

School kids say goodbye to early marriage

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Hundreds of students and their guardians showed red cards to early marriage yesterday, declaring Muktagachha upazila child marriage-free at a programme on the upazila premises.

The students from 70 educational institutions and their guardians, marriage registrars, NGO men and officials of local administration joined the programme.

Local lawmaker Salahuddin Ahmed Mukti was the chief guest at the programme organised by Muktagachha Upazila Parishad and World Vision Bangladesh with Deputy Commissioner Md Khalilur Rahman in the chair.

The speakers at the meeting said early marriage is a social curse.

The noble initiative by local administration to make the upazila early marriage-free step by step should continue, they said. They also urged all concerned, including parents and local leaders, to resist early marriage in the upazila.

Warm clothes, free treatment for poor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Medicines and warm clothes were distributed among hundreds of distressed people at the premises of Rafat Jalil Government Primary School in Shaniajan union under Hatibandha upazila on Saturday.

After that, doctors provided free treatment to different kinds of patients.

The event was organised by Rafat Jalil Kalyan Trust and Rotary Club.

Parliamentary Standing Committee Chairman on the Home Ministry Tipu Munshi was present as chief guest. Trust President Faruk Jalil presided over the function.



Farm labourers plant boro paddy at a field of Dattanagar farm in Moheshpur upazila of Jhenidah. Inset, the premises of Gokulnagar seed farm, one of the five plots under the project run by Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation.

PHOTO: STAR

JHENIDAH DATTANAGAR FARM

One of Asia's biggest seed producers

Locals hope for university of agriculture

AZIBOR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

In the perilous years of the Second World War contractor Hemendranath Dutta from Kolkata established an expansive farm at Dattanagar, in modern-day Jhenidah's Moheshpur upazila. His aim was to provide fresh vegetables to the British and other soldiers fighting the Japanese. The 2,737-acre farm, spread over five locations, is nowadays administered by the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation as one of the largest seed-producing farms in Asia.

Initially, Hemendranath used to transport the produce to Kolkata from Darshana rail-

way station but he found it challenging to rely on the train; thereafter he constructed a helipad, with the vegetables transported by helicopter. Hemendranath's agriculture service to the troops earned him quite some renown.

At the time of Partition in 1947 Hemendranath left Dattanagar to return to Kolkata, with the then-Pakistan government acquiring the farmlands. Subsequently, in 1962 the properties were handed over to the agriculture development corporation, and today, thousands of tonnes of seeds of paddy and paddy hybrids, jute, wheat, pulses, maize, potatoes and other crops are produced there every year.

"We produce around 5,000 tonnes of seeds annually for distribution across the country," says Md Delwar Hossain, responsible for administering the Gakulnagar part of the farm.

"In its entirety the farm employs more than 60 managers and 1500 labourers. The seeds are also exported." In addition, in peak periods during boro and aman paddy cultivation, from June to August and January to March, the number of labourers employed surges to around 20,000.

"We get better wages during the boro and aman seasons," says one labourer, Shukur Ali who works at the Patila section of the farm. "At this time we achieve solvency for our families." In

other months however, the seasonal workers struggle to make ends meet.

Meanwhile, a proposal with broad community support to establish an agricultural university on part of the land was first forwarded for prime ministerial approval by former lawmaker Shafikul Azam Khan Chansal from Moheshpur upazila in 2007. The present government sent a team to Jhenidah to consider the proposal's merits which resulted in a positive report being forwarded to education ministry; but since then there has been no progress.

"The education ministry seeks one hundred acres of the land," says lawmaker Shafikul, "but the

concerned ministry could not agree entirely, which leaves the proposal in limbo.

The university would be good for this remote corner of the country and could produce many skilled agriculturalists."

Locals also favour the development. "An agriculture university should be established for the benefit of the area's students," says Amjad Hossain from Gakulnagar village.

"We need an agriculture university here in Moheshpur," agrees student Saiful Islam who currently studies at Moheshpur Degree College. "At the moment if we want to find an agricultural university we need to go to Dhaka or Mymensingh."

61 Kushtia AL men sued by JSD leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A Jatya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) leader filed a case against 61 leaders and activists of ruling Awami League (AL) in Mirpur upazila of the district over vandalising their office on January 19.

Organising Secretary of Mirpur upazila unit JSD Salauddin Ahmed filed the case with Mirpur Police Station on Monday night, said Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC).

In the case statement, Salauddin alleged that AL activists vandalised the Mirpur upazila unit JSD office while going past it in a procession on January 11.

AL brought out the procession soon after its activist village doctor Mutfar Rahman Sabu was shot dead. AL blamed JSD for the killing.

President of Mirpur upazila unit AL advocate Abdul Halim, and secretary of the unit, also chairman of Mirpur Upazila Parishad, Kamarul Arefin and 59 other AL leaders and activists are accused in the case.

Man gets life for killing father

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A court here yesterday sentenced a man to life imprisonment for killing his father in 2013.

The lifer is Anwar Hossain, 44, of Guptergoan village under Phulpur upazila in the district.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Shahrier Kabir also fined him Tk 10,000. In default, he is to suffer another one month in jail.

Joban Ali, another son of Iman Ali, lodged a case with Phulpur Police Station, accusing Anwar.

After examining witnesses and evidence, the judge found him guilty and pronounced the verdict.

A boy extraordinaire

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Twelve-year-old Rafi is already a well known figure in the area, being a captivating performer of different physical feats.

Rafi, youngest of the three sons of Idris Khan, a mason in PTI area of Pirojpur town, never went to school as the poor family is hardly aware of the value of education.

"After seeing the performance of artistic physical feats of a circus party that visited Pirojpur town two years ago, I stared practising it alone and learnt the tricks well," Rafi said.

"When any cultural function is arranged in the town, I go there to perform. Sometimes I get Tk 500 to Tk 1,000 from officials and important persons as they enjoy my performance," he said.

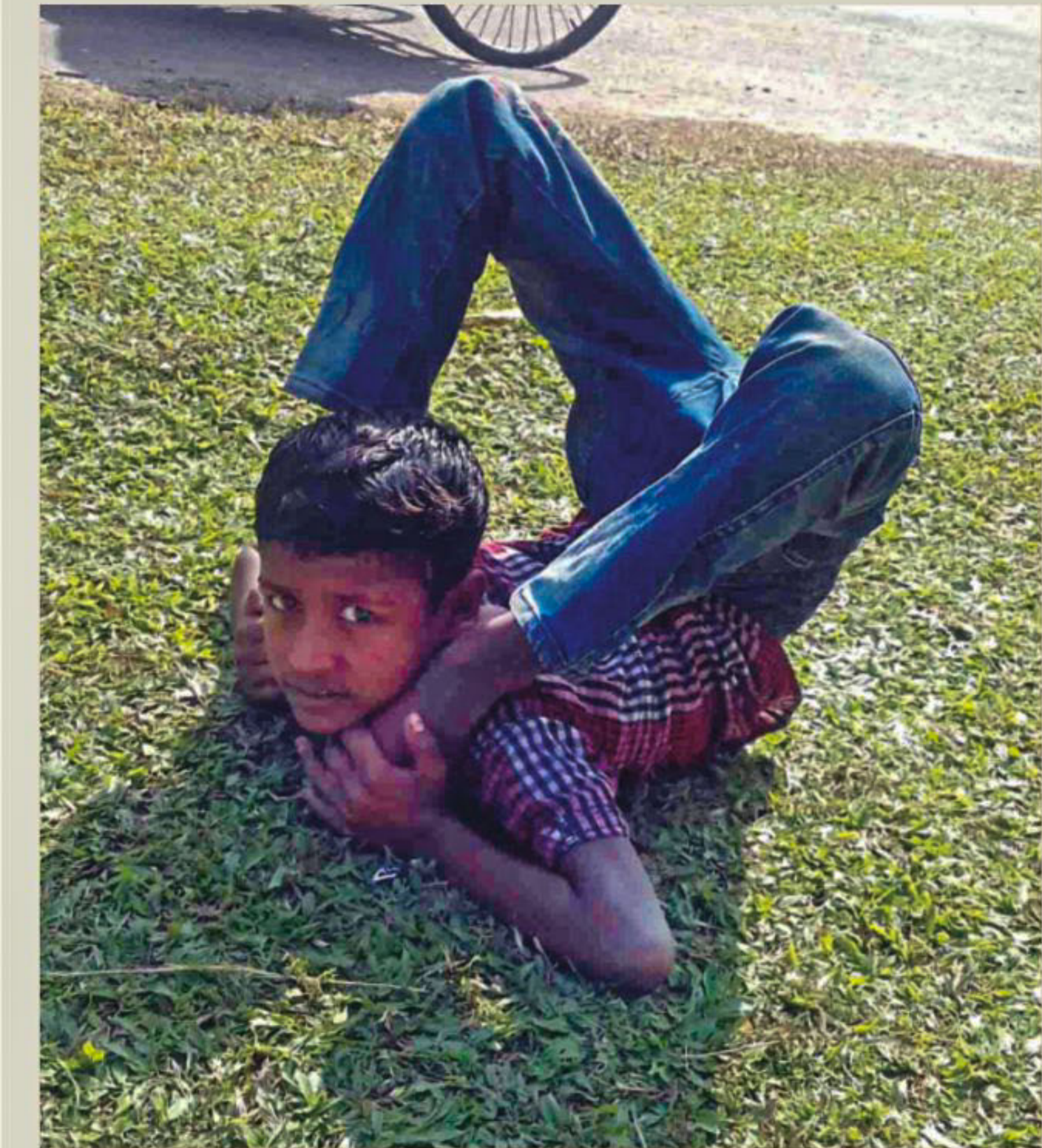
Often he gets into buses for different locations and shows his performance at public gatherings.

He also saves his money with his mother Rokeya Begum. Earlier she worked at others' houses, now she stays at home as Rafi's earning has brought her a little solvency.

Rafi wants to be a much better performer in future. However, not careful about his personal care, he is usually seen in untidy clothes.

His elder brother Raju, who works at a steel workshop in Pirojpur town, said, "We are a poor family but we are not worried about our youngest brother Rafi as he is very clever and has already learnt a very useful feat."

Their another brother Saju is a rickshaw puller.



Rafi performs an acrobatic feat at a ground of Pirojpur town.

PHOTO: STAR

Pro-BNP panel wins Mymensingh Bar polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Badhan Kumar Goswami and Mir Mizanur Rahman, backed by pro-BNP panel, have been elected as president and general secretary (GS) in the Mymensingh Bar Association election.

The election was held on Sunday.

Out of 15 posts, BNP-backed panel won five posts, including president and general secretary, while AL-backed panel won 10 posts, including vice-presidents and assistant general secretaries, sources said.

The other office bearers are vice-presidents-Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan and Hazrat Ali; assistant general secretaries-Harun-or-Rashid, Bijon Kumar Pal and Abul Bashar Masud; Anisuzzaman Anis (auditor).

Drug peddler arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested an alleged drug peddler with nine grams of heroin worth about Tk 90,000 from Boira bazar in Sarishabari upazila yesterday.

The arrestee is Rokan Ali, 37, of Gachhboira village in the upazila.

Acting on a tip-off, the elite force raided the bazar and arrested Rokan with the heroin, said Hayatul Islam Khan, company commander of Jamalpur Rab.



A rickshaw-van puller and two others cross a bamboo bridge on the Dhalai river in Tarakanda upazila of Mymensingh amid risk of accident.

PHOTO: STAR

Risky bamboo bridge only means

Thousands of people cross Dhalai river over the makeshift structure

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Thousands of people of 10 villages have been crossing the Dhalai river in Tarakanda upazila of the district using a bamboo bridge for the last five years.

Villagers said they suffer a lot while crossing the bridge with their agriculture produce or carrying critical patients. Students from both sides of the river cross it facing risks, especially in the rainy season when the river water level rises, said Abdul Hayat Siddique, a student of Government Ananda Mohan College.

Farmers have to carry their produce to local bazars on rickshaw-vans and trolleys which costs a lot, so they cannot make a profit, said farmers Rafiquzzaman Khan and Nizam Uddin Khan of Kalikha village.

There are many poultry and fish farmers in the area, and they too

suffer, said Selim Ahmed, a fish farmer.

Though the area has potential to contribute towards local development, the expected development is still a dream for the people here due to the lack of a concrete bridge on the Dhalai river, said Abul Kalam, president of ward No-1 of Kamargaoan union Awami League.

"Following repeated appeals, local lawmaker Sharif Ahmed recently took an initiative and a survey by local LGED was conducted for construction of a concrete bridge," Kalam said.

The people of the villages built the 110-metre-long bamboo bridge on their own accord five years ago. They have to spend Tk 50,000 every year for its maintenance, which the locals pay, he said.

200 trees felled to grab land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Rivals felled at least 200 fruit trees to occupy a piece of land in Pashchim Chila village under Amtali upazila of Barguna.

Some Amirul Shikder along with his men allegedly cut down fruit trees like mango, coconut, guava, lemon, banana and jackfruit at a fish enclosure on Sunday, said Md Shahidullah, officer-in-charge of Amtali Police Station.

One Motahar Sikder, father of Ripon Shikder, filed a case in this regard the same day, said the OC.

Locals said Ripon bought 10 decimals of land from his uncle Dhalu Shikder in 2013 and set up a fish enclosure there. He also planted the trees on both sides of the enclosure.

Around 5:30pm on Sunday, a gang of 12/14 allegedly led by Amirul, another uncle of Ripon, went to the enclosure and cut down all trees.

They also looted fish worth about Tk 5,000 from the enclosure, said Ripon.

Despite repeated calls, this correspondent could not contact Amirul Shikder for his comment on the issue as he did not receive the phone but his daughter Ruma Begum said her father is owner of the land.

Asked why the trees were felled if Amirul owns the land, she could not say anything in this regard.