

# Evicted ethnic people living woeful life

BULBUL AHMED, Natore

Fifteen indigenous families at Madhnagar village of Naldanga upazila in the district are living an inhuman life following their eviction from there Tuesday morning.

There was a case over the ownership of land between the indigenous people living there and one Bazlur Rashid for long and recently the latter got a court order in his favour, said Dewan Amzad Hossain, chairman of Madhnagar union parishad in Naldanga.

Rashid's men dismantled the indigenous people's houses in presence of a representative (najib) of the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court, he said.

"The police vandalised our house with the help of Bazlur Rashid and his men in presence of a najir of a Natore court. They beat me, my wife and daughter mercilessly," said Karun Kumar Sing, a victim.

"As policemen were beating my father and mother, I requested them to stop the cruelty. But they beat me too," said Karun's daughter Basona Sing, 13.

"The criminals also damaged my books. Where will we go now? Who will feed us?"

she said.

Rajkumar Sing, another victim of the eviction, said the indigenous families were living there for over 50 years.

"All of the 30 decimals of land is a khas land and the government earlier allocated it for us," he claimed.

"We are living here for generations. I was born in this land and want to die here," said Arjun Kumar Sing, another victim.

Jatiya Adivasi Parishad at a human chain and protest programme in front of Natore Press Club on Wednesday morning gave an ultimatum to the government to rehabilitate the evicted families within seven days.

Earlier on Tuesday night, the upazila nirbahi officer of Naldanga visited the spot and arranged a temporary shelter in a local school for the evicted indigenous people.

The district administration is taking necessary steps for rehabilitation of the indigenous people, said Shahina Khatun, deputy commission of Natore.

"The place under question is a khas land. None has the right to occupy the government land without any permission or allocation. We will take legal action against the grabbers," she added.



An uncertain future grips 15 families belonging to Sing community at Madhnagar in Naldanga upazila of Natore as the indigenous people were evicted from the land where they lived for generations. Their houses were also destroyed during the eviction on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Grabbers attack land owner

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A man from the minority Hindu community in Pirojpur town was injured in an attack by his rivals yesterday for arranging a press conference on Monday to protest their alleged bid to grab his land.

The victim, Santosh Kumar, a resident of Masimpur area in the town, is undergoing treatment for head injury at Pirojpur Sadar Hospital.

At the press conference, Santosh alleged that eight people, including Shah Alam, former assistant personal secretary (APS) of local lawmaker AKM Awal, are trying to grab his land forcibly by implicating him in a false case.

Quoting Santosh, Officer-in-Charge Masumur Rahman of Sadar Police Station said one Nazrul Islam and Kader Gazi attacked Santosh with bricks while he was going to a local hospital around 10:00am.

When asked, Shah Alam said his father-in-law's family bought the land from one of Santosh's brothers years ago and they hold all the legal papers.

He also said that none of his family members and relatives is involved in yesterday's attack on Santosh.

Instead, Shah Alam claimed that being influenced by some locals Santosh is harassing his family members.

The OC said although Santosh informed him of the matter verbally, he is yet to lodge any written complaint in this regard.

# Venison seized in Satkhira

UNB, Satkhira

Members of Bangladesh Coastguard in a drive early yesterday seized 51 kilograms of venison from Kalirkhal area under Satkhira range near the Sundarbans.

During the regular patrolling, a team of the coastguards, acting on a tip-off, conducted a drive in the area adjacent to the Sundarbans and seized the venison in an abandoned condition, officials said.

None was, however, arrested in this connection as the criminals fled the scene sensing the presence of the law enforcers.

Meanwhile, law enforcers during overnight drives arrested 42 people from different upazilas of the district on various charges.

The arrestees are accused in cases for sabotage and drug abuse, police said.

# A different day for Mahalis

## Swiss envoy learns about distinct lifestyle of the indigenous people

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

It was a different day for the indigenous Mahali people as Switzerland Ambassador to Bangladesh Christian Martin Fotsch passed a few hours with them at Jagannathpur Adibashi Palli in Pirganj upazila of Thakurgaon on Tuesday.

As the ambassador reached the village at 9:00am, the indigenous people received him with their traditional dance with songs.

During his stay there till 1:00pm, he cordially interacted with the residents, visiting the houses and seeing their lifestyle including household living, cooking pattern and hunting materials from close quarters.

With the financial assistance of HEKS EPER, a donor agency of Switzerland, Eco-Social Development Organisation (ESDO) is implementing a project titled 'Promotion of Rights for Ethnic Minority and Dalit Improvement Programme' to uplift



PHOTO: STAR

Swiss envoy Christian Martin Fotsch gets a warm welcome as he visits Jagannathpur Adivasi Palli in Pirganj upazila of Thakurgaon on Tuesday.

livelihood of the ethnic minority communities in northern districts Thakurgaon and Dinajpur.

Talking to Martin, the indigenous people described how the project

activities are helping them to develop their livelihood.

"The visit was very enjoyable and I learnt various things regarding the indigenous people's life and culture.

The people, although lagging a little behind from the mainstream, are now progressing through their efforts," said the ambassador, who visited the village accompanying Anik Asad, country director of HEKS EPER.

Later he visited Lokayan Museum at Akcha village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

Cultural team of ESDO performed a vibrant cultural programme in honour of the ambassador.

In the evening, he attended a view exchange meeting at Chetona Bikash Kendro in ESDO's head office at Thakurgaon town.

Executive Director of ESDO conducted the programme presided over by Thakurgaon Deputy Commissioner Md Abdul Awal.

Local political leaders, teachers, social workers and journalists took part at the meeting.

The ambassador visited Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital yesterday morning before leaving for capital Dhaka.



Tania Khan feeds liquid saline to a squirrel, helping it to recuperate, at her Sonapur residence in Moulvibazar town as the animal researcher and wildlife photographer has turned a part of her house into a 'mini hospital' for birds and animals.

PHOTO: STAR

# Tania Khan a wildlife nurse

BY MINTU DESHWARA and ANDREW EAGLE

At Tania Khan's residence in Moulvibazar town a number of patients are recuperating. But she is not a doctor and her patients aren't of the human species. A squirrel is feeding on liquid saline while a myna bird is partaking of fruit. Tania believes motherly affection is the key to bringing injured animals back to health.

"These two are out of danger now," she says. "The condition of the squirrel was critical. A veterinarian said it suffered brain damage after it was brutally beaten by a child on 30 December last year. When it's well enough I will release it in the forest."

The myna arrived on Tania's doorstep on the same day. Its feathers were cut and it could not fly. The bird had been rescued from a store in Habiganj town. Her home also currently provides respite for twelve injured cats.

Tania loves animals so much that she established her own wildlife organisation called 'Save our unprotected wildlife' or 'Soul'. She is also an animal

researcher and wildlife photographer who hopes to increase awareness of conservation issues.

"Tania Khan works tirelessly to protect nature and wildlife. Looking after animals is almost a part of her existence," says Tabibur Rahman, assistant conservator with the wildlife management and conservation department in Moulvibazar. "It's not only the squirrel and myna, she has saved many animals and released them once they are well. Actually she just loves animals."

"Due to lack of food, nesting sites and illegal trade, the number of mynas is decreasing," notes Mihir Kumar Doe, the divisional forest officer with the same department who is pleased if Tania can save one and prepare it for release. "These birds are at risk and keeping them as pets is prohibited under the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012."

"To witness the kind activities of Tania Khan in nursing wildlife is an emotional experience," says visitor to Moulvibazar, Akmol Hossain. "She is an inspiration to every man and woman in the country."

# Kazi jailed for conducting early marriage

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A mobile court sentenced a Kazi (marriage registrar) to one-month imprisonment on the charge of conducting the marriage of a 14-year-old schoolgirl in Kaliganj upazila of the district on Tuesday.

The convict is Asadul Islam, 55, of Bagergachhi village in the upazila.

Asadul conducted the marriage of Rimi Khatun, a Class IX student of Bagergachhi Secondary School and daughter of Hazrat Ali, and Sakib Hossain, 20, son of Monir Hossain, without verifying the birth registration certificate of the bride on Tuesday morning, said Kaliganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sadekur Rahman, also executive magistrate, who passed the order.

However, sensing the presence of the law enforcers the bridegroom, his father and other relatives fled from the marriage function.

# Four drug peddlers arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Detective Branch of police on Tuesday night arrested four alleged drug peddlers along with a huge quantity of drugs in Benapole and Sharsha upazila of Jessore.

Officer-in-Charge of Detective Branch (DB) of police Imamul Haque said DB conducted drives in Benapole and Sharsha upazila and arrested the four along with one and a half kg of heroin, 4,000 Yaba pills, 2 kg of hemp and 155 bottles of Indian Phensidyl worth around Tk 1.64 crore.

The arrestees are Sajib Mia, 40, Animesh, 45, of Sharsha, and Keramat Ali, 47, and Basudev Chandra, 45, of Benapole.

# Yoke on shoulder for Tk 200 a day

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Believe it or not, some farm labourers do the arduous task of pulling yoke on their shoulders to plough the land for a meagre daily wage of Tk 200.

The bizarre scene is not that much uncommon during the ongoing maize cultivation season in different areas including Purbo Bhelabari village of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat.

Farmers generally use cows to plough their lands but it is done manually in the maize fields during the growing period of plants to prevent damage to the crop, said locals.

"During growth of the maize plants, the field has to be ploughed 2-3 times in two months for keeping the soil fertile. Generally farmers and hired labourers till the maize field by pulling the plough with hands, but some farmers use hired labourers for pulling the yoke on shoulders," said farmer Nazrul Islam, 55, of the village.

"I have cows but using those for

pulling yoke to plough the maize field would damage a good portion of the plants. And so, I have hired labourers to do the work," said Bazlur Rahman, 45, who has cultivated maize on 15 bighas of land at the village.

In the process, usually two hired farm labourers pull the yoke while the landowner farmer himself handles the plough, locals said.

"We do the difficult work for Tk 200 per day as no other job is available now," said Nur Jamal, 35, a farm labourer of Bhelabari village.

Jagodish Chandra Barmon, 33, another labourer at the village, said they become tired during pulling yoke but they have to work from morning till late afternoon as the landowner targets ploughing at least five bighas a day.

Farm labourers face job crisis during the Bangla month of Chaitra to mid-Baishakh every year and they are hired for farm work again when boro paddy harvesting starts afterwards.

# Councillor held on charge of extortion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police arrested a ward councillor of the municipality on extortion charge after a contractor filed a case against him on Tuesday night.

The arrestee is Mostafa Kamal Mukti Babu, 45, a councillor of ward No-2. Police arrested him from his home in Chawliapatti area on Wednesday morning.

Police produced the councillor before a court on Wednesday afternoon, seeking a seven-day remand. Hearing on the remand will be held today.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Sada Police Station Redwanur Rahim said Gour Chandra Shil, a contractor of the municipality and president of ward No-11 unit of Awami League (AL), filed an extortion case against Mostafa on Tuesday night.

Mostafa demanded Tk 50,000 from Gour Chandra, the OC said.

Protesting the arrest, councillors of the municipality locked the municipality building and blocked the road in front of the municipality at around 12:30pm. Later, Mayor Jahangir Alam brought the situation under control.



Two farm labourers do the arduous task of pulling yoke on their shoulders to plough the land at Purbo Bhelabari village of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY