

28 women return after serving in Indian jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dhaka

Twenty eight Bangladeshi women and three children returned home on Wednesday after serving three years in an Indian jail. They hail from Khulna, Narail, Bagerhat and Jessore. Officer-in-Charge of Benapole Immigration Police Omar Sharif said they entered India illegally three and a half years back and had to pass through Jessore border. Indian police arrested them from Maharashtra and a court sentenced them to imprisonment for three years each. The Indian government returned them following exchange of letters between the home ministries of the two countries. Police said they handed the women over to their respective families through Mahila Ainjibi Samity.



Traditional jackfruit market at Brahmanbazar in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar.

PHOTO: STAR

Jackfruit market a centuries-old tradition

Kulaura Kathaler Haat draws buyers, sellers on Mondays and Thursdays

MINUTU DESHWARA with ANDREW EAGLE

Once small now thriving, quiet and crowded, still and bustling, Kathaler Haat, the "jackfruit market" in Brahmanbazar of Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila is as old as the oldest of the trees which bear the national fruit. Following tradition that has endured longer than any one can recall, Mondays and Thursdays draw them in, buyers and sellers. It's a kind of bi-weekly thriving homage to heritage that fills the humble market with life.

"My father saw this market active since his childhood," says Brahmanbazar resident Moimul Islam, 69. "I myself have seen it since I was a boy. Now is the season when the market is at its busiest; over the years it has grown because getting here is much easier nowadays."

On market days thousands of people attend the market where jackfruits sell from between Tk 30 to Tk 80 depending on their size. "I used to be unemployed," says one youth, Jasim Uddin of Kulaura's Dhamul village. "Now I earn money here selling my jackfruits."

"I have two hundred jackfruit trees in my orchard," says another seller, Motiar Rahman, "and this year the production rate is up, better than last season."

"This market is suitable for wholesale buyers," notes jackfruit trader Nazmul Hasan who has reached the spot from his native Brahmanbazar. "There is a minimum purchase size of one hundred jackfruits for which I spend between Tk 3,000 to Tk 6,000."

For the past five years Nazmul has been a regular visitor. "The rates here are cheap," he says. "It's very profitable to buy jackfruits here and sell them elsewhere in the country."

And besides, for me this market is a family tradition: my father used to visit this market before me. Many families pursue the jackfruit trade from here."

On an average market day up to 40,000 jackfruits are sold. "Depending on the strength of the season, robust trade in jackfruits can continue well into July," says Brahmanbazar local Mohammad Ali, 65, who has also seen the market active since he was young. "Thousands of people arrive daily," remarks the shopkeeper of a nearby betel leaf stall. "I said Sabar Mia. All sizes of jackfruit are available to enjoy."

No doubt the betel leaf business has brought his betel leaf sales too, just as it brings lively business to Imad Mia's nearby tea stall.

"These are busy days," Imad Mia says. "Because of the market in jackfruit season my tea sales triple. I wait all year for these profitable months!"

According to the deputy director of the agriculture extension department in Moulvibazar, Shajahan Chowdhury, bumper jackfruit production across the district due to favourable weather conditions has been encouraging for the industry. "Jackfruit cultivation is becoming increasingly popular," he says, "and our department is supporting the industry's growth."

"Jackfruit is of course delicious," notes the department's

divisional director in Moulvibazar, Dr. Mamunur Rashid. "Its timber is useful for quality furniture manufacture and jackfruit seeds are used in cooking. It's a profitable plant for farmers, no doubt; and for many people with jackfruit trees in their gardens selling the fruit brings in extra income without any expense."

Jackfruit orchards are a traditional endeavour for many families in the area, he adds, a tradition often passed down through generations. That being the case, it can be anticipated that Brahmanbazar's iconic Kathaler Haat will remain a celebrated, thriving part of the local landscape for many years to come.

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Most indigenous students yet to get textbooks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Education of the indigenous children is being hampered in the district as most of them are yet to get textbooks in their mother languages.

Besides, there is a shortage of teachers trained to teach in different mother languages.

Bandarban District Primary Education Officer (in-charge) Riton Kumar Barua said they received only 759 copies of pre-primary textbooks for the indigenous Marna students, although they recommended for 5,308 copies for the students of Chakma, Marna and Tripura communities.

Of the 5,308 pre-primary students, 4,235 are Marna, 863 Tripura and 208 Chakma, he said, adding that Tripura and Chakma students have not got any books yet.

There are 38,168 students in 343 schools of the hill district, said Riton, adding that around 60 percent of them are from different ethnic minority communities.

The indigenous children were supposed to get pre-primary books by January 1 under the government's first-ever mother tongue-based multilingual education programme, said Riton. SWE Prue Marna, alias Khola Sri, Khola, a retired teacher, said the kids of the district are yet to get books.

There are also other communities like Tangchanga,

Education of the indigenous children is being hampered due to lack of textbooks and shortage of trained teachers to teach in mother languages.

Mro, Khumi, Pankhua, Lusa, Khyang, Bawn and Chak in the hills and they have their own language.

"We have received a few textbooks in indigenous languages while we lack skilled teachers for the pre-primary children," Riton said.

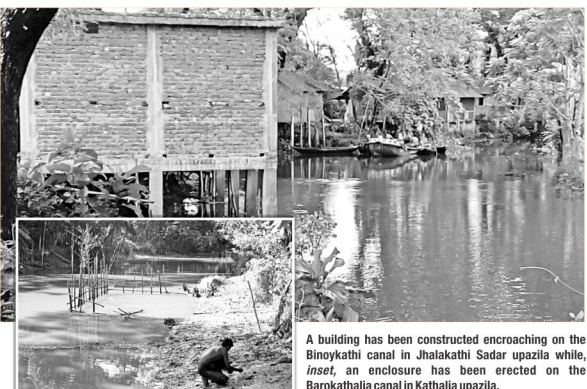
"The problem was not to be resolved even if the children get books as there is lack of qualified and trained teachers, leading to early drop out of indigenous children," he added.

Bandarban Hill District Council Chairman Kwe Shwe Hla said that shortage of trained teachers is hampering education of the indigenous children.

U Mya Nu Marna, a guardian in Rowangchhari upazila, said, "My daughter dropped out when she was in Class II due to shortage of teachers trained in mother tongue-based education."

Bandarban Para Primary School Headmaster U Shong Nu Marna said, "Although most of the students of my school are from Marna community, we cannot teach them in their own language as we have no teachers trained in Marna language."

"It really tough to teach indigenous students of my school as most of them are from Mro community while we do not have any Mro teachers and books in their mother tongue," said Dipak Kanti Mallik, headmaster of remote Tonkiboti Government Primary School.



A building has been constructed encroaching on the Binokathi canal in Jhalakathi Sadar upazila while, inset, an enclosure has been erected on the Barokathalia canal in Kathalia upazila.

Low quality road work at dead of night!

Locals compel contractor's men to stop malpractice

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nijphamari

Locals at village in Domar upazila under the district compelled the contractor concerned to stop below standard work of an important road, which was being done secretly at dead of night on Wednesday.

Following a tender, Messrs Gofuroneza last month got the work order to construct 3.4-kilometre-long road from Gomnati Bazar to Dangarhat Bailey bridge at a cost of Tk 49 lakh, said sources of Local Government Engineering Department in Domar upazila.

The work includes grading work, intensive repointing of the damaged road, making seal coat and thick carpeting.

The contractor's labourers were doing the work in a hurry near Gomnati market on Wednesday night in absence of the sub-assistant engineer who was the in-charge to monitor the work, said Abdur Rahman, a

teacher of Gomnati High School.

"Hearing the matter, locals went to the spot and found that mud mixed old low quality bricks were being used for filling ditches and holes of the road. Besides, below standard bitumen and stones were being used for doing carpeting work with less thickness," said Afzal Hossain Hinn, a local youth.

Locals compelled the contractor's men to stop the work, AFP added.

Visiting the road yesterday, this correspondent found cracks on the newly done carpeting.

Sub Assistant Engineer, Enamul Haque said, "Ignoring my directive, the contractor did the work at night and he must pay for it."

Upazila Engineer Shah Md Obaidur Rahman said they will take action against the construction firm as per departmental rules.

Child dies as blackberry seed stuck in throat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Begu

A child died when a blackberry seed got stuck in her throat at Joyshing village under Nimgaçi union of Dhanat upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased child was identified as Rubaiya Khatun, 4, daughter of Asadul Islam of the village.

Family members said she was eating blackberries with other children in the house yard when a blackberry seed got stuck in her throat. Locals took her to a nearby physician, but she died when they reached Nimgaçi bazar.

Fisheries, agriculture under threat

Grabbers encroaching and filling up Jhalakathi canals

MD JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, Jhalakathi

Fishermen complained encroachment and filling-up of canals in the district have threatened agriculture and natural habitat of fish.

"Large areas of agricultural land remain unsuitable for lack of irrigation during the dry season due to filling up of canals," said Sheikh Abu Bakar, district deputy director (DD) of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

There are 489 canals in four upazilas of the district - 63 in Kathalia, 125 in Nalchichty, 151 in Rajapur and 152 in Jhalakathi Sadar, according to DAE.

About 19,990 hectares of cultivated farmers have been badly affected as the farmers use the canals for irrigating their lands, Bakar said.

Fish are facing adversity as their breeding- so in the canals are being filled up, said Prithvi Kumar Mallik, deputy director (DD) of fisheries in the district.

"The fish of indigenous species will not survive if we cannot save the canals," he added.

Two hundred-seventy-two canals need to be re-excavated immediately for their survival, both officials said.

Canals are the source of irrigation for agriculture in the dry season," said Md Riaz Bahadur, agriculture officer of Rajapur.

"I used to grow watermelon every year, but I could not do so for the last four seasons due to water crisis," said Belal, a farmer at South Rajapur.

Fishermen complained who catches fish in several canals of the area, told this correspondent that the number of indigenous fish has decreased drastically during the last few years.

These canals were mostly used for communication by the villagers and farmers for carrying their harvest, but they are drying up, farmers and fishermen said.

"I do not see anything wrong in grabbing the canals as many people are doing so," said a grabber at Rajapur.

"We are going to conduct drives to remove the grabbing canals very soon," said Deputy Commissioner Md Hamidul Haque. He said he had already instructed all the upazila nirbahi officers of the district to prepare a report on canal grabbing.

2 'outlaws'

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Tiwaril village of the upazila, was involved with the PBCP for last 13 years. He was accused in seven cases, including murder, extortion, robbery and abduction.

Olta was also the prime accused in fish farmers' leader Ziaur Rahman murder case. Zia was shot dead in April 19, said the police official.

In another incident, Korom Ali, 36, a leader of Puro Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP-ML) Lal Pataka faction, was killed in a "shootout" with police in Chardalandi village of Rajbari's Goolando.

Obaidur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Rajbari Detective Branch of police, said they arrested Korom from Hemyangpur of Dhaka on Wednesday.

Based on information from Korom, they along with him went to Goolando to recover firearms. Korom's accomplices attacked police when they reached Chardalandi around 3:30am, he said.

Korom, from Tenapocha village of the upazila, was hit by bullets when he was trying to flee during the gun battle between police and criminals, he said.

Police claimed to have recovered a shutter gun and two bullets from the spot.

Korom, who stood accused in five cases, including three for murder, had been evading arrest for last three years, reports our Kushtia correspondent, quoting police.

In another development, police shot dead two suspected robbers and wounded two others in Naogang's Manda early yesterday, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

The deceased are Mozammel Hake, 35, of Chapainawabganj's Nachele, and Sujain Hossain, 30, of Rajshahi. The injured are Imran Hossain and Sohel Rana.

Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Manda Police Station, said acting on information that a robber gang in a truck was entering Manda, police put a barricade on Mandaniamatpur road at Chowdhuria.

Police fired bullets when a speedy truck carrying the robbers attempted to hit them after police signalled the vehicle to stop around 2:30am, he said.

Two robbers were killed on the spot and two others injured. The injured were undergoing treatment at Manda Upazila Health Complex, the police official said.

Police seized the truck, the OC added.



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