

## Fog halts ferry movement in Padma

Around 400 vehicles remain stranded on both sides of the river

STAR REPORT

Movement of water transport on Shimulia-Kawrakandi and Chandpur-Shariatpur routes in Munshiganj and Chandpur remained suspended in the river Padma due to dense fog since early yesterday.

The ferry and launch services that came to a halt around 3:00am on the ferry ghats remained suspended till filing of this report as of yesterday noon.

Manager of Harinaghat ferry terminal Emran Hussain said suspension of movement of vessels is causing problems for travelers due to the severe cold.

Suspension of the service caused a huge traffic tailback of vehicles on both sides of the river. Around 400 trucks, buses and other vehicles remained stranded on both sides of the river.

## Protest against threat to kill Sylhet Bapa leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Speakers at a rally in Habiganj town yesterday protested the threat to kill Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa), Sylhet unit.

Bapa, Habiganj unit and Khowai river water keeper organised the programme chaired by Habiganj Bapa president Ekramul Wadud.

On December 14, Sylhet Kotwali police picked up Kim for interrogation on receiving complaint that he had made derogatory comments on Islam on Facebook.

The environmentalist activist was picked up from his house in Sylhet city.

He was later released after police investigation found him completely innocent.

According to police, someone using a fake Facebook account in Kim's name or Photoshop circulated hate words against Islam on Facebook recently.

Although Kim was innocent, a number of Facebook users blamed him for the incident and continued threatening to kill him through the social media, said Wadud.

Environmentalist Tofazzel Sohel, who presented the keynote paper, said "Kim always raises his voice against deforestation. It is one kind of conspiracy to kill him."



A number of students from Patigar community in Jhalakathi's Rajapur upazila pass their free time in weaving shitalpati (cool mats) to manage their schooling cost at an early age.

PHOTO: STAR

# Patigar children enjoy weaving mats

## Youngsters enthusiastic to participate in ancient heritage

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL with ANDREW EAGLE

For Jhalakathi's Patigar community, weaving soft and cool shitalpati mats from stalks of the murta, a reed-like plant locally called paitara, is far more than a job: it's an ancient heritage. Unsurprisingly, the community's children are enthusiastic to participate. After school, Patigar children, especially the girls, are often busy mat-weaving, for them a cherished pastime.

"Weaving mats is fun," says Antora, a student of class one from Hailakathi Primary School in Rajapur upazila's Mathbari union. "To us it's like playing."

"We use our free time to weave

mats with family members and friends," says Puja, a class-five student of the same school. Along with primary-school-age friends Antora, Bristi and Jui, Puja is to be found one afternoon busily weaving a mat on a temple veranda beside her home.

"I learned to make shitalpati from my aunt about five years ago and have done it ever since," she says, adding that much of her school vacation time is also dedicated to weaving mats. "I need about 25 days to complete a moderate sized mat, which can be sold for up to Tk 1200."

According to Patigar elders, children in the community learn to weave from family members when they are around five years

old. It's considered an essential part of a child's education.

"Some will give up the craft for other professions," says Shushil Patigar, 60. "Others will weave as adults too."

"In our community girls and women in particular who have superior weaving skills are highly respected," says Jui's father Naruttom Patigar. "The children are most often keen to learn weaving skills as it is our ancestral profession."

With dexterous, smaller fingers, shitalpati mats woven by the younger Patigars can also be of favourable quality. Apart from being a chance for the youngsters to actively participate in and learn their heritage, the mats they

weave add much-needed taka to family coffers.

"Even at such a tender age my daughter is able to contribute to our family's income," says Jui's father, who explains that in a climate of falling demand and prices for shitalpati mats driven in part by competition from plastic mats an extra pair of hands involved in the weaving is particularly welcome. "I appreciate her contribution very much."

"It's become very difficult to survive on shitalpati mat weaving nowadays," Naruttom adds. Around 100 families in Rajapur upazila continue to be engaged in shitalpati manufacture.

Despite difficult times in more recent years, money is not the sole focus of mat-weaving for the Patigars. "All our sorrows and pleasures are mixed into the art," says Jui's mother Shima Patigar, who like her daughter learnt the skills of weaving at a young age.

For their children too, the Patigar community is equally serious about formal education. "Patigar children are regular in school," says Hailakathi Primary School teacher Meherunnesa. "They are very attentive to their studies. I am impressed by their work and happy that my students are able to contribute to their families' livelihoods without compromising on their schooling."

## Lucky coupon or gambling!

Month-long handicrafts fair in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

In the name of 'lucky coupon', gambling is going on unabated at the month-long small and cottage industries fair at Collectorate ground in the town, thanks to the ignorance of local administration and police about the matter.

State Minister for Social Welfare Md Nuruzzaman Ahmed inaugurated the fair on December 19.

Students, farmers, day labourers, housewives and even little kids get engaged in gambling arranged under the nose of law enforcers, said local trader Mizanur Rahman Mizan, 45, of Uttara Road in the town.

He blamed Jahangir Alam, director of Dainik Adarsho Lucky Coupon, and the organiser of the fair Lalmonirhat munici-

pality authority for doing the illegal trade in the name of lucky coupon.

Mayor of the municipality Reazul Islam Rintu said lucky coupon is not gambling at all. Rather, it is one kind of entertainment.

Jahangir Alam said they offered prizes including motorcycles, gold ornaments and refrigerators against the coupons.

"The organiser of the fair got permission from the district administration to play lucky coupon and we are just monitoring the law and order situation at the fair," said the OC.

Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner AFM Alauddin Khan said permission was given for lucky coupon draw against buying products at the stalls in the fair, but not for selling the lucky coupon ticket for gambling.



Seventy eight-year-old Saidur Rahman, a landless freedom fighter, is guarding a poultry farm in Khochabari area under Lalmonirhat Sadar municipality at midnight.

PHOTO: STAR

## Fellows come to aid of tortured FF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Over a hundred freedom fighters of Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila came together yesterday to help their injured fellow Farid Uddin of Bichhondoi village under Dawabari union and started to rebuild his house.

Meanwhile, injured Farid Uddin and his college going son Ali Hossain are still undergoing treatment at Hatibandha Upazila Health Complex.

Local freedom fighters said hopefully the construction of the two new tin-shed rooms on the same land, from where his family were evicted, will be completed in seven days time.

Hatibandha Upazila Muktiyoddha Sangsad Commander Abdul Gafur said local freedom fighters at their personal initiatives are providing all the assistance to rebuild Farid Uddin's house.

"The culprits will not dare to face us again as the freedom fighters are united now and took their stand against them," Gafur added.

Farid's wife Achhiya Begum, who along with four of her family members are staying under the open sky since the attack, said she is glad to see the unity among the freedom fighters, adding that "We are happy that our house is being rebuilt."

Local Awami League leader Shamsul Islam Sufi, also a former Jamaat leader, and his men attacked the FF Farid, 73, and his family members twice on December 12 and 14 to occupy his 10 decimals of household land at Bichhondoi village in Hatibandha upazila.

Following a case filed with Hatibandha Police Station against eight named and five to six unnamed accused, police arrested Shamsul Islam Sufi, 47, son of late Soleman Goni, his younger brother Saiful Islam Manik,

43, and one of his relatives Emdadul Haque, 38.

Muktiyoddha Commander Abdul Gafur at a protest meeting on December 21 warned of a tougher agitation if police fail to arrest all the culprits involved in the attack by today (December 28).

Officer-in-Charge Rezaul Karim of Hatibandha Police Station said although the other accused of the case fled their houses, police are trying to nab them as early as possible.



Local freedom fighters together have started to build a new house for torture victim fellow fighter Farid Uddin at Bichhondoi village in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: STAR

## Accused shot, 2 policemen hurt in Bogra 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

An accused in a murder case sustained bullet injuries during a 'gunfight' between his cohorts and law enforcers at Shiladebirghat area in Shibganj upazila of the district early yesterday.

Two police constables of Shibganj Police Station were also injured in the incident.

Victim, Bishal Mia, 23, a listed criminal and main accused of local youth Shahin murder case is undergoing treatment at Bogra Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital.

Injured constables, Jewel Rana and Faruqul Islam were admitted at Bogra Police Lines Hospital in the town.

Police said, acting on a tip-off, they raided Shiladebirghat area when a gang were planning to conduct subversive activities in the area early yesterday.

Sensing the presence of the police team, Bishal and his cohorts opened fire, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate, police said, adding that Bishal sustained bullet wounds while his cohorts managed to flee.

Police later seized a foreign-made pistol and three bullets from the spot, said Gaziur Rahman, senior assistant superintendent of police in Bogra.

Earlier, criminals stabbed Shahin Mia, 27, of Sikandarabad village in the upazila, who used to work at a local barber shop, to death on Monday afternoon.

Deceased's father Nizam Uddin filed a case with Shibganj Police Station against two named and four to five unidentified accused the same night.

## 78-year-old freedom fighter works as night guard

Alleges railway employee stole his enlistment number

S DILIP ROY with ANDREW EAGLE

Seventy-eight-year-old Saidur Rahman, from Khochabari area of Lalmonirhat municipality, says that in 1971 he fought under company commander Alif Uddin in Sector No 5, in different areas of Nilphamari and Panchagarh districts. But the elderly gentleman, who is landless, currently works as a night guard at a poultry farm, earning just Tk 3,500 per month. He is not registered as a freedom fighter, he says, because a railway employee has falsely claimed his number.

"After independence, we went away to Dhaka where I peddled rickshaw for thirty years," he says, "so I was unaware of the freedom fighters' gazette and didn't enlist my name."

In 2005, taking advantage of Saidur's lengthy absence, one Shahidur Rahman, son of late Shahur Uddin of Sadeknagar village, used his identification number 42734 to enlist himself as a freedom fighter in Saidur's place, according to Saidur. "His date of

birth is 1 August 1959 while mine is 1 July 1938," explains Saidur, "and neither Shahidur's name nor his father's name matches the records from India's Lalbarta list. How he enlisted himself in the gazette with my number I do not know."

For many years now Saidur has been attempting to correct the error, to no avail.

Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy general manager of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Kalyan Trust's Welfare Department, and Abul Bashar, acting secretary (Administration) of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad's Central Command Council, issued certificates to Saidur Rahman on November 28, attesting to the correctness of Saidur's claim.

Ziauddin Tarique Ali, trusty and member secretary of Liberation War Museum, had issued another certificate to Saidur Rahman on November 19 to this effect.

"I have submitted a written complaint to the Liberation War Affairs Ministry," says Saidur, "and I hope

their verification committee will call me and Shahidur Rahman so that I can properly access my entitlements soon."

In the meantime, the alleged fake freedom fighter Shahidur Rahman continues to work as a fourth class employee of Bangladesh Railway in the Lalmonirhat office. Contacted, Shahidur says he is not interested in talking to any journalist in this regard but is ready to reply to the freedom fighters' verification committee if they contact him.

Freedom fighters in Lalmonirhat urge the concerned authorities to take prompt steps to settle the dispute and resolve the matter to ensure the genuine freedom fighter is matched to number 42734 immediately.

"My job as a night guard is insufferable," says Saidur. "It's really difficult to stay active throughout the night but I'm bound to do this job since I have no income alternative." Saidur lives with wife Hamida Begum, 68, and son Hamidul Islam, 40.