

Elderly ayurvedic physician murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A seventy-five-year-old ayurvedic physician was hacked to death at Huda-Milemari village in Shailkupa upazila of the district yesterday.

The victim, Asalot Sheikh, son of late Sonaulah Sheikh of the village, was a village ayurvedic doctor, called *kabiraj* in Bangladesh, as well as a farmer.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Shailkupa Police Station Toriqul Islam said locals found Asalot's body lying in a field and informed the police.

The OC said Asalot might have been killed over previous enmity, adding that the body bore marks of hacking in several places.



Asma Begum takes care of flowers in her garden at Fulgachh village of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

Expat killed in moving train

Robbers throw the body beside Gazipur rail track

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Police recovered the body of a Malaysia expatriate, murdered allegedly by robbers, beside rail tracks at Hyderabad under Gazipur City Corporation yesterday.

The deceased, Shafiqul Islam, 38, son of Altaf Hossain of Majhuail village under Sirajganj Sadar upazila, was robbed off belongings in a moving train before he was killed, said police.

Informed by locals, Gazipur police recovered the body from beside Dhaka-Rajshahi railway at Hyderabad around 12noon.

Shafiqul reached Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka from Malaysia capital Kuala Lumpur on Monday night, Sub-inspector (SI) Alauddin of Tongi Railway Junction police camp said, referring to the information available in the passport found with the body.

He started for home in a train that night with the valuables he brought from Malaysia, the SI said, adding that the muggers killed him in the train after snatching away his belongings and dumped the body at Hyderabad.

Police was preparing to send the body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy, he said.

UP member hacked

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Projoipur

A union parishad (UP) member was hacked mercilessly in Mathbaria upazila of the district on Monday night.

The victim is Kaiyum, member of ward No-4 of Baro Machua union.

Police said Kaiyum was going to his village home from Mathbaria upazila headquarters on Monday night when some men hacked him with sharp weapons in Dakkhin Bandar area in the upazila and fled the scene.

Locals took Kaiyum to Mathbaria Upazila Health Complex from where he was shifted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital as his condition deteriorated.

Police arrested two accused -- Nayon and Mamun -- after victim's brother Abdul Halim filled a case accusing 13 people, said Officer-in-Charge Khandakar Mostafizur Rahman.

Lalmonirhat woman finds solvency in flowers

S DILIP ROY with ANDREW EAGLE

Roses, daisies and marigolds: Asma Begum's garden in Fulgachh village of Lalmonirhat's Mogholhat union blooms not only of beauty but of success. In the wafting aroma of flowers the enterprising mother-of-four found funds for her children's educations. In delicate petals she discovered solvency.

When Asma first picked up a shovel a decade ago to plant flowers beside their family home, few could realise how the decision would change their lives.

Asma's husband Fakar Ali used to be a day labourer, earning at best Tk 150 per day. His income was hardly sufficient to cover the living costs of a six-member family and Asma was frustrated.

"I established our flower farm with help from my husband," she recalls. "It started on our one bigha of land but five years ago we purchased another two bighas and I have rented two more from our neighbour. The garden covers five bighas altogether."

After establishing her garden, Asma managed to complete two months'

training on flower cultivation with a non-government organisation and subsequently took a small loan which enabled her to extend the farm. These days the garden earns the family up to Tk 7,000 per day from selling flowers during the winter months, providing a steady daily income of around Tk 1,200 during the off-season.

"The winter is especially busy," she says, "But my husband and our four children help to ensure we get the best results." Meanwhile her children are also busy with their school and college study. The eldest two, Mabiya Akhter and Asadul Islam, are each completing a Bachelor of Arts, while Masuda Akhter is in Class IX and Shanto Islam, the youngest, is a student of Class VII.

"We spend our leisure hours helping with the flowers," says Asma's son Asadul Islam. "We're never idle." Asma's sons have also taken on the responsibility of selling the flowers in the town.

Jahedul Islam, a flower trader who runs his business at Mission Intersection in Lalmonirhat town, is

among those who purchase flowers from Asma's garden. "Asma Begum is very energetic," he says, "She works hard and is serious about developing her business."

According to Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Enamul Haque, Asma is an inspiration to others. "Many locals have begun commercial flower farming after seeing her success," he says. "We provide as much support and encouragement for the area's flower farmers as we can, because flowers have ready demand and prices are favourable."

Meanwhile in Fulgachh, Asma's family has garnered a reputation for being one of the best managed in the village. Locals have seen how, where there used to be one tin-shed house on their land there are now four. They too can nowadays find in the colour and fragrance of her flower fields the very same dreams of solvency that first attracted Asma.

"We also produce some spices and fruits in our nursery to keep us going throughout the year," adds husband Fakar Ali.

Encroachment on Ziarkhal

Re-excavation begins

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

In a bid to resolve waterlogging problem and ensure natural flow of freshwater, Natore's Naldanga upazila administration has started the re-excavation work of Ziarkhal canal yesterday.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Sharmin Akter Jahan and Naldanga Upazila Parishad Chairman Sakhawat Hossain jointly inaugurated the digging programme in the morning, in presence of a thousand local farmers.

Mindless encroachment has stopped the natural water flow of the 20-kilometre-long canal that connects with Hali Beel (a local water body).

Farmers of at least 20 villages, who cultivate hundreds of hectares of land along the canal, had been facing irrigation problem for want of re-excavation of the canal, Dewan Amzad Hossain, a local UP chairman, said.

Due to the waterlogged condition, hundreds of hectares of land in those villages still remained uncultivated this year, Amzad added.

Chairman Sakhawat Hossain said about 1,000 hectares of land were uncultivated during the last boro season adding that the situation possibly will change this year.

The re-excavation will resolve the problem temporarily and they will send a proposal to the ministry concerned for a permanent solution of the situation, said Natore Deputy Commissioner Shahina Khatun.

Mother of two kills herself

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Projoipur

A woman allegedly committed suicide following a family feud at Kalakhali village in Sadar upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased is Suborna, 25, wife of Rezaul Sheikh of Kalakhali village. She was the mother of two children.

Local UP member Delwar Hossain Montu said family members found Suborna's body hanging from the ceiling of her room around 10:00am and informed police.

The reason behind the suicide could not be known immediately, said Masumur Rahman Biswas, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

The OC further said she might have killed herself following a family feud with her husband.

Pigeons spell success for the unemployed

MD NURUL AMIN, Noakhali

Possibly the world's first domesticated bird, the pigeon, and its association with mankind is recorded in more than five-thousand-year-old Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets and Egyptian hieroglyphs. The bird which over centuries has garnered a reputation for carrying messages, a symbol of peace that has also proved invaluable in wartime, has nowadays become Noakhali's bird of hope. Across the district both established farmers and otherwise unemployed hobbyists are achieving success and economic self-reliance through raising pigeons.

Since he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Md Mohsin from Noakhali municipality's Majidee has been unemployed. "As I had no job, I started a pigeon farm with 50 pairs of birds. Already my flock has grown to 150 pairs," he says. "After expenses I make a monthly profit of up to Tk 18,000." Mohsin is looking for government or private sector assistance to help him expand.

Second year honours student Fazlur Rahman from Krishnarampur village in Sadar upazila began raising pigeons as a hobby, with ten pairs. "Already I have 125 breeding pairs at my pigeon farm," he says.

Dedicated pigeon farmer Jamal Hossain Bishad, 38, from Sadar upazila meanwhile has established a larger operation on a floor in his rented house in Majidee. "I have around 225 pigeon pairs. It's a Tk. 2.5 lakh farm," he says. "After costs like food and medicine for the birds and staff salaries I earn upwards of Tk. 30,000 per month, slightly less during winter."

His colleague Dolon Kumar Nath, 42, houses his pigeon farm on the second floor of his own building which fronts Sadar upazila's main road. "My farm is completely business oriented," he says. "Currently I have 300 pairs of local and foreign pigeon varieties. I started the farm with Tk 3.5 lakh capital and now earn Tk 40,000 per month in profit."

Several farmers expressed hopes that pigeon-rearing could prove to be a useful activity for the district's drug-affected youths, to steer them clear of the menace.

Yet Noakhali's pigeon industry faces a number of hurdles in operating with limited technical cooperation, no dedicated treatment facilities and no government financial assistance. While medicines for cattle, chickens and ducks are available in the market, for example, medicines designed specifically for pigeons

aren't. Pigeon farmers currently rely on medicines targeting other poultry to treat their flocks.

Nonetheless pigeon-rearing either as hobby or profession is growing in popularity. Recognising an opportunity, local youths are bringing different varieties of pigeons from the capital and Natore in particular, to be sold across Noakhali, Lakshimpur and Feni districts. Depending on the variety, a pigeon pair can sell for between Tk 3,000 and Tk 1.2 lakhs, according to farmers.

Indeed, inspired by the success of Noakhali's professional pigeon farmers, many youths are simultaneously establishing their own flocks, on rooftops, in yards or even within their homes.

Noakhali's District Livestock Officer Md Ziaur Rahman says there are at present 284 big and small pigeon farms in the district, housing an estimated 7,142 pairs of birds. "If the farmers visit our livestock office we do our best to provide them with advice," he says, "though due to manpower shortages the service available to them isn't always optimal." Rahman says additional recruitment will be completed soon.

200 shops gutted in Tangail sari market fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

About 200 shops at traditional Tangail sari market in Karatia under Sadar upazila were damaged in a fire yesterday.

Initially, the losses were estimated to be around Tk 2 crore, said Shajahan Ansari, secretary of the market committee.

The fire started from a cloth godown at the market at about 9:00am and spread to adjacent shops immediately, he added.

Six units of fire fighters from Tangail and adjacent Mirzapur and Basail upazilas immediately rushed to the spot and doused the flames in half-an-hour, said Assistant Director of Fire Service and Civil Defense in Tangail Monir Hossain.

"The reason behind the fire could not be known immediately. It might have been caused by electric short-circuit or a mosquito coil," he added.



The rundown iron bridge on the Sandhya river's branch in Udoykathi union under Banaripara upazila of Barisal. PHOTO: STAR



Two pigeon farmers work at a farm in Noakhali. Inset, a cage with pigeon and chick.

Ramshackle iron bridge poses risk

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

An iron bridge on the Sandhya river's branch in Udoykathi union under Banaripara upazila of the district remains in an awful condition for years, much to the sufferings of thousands of people including school going children.

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) built the bridge in 1985-86 fiscal year to connect Udoykathi to Harta union under Ujirpur upazila, said Rahad Ahmed Nany, chairman of Udoykathi union parishad.

"As the bridge became risky five to six years ago, we wrote to LGED to build a new bridge there," he said.

There are 11 primary schools, one high school and two bazaars near the bridge, he said.

The bridge may break down anytime as the sleeper has broken, said day labourer Mahabubul Alam, also a regular user of the bridge.

A large number of people use the risky bridge daily while it has become virtually off limits to vehicles, said Nazmul Alam, a college teacher of the area.

Humayun Kabir, sub assistant engineer of LGED in Banaripara upazila, said a new bridge will be built at the spot soon.