spread in Fulbaria municipality after Abul Kalam Azad, 55, assistant professor of botany department of Fulbaria Degree College, and passer-by Safor Ali, 65, were killed during a clash between police and demonstrating teachers and students on Sunday noon. Over 100 others were also injured, 10 of them seriously, as police swooped on the demonstrators in Fulbaria that time. The teachers, students and local people started the agitation one and a half months ago after the college was left out from the nationalisation list. Established in 1972, Fulbaria

Degree College has six thousand students and 102 teachers and the institution runs honours course in seven subjects, in addition to intermediate and degree (pass) courses, said the college teachers. But it was deprived of nationalisation although Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Mohila College, a non-MPO college, established in 2009 in the upazila, was nationalised, said teachers and students. Advocate Emdadul Haque Selim, son of AL lawmaker Muslem Uddin, is the president of Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Mohila College governing body. A delegation of the agitating teachers and students held a meeting with Religious Affairs Minister Principal Motiur Rahman, lawmaker Muslem Uddin, Mymensingh Divisional Commissioner GM Saleh Uddin, Deputy Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun, Deputy Commissioner Md Khalilur Rahman, Superintendent of Police Syed Nurul Islam at Mymensingh Circuit House yesterday afternoon. "Following the discussion, we have postponed our protest programmes for one

month. The minister assured us that he will work for nationalisation of the college," said college teacher SM Abul Hashem, also convener of Phulbaria Degree College Nationalisation Committee. It was also decided that the present committee will be dissolved and college governing body President Muslem Uddin and college Principal Nasir Uddin Khan will resign from the posts soon, the teachers said. Teachers and students went to Fulbaria Degree College yesterday although there were no classes due to holiday, said Mashrufa Sultana Mimi, a teacher of the college. A two-member team of National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh led by Akhter Hossain visited the college yesterday and talked to the teachers, students and local people, college sources said. In connection with Sunday's bloody incident, a brother of killed Safor Ali filed an unnatural death case while police filed a case for assaulting law enforcers accusing 400 to 500 unidentified people. Four separate probe bodies were formed to investigate the incident.

Woman found dead in forest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The throat-slit body of a housewife was recovered from a sal forest in Birganj upazila of the district yesterday. The deceased, Nurjahan Begum, 30, was wife of Hasinur Rahman of Dahonda in the upazila. Following a case filed by victim's brother Kamal Hossain, police detained Nurjahan's husband Hasinur, said Officer-in-Charge Akkas Ali of Birganj Police Station. Locals spotted Nurjahan's body inside the forest around 11:00am and informed the police, the OC said. Police recovered the body and sent it to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

FLOOD-TOLERANT AMAN

A ray of hope for farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Flood-tolerant varieties of aman have brought new hope to at least 130 flood affected farmers of eight char villages at the Teesta river basin in Sadar upazila. Under a project titled STRASA of International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the flood-hit growers were given seeds of flood-tolerant aman varieties -- BRRI-11, BRRI-12, BRRI-51 and BRRI-52 -- free of cost by RDRS Bangladesh, a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Flood affected farmer Ashraf Ali of Char Kalmati village said "I cultivated BRRI-52 on my four bighas of land submerged under water for 15-20 days this year and lost hope of good production, but finally I got 68 maunds of paddy from the fields." Saiful Islam, agriculture technical officer of RDRS Bangladesh, said when it was found that the farmers had no flood-tolerant aman seeds, they distributed the seeds free of cost. "We also provided technical support to char farmers during farming of the flood-tolerant aman variety paddy," he said.



Some female school students of char villages in Munshiganj cross the Padma river to attend classes by a trawler amid risk of accident. The photo was taken recently.

Crossing Padma a daily risk for Munshiganj students

FARHANA MIRZA with ANDREW EAGLE

Commuting to school should be a pleasure but it isn't always. Early morning rush and worries about homework in the cities students have to contend with traffic jams, making it a challenge to arrive on time. But spare a thought for those students who live on chars in the Padma River in Munshiganj. For them, to walk for kilometres and catch up to two ferries is usual, just to reach the school gate. Approximately 2,000 students from 15 char villages in Munshiganj rely on ferry or trawler to go to school. "There's not always time for breakfast," says Hanif, a class-four student from Patulir Char who attends Uttal Dighal Primary Model School. "We have to leave home very early. There are two ferries and sometimes we can't reach home again before nightfall." "After walking through open, scrubby land we have to wait for the ferry to cross the Padma River, sometimes for hours," says Noyon Akter, a class six student of Louhajong Girls' Pilot High School. "After that we need local motorised transport such as a 'nosimon' to reach school." The headmaster of Uttor Digholi Government Primary School in Louhajong's

Ghoradour Bazar, Razzak Mridha, says that up to one-third of the school's 900 students come from char areas. "They suffer a lot especially in the rainy season," he says. "There aren't any roads on the Padma shoals," says the chairman of Louhajong's Tuitia union, Hajji Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Dhali. "But Professor Sheguffa Yesmin Emily has recently organised for the construction of one road which will benefit students from ten shoal villages. Also solar lights are available in shoal areas nowadays, and a primary school is due to be constructed soon. Already a mosque and madrasa are built there." Indeed a Japan-based organisation has already established the first school in the char area with the help of local youths. "It's true that thousands of students attend school with great difficulty," says the local upazila nirbahi officer Md. Khalekuzzaman. "But eventually the obstacles they face will be overcome. We have the Padma Bridge under construction in this upazila. A water treatment project and Olympic institute will also be built here. Change is on its way and includes a proposal to establish three government primary schools in the char areas."

Young entrepreneur shows the way

Innovative and hard working Babul has made 10-acre bottle gourd farm at Hatiber jungle in Mymensingh's Bhaluka

SHYKH SERAJ

I have dreamt for a long time that the heroes of our country will come out of the villages. Today, you all can see the real growth of Bangladesh, mostly with the contribution from the rural people. We can't deny the role of the people, mostly from rural areas, who are working so hard abroad to boost up our remittance. These rural people are working silently, yet quite effectively, for emergence of Bangladesh as one of the leading developing countries in the world. To trigger this development process, young and educated entrepreneurs have joined in. They have taken farming to a different level by putting modern education and indigenous knowledge together. Through innovation and hard work, they have overcome family poverty and showed the way to many other prospective entrepreneurs. One of the finest examples of such success is young farmer Babul at Hatiber in Mymensingh's Bhaluka. Beside the cultivation of aman paddy, Babul has raised bottle gourd plants on ten acres of land. Such an enormously large garden adorned with thousands of bottle gourds can hardly be seen elsewhere in the whole country. The innovative youth has worked with full courage and endeavour to make the initiative a success. "I am from a very poor family. I had to overcome so many hurdles to complete my graduation," said Babul. After completing formal education, a youth would generally try to get a job for a decent earning. But Babul did something through which he can earn as well as employ others. "My dream is to eradicate poverty

out of my region," said a confident Babul. Starting the work at Hatiber, a jungle area with wild animals, one year ago, Babul had to put much effort to turn the once uninhabited place a very resourceful one. He with the help of other locals cleaned up the place and with the assistance of family and local loan he started his bottle gourd farming. Every other day Babul sends 1500 to 2000 bottle gourds to market. This season he has already sold bottle gourds worth five lakh taka and hopes to get at least another eight lakh taka from selling the winter vegetable this year. "The way I'm getting profits, I hope to repay the loan very soon," he says. A better and flexible market system would further enhance the profit, said Babul, who plans to extend the area of bottle gourd cultivation in future.

Shykh Seraj is a Media and Agriculture Development Activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and recipient of Ekushey Padak, FAO A.H. Boerma Award and many other prestigious accolades. At Channel i, he is Director and Head of News. He is also Director and Host of the popular agro-documentary, "Hridoye Mati O Manush".



Babul's college teacher Masud Rana has been with him from the very beginning. And, Babul is certainly an idol to the young people of his area. Earlier the lion's share of the profit would go to the pocket of middlemen but now farmers are earning a lot better as the buyers come straight to the field and buy

fresh and healthy bottle gourds for good amounts, local farmers said. I saw smiles of accomplishment among Babul and other farmers at Hatiber as the popular winter vegetable has already started bringing them good earning. Dear readers, the very idea of a young entrepreneur would usually make one imagine a privileged person from a city. But to me, the real entrepreneurs are young farmers like Babul who have fought hard throughout their life. They experimented and invented on their own. They faced crisis and tackled it quite boldly. And young entrepreneurs like Babul work not only for their own but for rest of the people around and for the country as a whole. Their success means the development of Bangladesh, its strong economy. I hope many others will come up with new ventures, being inspired by the success of people like Babul.



Shykh Seraj visits Babul's bottle gourd garden as farmers collect the popular winter vegetable for direct sale, avoiding any interference of middlemen.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH