

Woman's body dumped under earth after killing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

The body of a missing woman was found at the house of her husband in Subarnachar upazila of the district on Friday.

Police arrested husband Millat, 32, son of Shahjahan Dhubai of Char Majid village in the upazila.

The victim was Kohinoor Akhter, 22, mother of two children.

The body was kept under the earth in a room of the house of Millat, said police.

They had been quarrelling for long over various issues including dowry.

As the neighbours did not see Kohinoor since Thursday night, they became suspicious. They went to Millat's house on Friday night and found there was a pit inside the house and it was filled with earth.

Police later recovered the body from the house.



A farmer sprays pesticide in his wheat field at Bhelajan village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Lack of winter worries north's wheat growers

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT with ANDREW EAGLE

Winters in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh can sometimes be, by Bangladeshi standards, uncomfortably cold. While people might not always enjoy those months of shivering, the winter season is nonetheless quintessential, a predictable part of any year. Thus when a solid winter does not arrive it can be more uncomfortable still, not least for the region's wheat farmers.

This year unseasonal, warm temperatures have left wheat crops attacked by aphids and raised concerns among farmers and scientists that the warmer than usual days will stifle the growth of wheat grain, with harvests thereby undermined.

Although officials of the agriculture extension department claim the situation is under control and wheat production will not be adversely affected, agro-scientists are especially concerned about the impact of the warmer climate on the growth of wheat crops planted after November last year.

Farmers in the two districts have reported to The Daily Star that the

growth of wheat sheaves has been far from optimal, with harvest levels likely to be the worst in several years.

"I have wheat on two bighas of land," says Anikul Barman, 58, of Moidandighi village in Panchagarh's Boda upazila. "The sheaves this year are short in size because the crop did not see much fog this time around, during the growing season."

"This year's warm weather has been unfavourable for wheat," says another farmer, Sirajul Islam, 60, of Sakoya village. "February has been hotter than in previous years, which is not good for the crop."

In addition the warmer weather may have encouraged a rise in aphid numbers. "I plan to spray pesticide on my wheat crop in the next few days," says grower Rafiqul Islam, 45, from Bhelajan village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila. "Aphids have attacked my crop, leaving black spots on the sheaves. The pest attack at this time raises concerns as to whether I will be able to achieve a good harvest."

"Wheat is a winter-loving crop," says Dr Md Zahidul Islam Sarker, chief scientific officer at the Wheat Research

Institute in Dinajpur. "As winter was of short duration this season, grain growth on the crop can be affected. Harvests might be around ten percent lower than expected."

He notes the moisture associated with winter and fogs is drawn from the soil via the roots of the wheat plant to foster healthy grain growth.

The deputy director of Thakurgaon's Department of Agriculture Extension Maududul Islam meanwhile says aphid attack at this stage of the crop's cycle is unlikely to affect production much. He says temperatures, though warm, have not been hot enough thus far, to seriously hamper production levels.

"Wheat crops will not be affected by temperatures that are below 18 degrees," he says. One day recently, however, the lowest temperature was 20 degrees Celsius.

The agriculture extension department reports wheat cultivation on 67,820 hectares in Thakurgaon district this season and a further 26,430 hectares in Panchagarh. Production targets for the two districts are 211,556 and 77,975 tonnes respectively.

'Thief' dies in mob beating

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

An alleged thief was killed in a mob beating at Amjoan village in Nachole upazila yesterday.

The deceased was Mohammad Gumani, 26, son of Lal Chand of Dadonchak village in Shibganj upazila.

Fasiruddin, officer-in-charge of Nachole Police Station, said locals caught Gumani around 2:30am when he was trying to open a lock of a battery-run easy-bike in the area.

The angry mob later gave him a good beating, leaving him seriously injured. He later died at the upazila health complex around 10:30am.

Quoting his relatives, the OC said the youth was mentally challenged.

Youth found murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police recovered the body of a young man from the bank of Jhina river at Uttar Taratia village in Sadar upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased, Mohammad Harun Khan, 35, son of Abdus Samad, was a resident of Khoila Nayapara village in Kalihati upazila of the district.

Quoting deceased's family members, Officer-in-Charge Nazmul Haque of Sadar Model Police Station said Harun went out of his house on Friday evening and did not return home.

Villagers spotted Harun's throat-slit body, bearing marks of stab injuries, yesterday morning and informed the police who recovered the body and sent it to Tangail General Hospital for autopsy, the OC added.

Police said criminals might have killed the youth somewhere else over previous enmity centring a land dispute and later dumped the body there.

Brutality on boy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A 12-year-old boy was mercilessly tortured upon allegation of stealing a mobile set at Chiroil village of Mothurapur union in Chatmohar upazila under the district yesterday morning.

The victim, Raidul Islam, son of Kamrul Islam of the village, is undergoing treatment in Chatmohar Upazila Health Complex.

Police detained a villager on charge of brutal torture on the boy.

"A mobile set was stolen from the house of Ajit Sardar of the village on Friday night. Blaming Raidul for it, a group of people in the village caught him this morning and beat him up mercilessly," the victim's mother Nasima Khatun said yesterday.

"Tying him with rope, they beat Raidul. They also pierced different parts of his body with pins. When I tried to save my son, they hit me. At one stage I took him to Chatmohar Upazila Health Complex where he was admitted," Nasima said.

"The victim boy's mother filed a case with Chatmohar Police Station this afternoon and police arrested and sent to jail Md Sajedur Rahman, 26, of the village in connection with the torture on the boy. We are investigating the incident," said Md Ahsan Habib, officer in charge of the police station.



UPAZILA POLLS IN PATUAKHALI 30 injured in violence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 30 people were injured in pre-election clash between the supporters of two chairman candidates in Rangabali upazila of the district on Friday.

The election to the Rangabali Upazila Parishad is scheduled to be held on March 6.

Awami League candidate Mohammad Delwar Hossain, BNP candidate Jahangir Hossain Akon and Islami Shasantantra Andolan candidate Amir Hossain Mollah are contesting for the post of upazila parishad chairman there.

BNP candidate Jahangir Hossain alleged that a gang led by Rezaul Karim and Jahirul Islam Tuku attacked his supporters while they were going to attend a street corner meeting around 5:30pm, leaving at least 20 people injured.

Jahirul Islam Tuku, secretary of Moudubi union unit of AL, refuted the allegation and said BNP men attacked on them that left 8 to 10 AL supporters injured.

Officer-in-Charge Shamsul Arefin of Rangabali Police Station said he heard about the incident but none had lodged any complaint in this regard yet.

The post of chairman fell vacant following the death of former chairman Ahsan Kabir Chan on July 2 last year.

'Ban battery-run rickshaws in Tangail'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Rickshaw pullers and owners at a human chain here yesterday threatened to go for tougher agitation if the battery-run rickshaws and other illegal vehicles are not kept off the roads in the town immediately.

They later submitted a memorandum to the superintendent of police in this regard.

They also urged the authorities concerned to stop plying of unfit and illegal vehicles, including battery-run rickshaws, to keep the town free from traffic jam.

Some greedy traders introduced battery-run rickshaws in the town recently, said rickshaw owner Jamal Uddin Talukder.

8-yr-old boy killed

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family were frantically searching for his missing son.

He called the number back several times and no one received it. Finally at around 7:00 pm someone picked up the phone and demanded Tk three lakh as ransom for Shuvo's safe return.

The man on the phone said they would contact Shuvo's father again at 8:00pm which they did not. The phone was found switched off when the family attempted to make contact

with the unknown abductor.

Unable to make any contact with his son's abductors, Gafur finally filed an abduction case with Kalai Police Station at around 11:00 pm accusing unknown people of abducting his son.

Rahela Begum, a neighbour, first saw Shuvo's body when she got up to feed her cows early yesterday. The body with no visible injury marks was lying beside a pile of straw. He was wearing the same clothes he had on when he disappeared.

His mother Jakia Begum demanded justice for his son's killing and the arrest of his killers.

The body was handed over to the family after autopsy at Joypurhat District Modern Hospital.

Ataur Rahman, resident medical officer of the hospital, said it primarily appeared that the boy was strangled to death. The autopsy report would be finalised after the medical board had met to discuss it, he said.

The plight of Aleya

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"I was very happy to get the job in a police official's home. I thought my children's future would change."

But her happiness didn't last long. Soon she started facing troubles.

"They [agents in Saudi Arabia] started mounting pressure on me to leave my job. They wanted me to do 'bad jobs' for them," Aleya alleged. "They also assaulted me physically for several days as I refused their 'offer'."

Aleya then contacted her husband and told him everything. He asked her to return home.

"We are poor. We need money for our family and children. But we cannot destroy our honour," said Kayem Molla, Aleya's husband.

Kayem contacted the local agent in Dhaka and finalised the procedures for his wife's return.

She came back home empty-handed on February 26, with nothing but a harrowing experience.

Aleya went to Saudi Arabia on December 8 last year. She and her husband contacted a local broker who assured them of free work visa to the Kingdom.

She decided to go to the Middle East country as she came to know that the process of sending her husband there was very costly and a complicated one.

Aleya went there through Fatema Employment Services in the capital's Kakrail.

Contacted, Jahurul Islam, proprietor of Fatema Employment Services, refuted the allegation of physical torture on Aleya and claimed that she herself wanted to return home due to her illness.

Around 1,000 women came back home from Saudi Arabia on various grounds until February this year.

Besides, hundred other families have submitted written applications to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB) in the last few months, asking them to bring back their relatives from Saudi Arabia. Rokeya Begum, another

poor housewife from Sherpur, went there on April 25 last year. She was also happy to find her Saudi employer to be a good person. But things started to change the very next month when her employer began torturing her.

"The torture by the employer and his family members on my mother started to increase day by day. In the beginning, she could contact us. But soon she was not allowed to talk to us," alleged Rafikul Islam, son of the victim, in a written complaint to the WEWB on November 27.

Officials at the Bangladesh missions in Riyadh and Jeddah said more than 400 female migrants were now staying at separate safe houses after leaving their employers on allegations of abuses and illness.

The allegations are "common", claimed Sarwar Alam, counsellor (labour) at the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh.

"Very few female workers at the safe homes go back to their employers' houses. Majority of them want to return home," he told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Javed Ahmed, additional secretary to the expatriates' welfare ministry, said it is not possible to force any woman to work if she is not interested.

Around 85,000 Bangladeshi females have been working in Saudi Arabia as domestic help since April 2015, according to statistics of the BMET.

2 more held

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freedom fighters.

Dulal Hossain, 44, of Shahzadpur's Borobila village, was arrested in Pabna's Faridpur municipality on Friday and Tufan Miah, 35, in Dargapara village yesterday.

Police said the duo, identified from a video footage, were close associates of Miru. Shimul, Shahzadpur correspondent of daily Samakal, was hit when Miru allegedly opened fire during a factional clash of ruling Awami League (AL) on February 2. He died the next day.

Extrajudicial killing

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services deterred many from approaching government forces for assistance or to report criminal incidents.

In several instances, the government blamed victims of extremist attacks, increasing the impunity of attackers.

The report also claimed that extremist organisations claiming affiliation with IS and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) increased their activities in the country, executing high-profile attacks on religious minorities.

The Bangladesh government has repeatedly ruled out such claims, blaming the attacks on the home-grown militants.

Even yesterday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan reiterated that there is no existence of al-Qaeda in Bangladesh.

"There are some home-grown terrorist groups [in the country]. But our security forces have been able to tackle them properly," he said addressing as chief guest a meeting of civil society members in Bhola's

Charfashan area.

After the high-profile attacks in Bangladesh, the US State Department report says, the government responded with a strong anti-militancy drive, which human rights groups claim has resulted in increased extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions for the purpose of extortion, enforced disappearances, torture, and other abuses of human rights.

It also says, "Corruption remained a serious problem within the judiciary and was a factor in lengthy delays of trials, which facilitated witness tampering and intimidation of victims. Several reports by human rights groups and corruption watchdog groups indicated continued public dissatisfaction with the perceived politicisation of the judiciary."

On the press freedom, the report says, "Authorities, including intelligence services on some occasions, subjected journalists to physical attack, harassment, and intimidation."

In February last year, 79 sedition and defamation cases were initiated against

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star.

There were isolated incidents of "government" restriction and disruption of access to the internet and censorship of online content, the report adds.

Basic freedoms of expression and association are on the decline around the world.

Corruption, use of torture and discrimination against minorities, have gotten worse in some parts of the world, reported the AP, quoting the report.

It also cited the report to have expressed concerns about sexual abuse of women, growing crackdowns on the media and internet freedom, suppression of political opposition groups and the inability of people to choose their own governments.

Mandated by the US Congress, the country reports provide policymakers with a holistic and accurate account of human rights conditions in nearly 200 countries worldwide including all member states of the United Nations.

Obama wire tapped Trump Tower

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Trump leveled the charges in a flurry of tweets shortly after dawn, as his administration remains mired in controversy over communications between Russian officials and some of his senior aides, including Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

Trump and Obama frequently traded barbs on the campaign trail, and the Republican real estate magnate was a driving force behind the so-called "birther" movement that questioned whether Obama was born on US soil and eligible to be president.

The two men initially adopted a cordial tone as Trump took office, though the president has stepped up accusations against Obama in recent weeks, blaming his predecessor for being

behind damaging leaks to journalists.

'WITCH HUNT'

Since US intelligence took the unprecedented step of publicly accusing Russia of trying to swing the November election in Trump's favor, questions have swirled about whether some in Trump's campaign colluded with Moscow.

A slew of associates, including Sessions and already fired national security advisor Michael Flynn met Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak before Trump took office.

The businessman-turned-politician, who has accused his political foes of conducting "a total witch hunt," yesterday directed his Twitter tirade at his Democratic predecessor.

"Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before the victory. Nothing found," Trump wrote a day after departing Washington for a weekend getaway at his Mar-a-Lago Florida resort for the fourth time in five weeks.

The president compared the alleged action to Senator Joe McCarthy's campaign in the 1950s to root out alleged Communists and sympathisers, which was marked by improper investigative techniques.

"Is it legal for a sitting President to be 'wire tapping' a race for president prior to an election? Turned down by court earlier. A NEW LOW!" Trump said, again providing no proof of Obama's efforts to seek a court order to spy on the then-candidate.