

Upazila office besieged for elections

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Several hundred people yesterday besieged Palashbari upazila parishad office in Gaibandha demanding immediate election to three unions of the upazila.

Election to three unions-Kishoregari, Barisal and Palashbari Sadar--remained suspended for the last 15 years, due to a dispute over fresh demarcation of Palashbari upazila.

People of three unions, under the banner of Janata Votadhikar Bastobayan Committee, also staged a demonstration on the upazila parishad premises for two hours and threatened to go for a tougher movement if the elections are not held immediately.

Blaming the incumbent chairmen of the three unions, speakers said people of these unions are deprived of different development and facilities as the three chairmen on the plea fresh demarcation of Palashbari municipality filed separate cases to stop the elections.

Five injured as students clash at Khagrachhari college

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

At least five students were injured in a clash between two rival groups at Khagrachhari Government College in the town on Monday.

The injured are Assistant Organising Secretary of Bangalee Chhatra Parishad Pervez Ahmed, 21, Samuel Tripura, 20, and Md Yeasin, 22. They were admitted to Khagrachhari Sadar Hospital.

Tareq Md Abdul Hannan, officer-in-charge of Khagrachhari Police Station, said this is an isolated incident. They are investigating the matter.



The Dharla river is drying up due to illegal stone extraction from its bed in Kawamari area under Patgram upazila of Lalmonirhat. Inset, LGED has put up a red flag as a warning on the risky Patgram-Sarkarerhat Road at Kafirbazar village in the upazila following the river erosion.



Stone lifting makes 3 rivers dry

Arable lands turn sandy in Lalmonirhat

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Illegal stone lifting with dredgers was stopped in June last year, but vast areas of arable lands in Patgram upazila of the district had turned into sandy tracts by then.

Sub-Divisional Engineer (SDE) of Water Development Board (WDB) in the district Mohammad Al-Mamun said round-the-clock stone lifting along 25 km of 32 km on the Dharla river, 9 km of 18 km on the Saniyazan river and 7 km of 12 km on the Singimari river left big piles of sand on the beds of the rivers.

The sand piles act as barriers to the flow of water during the dry season and cause flood during the monsoon, locals said.

The villagers are very worried

about their livelihood as they do not know how or when the three rivers will regain their normal flow.

Ashraf Hossain, 55, a farmer of Kawamari village, said he and many other farmers have been facing livelihood crisis as their arable lands have turned sandy due to the illegal stone lifting from Dharla river. "We did not dare to protest against the stone lifters for fear of harassment as they are economically and politically influential," he added.

"We used to irrigate our crops with water from the river a few years ago, but now the river is crying for water," Ashraf said.

Helemul Ali Prodhan, 68, a farmer of Islampur village, said BNP-Jamaat men started illegal stone lifting from the three rivers in 1992, and Awami League men

started in 1996 after the change of government. "Illegal stone lifting from the rivers continued non-stop till June in 2016," he added.

"Political people got benefit from illegal stone lifting, even though it harmed our rivers, environment, agriculture and bio-diversity," said Disarul Islam, 55, a trader at Burimari land port.

SDE Mohammad Al-Mamun told The Daily Star that the Dharla, Saniyazan and Singimari rivers at Patgram upazila get less water flow from upstream during this season, and also face barriers like the sand piles and deep holes that were created on the riverbeds due to continued stone lifting for many years.

It will not be possible to get normal flow without proper dredging of the rivers, Al Mamun said, adding

that the district WDB has proposed to the water resources ministry to start dredging of 4 km of the Dharla river and 3 km of the other two rivers

Patgram Upazila Nirbahi Officer Noor Qutubul Alam said illegal stone lifting from the rivers has been stopped, and if anybody tries to do it again the administration will take stern action, adding that a total of 450 dredgers were employed in the illegal stone lifting in many villages in the upazila.

District Agriculture Officer Nur Alam said around 1,200 acres of land alongside the three rivers have been affected by stone lifting.

Meanwhile, illegal extraction of stones from the Dharla river has put the Patgram-Sarkarerhat road at risk of being eroded.

AL leader slaps headmaster

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

A schoolteacher was slapped allegedly by an Awami League leader for giving permission to Jubo League and Chhatra League men to celebrate the Independence Day at the school ground.

The victim is Md Fazlul Haque Akon, headmaster of Satoria High School in Rajapur upazila of the district.

"As per the direction of the school managing committee chairman, Jubo League and BCL leaders were given permission to use the field to celebrate the Day on Sunday," said Haque.

"The same day Satoria union AL Secretary Humayun Kabir, also a member of the school managing committee, came to me and asked me who gave permission for it," he said.

"As soon as I said the chairman gave permission, Humayun started slapping me using bad language and finally pushed me into a ditch." "I along with other teachers continued receiving threats after filing of a general diary in this regard," said the headmaster.

Students of the school blocked Khulna-Barisal highway on Monday, protesting the attack.

Despite repeated calls, this correspondent could not reach Humayun for his comment on the issue as he did not receive the calls.



Fatema selling goods to school students from her mobile stationery shop, set up in a rickshaw-van, on Darwani-Khansama road in Nilphamari Sadar upazila. The photo was taken recently.

A STRUGGLE for survival

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Divorced twice, for giving birth to daughters one after another, instead of a son, 30-year-old Fatema is struggling to earn her bread by running a mobile stationery shop in her locality.

Ignoring all odds, Fatema, daughter of Rajab Ali of Pashchim Darwani village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila, has set up a stationery shop on a rickshaw van and goes to different schools and villages to sell those for maintaining education expenditure of her three daughters.

"At the age of twelve, my landless father married me off with one Mizanur of nearby Satipara village," Fatema said.

"Within five years of our marriage, when I gave birth to a second daughter, my husband divorced me for not giving birth to a son," she said.

After the divorce, Fatema along with her two daughters returned to her parent's house and started working as a domestic help to arrange their bread.

Rajab Ali said, "Local influential people later arranged Fatema's second marriage with an elderly man, who also divorced her for giving birth to another daughter."

In 2012, she arranged Tk 2,000 by selling a goat and some hens, started a business of stationery items and began to sell bangles, thread, chocolates and plastic items at different villages on foot.

With the small income of Tk 150 to Tk 200 a day, she admitted her two daughters in a local school.

However, three years ago, Fatema had a memorable day when local lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor talked to her while she was roving at

Pulhat village with a basket on her head.

The next day, the lawmaker provided a rickshaw van for doing her business conveniently.

"I can carry more items in my rickshaw-van and move to distant villages and earn Tk 300 to Tk 350 everyday" Fatema said.

"Depositing a portion of my income, I managed to marry off one of my daughters about six months ago," she added.

She is, however, a little bit anxious about her future now as she feels a strong knee pain while plying the van.

"If I get financial support from any banks, individuals or other non-governmental organisations I would run a permanent shop at my home as my other two daughters are also growing up," Fatema said.

Flowers brighten U Thoai Marma

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

U Thoai Ching Marma has set an example for other hill people by earning good profit from flowers cultivated on his 10 decimals of land commercially for the first time in Bandarban's Sadar upazila.

He started cultivation of various flowers including dalia, rose and tuberose in remote Bakichhara Mukh area last year.

The 65-year-old indigenous man started his journey with around 1200 flower saplings bought from Chittagong's Hathazari area for Tk 12,000.

"I bought a dalia plant at Tk 10 and now each plant gives me 55 to 60 flowers. One dalia is sold for around Tk 4 in local markets," said U Thoai.

In 1971, the father of three children passed SSC examinations and started farming his forefather's land instead of seeking job.

U Thoai said gardening and farming makes him a happy man as it gives him

physical fitness.

In the last one year, he earned around Tk two lakh by selling flowers in the local markets.

"A large number of customers gather in my garden to collect flowers and it makes me happy," U Thoai said.

Besides flower saplings, he has started cultivating different medicinal plants in his nursery and getting good response from the buyers.

"Visiting my nursery, many jobless young men expressed a desire to start nursery business in their areas. I often advise jobless educated people to find ways of self-employment," he said.

Deputy Director of Department of Agriculture Extension Altaf Hossain said there is a great opportunity of flower cultivation in hills.

"Most of the hill people are not conscious of the benefits of flower cultivation while hill lands can become successful commercial place for flower cultivators," he said.



U Thoai Marma takes care of his flower garden at Bakichhara Mukh in Sadar upazila of Bandarban. The photo was taken recently.

Night guard stabbed dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A night guard was hacked to death at Abalpur village in Magura Sadar upazila on Monday.

The deceased was Earul Islam, 35, son of late freedom fighter Lutfor Rahman of the village. He was a night guard of voluntary organisation Mukti Manch Foundation in the area.

Police and locals said a gang entered an under-construction building of the organisation at night and stabbed Earul dead.

Informed by locals, police recovered the body from the spot yesterday morning and sent it to Magura Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The reason behind the murder could not be known immediately, said Assistant Superintendent of Police Tarikul Islam.

Mother of two children Razia Sultana, wife of the victim, demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the killers of her husband.