

SCHOOLGIRL MURDER
Three of a family sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Three members of a family have been sued for killing schoolgirl Jhuma Akhter, 13, in Singair upazila.

The accused are Ebarat Hossain, 50, his wife Farida Parvin, 48, and son Firoz, 24. Ebarat is the elder brother of Manikganj-2 constituency's lawmaker Mamta Begum.

The victim's father Riazul Sheikh yesterday filed the case with Manikganj Judicial Magistrate's Court.

As Riazul married a second time, Jhuma's mother Kanchan Mala left for Saudi Arabia as a female worker over three years ago, said family members.

According to the case statement, Jhuma lived at the house of Ebarat at Joymantap village for the last three years. She appeared in this year's primary terminal examinations.

Ebarat and his family members have been involved in a number of immoral activities. They always insisted that Jhuma join the activities.

As she refused to do the work, the trio killed Jhuma on December 7 and hung the body from the ceiling of the house.

Ziauddin Ujjal, sub-inspector of Singair Police Station, said after getting the autopsy report, the cause of death can be confirmed.

Haor seedbeds still under water

Boro cultivation uncertain in Sunamganj

DWOHA CHOWDHURY with ANDREW EAGLE

The year 2017 will long be remembered in the areas of the haor wetlands of Sunamganj as an annus horribilis. Excessive rain and flash floods marked the year as one in which local farmers lost their mainstay Boro rice harvest and along with it, just about all hope.

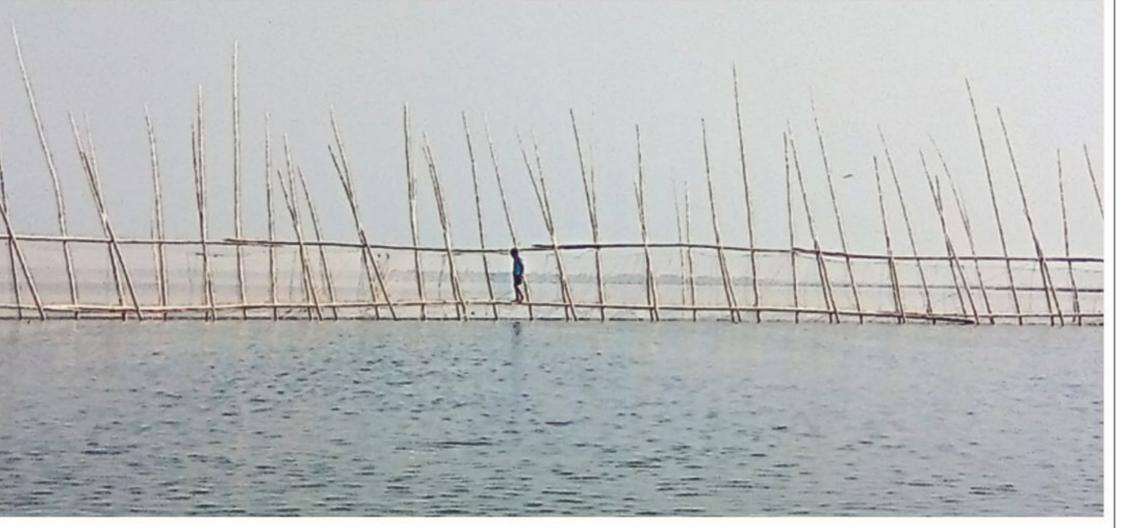
Worse still, high water levels will likely delay the cultivation of Boro paddy in the coming season too, and according to the Water Resources Minister who visited the area recently, farmers should be prepared for the potential of an even bigger blow, regular flash flooding. As winter settles over the haors, farmers eager to prepare for the next Boro paddy cultivation, are frustrated.

"Last year we lost our harvest to unseasonal and heavy rain, so this year we'd hoped to prepare our Boro paddy seedbeds early," says Jashim Uddin, a farmer from Shanir Haor in Tahirpur upazila. "But residual waterlogging is thwarting our plans." Farmers are very concerned that the delay now increases the risk of rain delivering a repeated catastrophe befalling next year's harvest.

"The water level is still so high that the lands we would normally use for Boro seedbeds are unavailable," says Abdul Jalil, a farmer from Dakshinkul Balijuri in Tahirpur. "Normally that land is above water by mid-November." Indeed the prospects for the timely production of Boro seedlings look grim.

On a recent field visit, it was observed by The Daily Star that water continues to flow into Shanir and Halir haors from the Boulai river. Normally at this time of year it would not be the case. "Farmers have nothing to do but wait," says the deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Sunamganj Md Jahedul Haque. "But if seedbed work is undertaken too late no doubt the risk of the next harvest being affected by flash floods will be greater."

The damage caused by the floods that hit the region from the end of March cannot be



Like several other areas of the kind, Halir Haor in Dharmapasha upazila of Sunamganj remains under residual water from the last floods, depriving the farmers of the opportunity to cultivate Boro paddy during the ongoing dry season.

PHOTO: STAR

underestimated. In Sunamganj district alone 113,000 of 166,000 hectares of Boro paddy remained submerged and were left to rot. With crop losses also recorded in adjoining districts, the disaster in rice production took on the proportions of a national crisis.

Much of last season's catastrophe has been blamed on negligence and corruption by the Water Development Board, its contractors and the project implementation committee responsible for the construction and maintenance of embankments. To this backdrop, the Board now plans to spend Tk 28 crore on urgent flood prevention works this financial year. While the planned expenditure is sizeable, many local administrative officials believe it is insufficient. They want a further Tk 70 crore to be spent on ensuring the haors are resistant to excessive flooding.

Furthermore, with a total of 84 flood prevention works from the 2015-16 financial year, and a further 76 works from this financial year yet to be completed, confidence in the Board's remedial efforts is far from being taken for granted. Activists worry that if corruption and negligence in construction tenders and works persist, the same mistakes risk repetition.

On the plus side, a new structure for the project implementation committee has been approved and the 2010 guideline relevant to budget expenditure on embankments and dredging works updated, with the inclusion of district and upazila officials mandated.

According to the Board, the planned dredging of 98.125 kilometres across six key rivers has already commenced. Nonetheless, Kashmir Reza, the president of

a concerned community group, argues that the master plan for the haors which was created in 2012 needs to be implemented as soon as possible. "The emergency response fund must be preserved," he says, "and a technological response to rapidly address embankment breaches at times of flooding should be developed."

"The haor master plan will be implemented soon," said Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud during a recent visit to inspect dredging works. "The height of embankments will be raised if research concludes it will not harm the haors." With regard to the current waterlogging he offered no solution. "We have nothing to do," he said. "We have to wait for water levels to subside naturally before cultivation can start, and before the works planned to commence in late December and early January can begin."

Ornaments worth Tk 32 lakh looted in Keraniganj

BSS, Dhaka

Robbers looted 80 tolas of gold ornaments worth around Tk 32 lakh and Tk 1.5 lakh in cash from a house at West Jaynagar village under Taranagar Union in Keraniganj upazila of the district early hours of yesterday.

Police said a gang of robbers entered the house of late businessman Layek Ali of the village by cutting grills of the window and tied up the inmates of the house brandishing lethal weapons.

They later looted around 80 tolas of gold ornaments and Tk 1.5 lakh in cash from the house and fled the scene. Officer-in-Charge of Keraniganj Model Police Station Shaker Mohammad Jobair said.

Six car lifters arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Six alleged car lifters were arrested in Mirzapur upazila early yesterday.

They are Ariful Islam Sumon, 22, Abdul Awal, 26, Ripon Sheikh, 24, and Sumon Mia, 23, of Baoitara village in Sadar upazila and Hasan Ali, 24, and Shariful Islam, 25, of Kamarkhand upazila of Sirajganj.

Mirzapur police set up a check-post on Dhaka-Tangail Highway at Asimtola, seized a microbus and arrested the six, said police.

Hindu widow cries for justice

Grabber ousts Subhodini Bala from inherited land



Subhodini Bala passes a hard time, living at a hut made on another person's land at Roypara village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila as a neighbour forcibly occupied her 31 decimals of ancestral land at Shahitri village in the upazila a few years ago.

PHOTO: STAR

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A hapless Hindu widow is passing hard days at a hut on another person's land, failing to get back her ancestral land from a land grabber, even 17 months after a village court's verdict in her favour.

Subhodini Bala, 58, widow of Sudhir Barmon, and daughter of late Nitai Chandra Barmon and Makhodasa Bala, inherited 31 decimals of land at Shahitri village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

But Subhodini's neighbour Mazidul Haque Bakshi, 55, son of late Fazle Haque Bakshi, occupied the land a few years ago.

He has also hung a signboard for a housing project on the land.

In June 2015, Subhodini sought justice to the village court of Lalmonirhat municipality as she could not go to the judicial court due to her hardship. The village court sat three times till June 2016 in this regard.

As Mazidul Haque failed to show any documents against Subhodini Bala's claim of the 31 decimals of land,

finally the village court delivered the verdict in favour of the woman on June 20 in 2016 (memo No Lal/Pourasava/BB/142).

"As the legal owner of the land, Subhodini Bala got the village court's verdict in her favour. But this court does not have any legal authority to recover the land from grabber. I suggested the woman to go to the judicial court for getting legal support," municipality Mayor Reazul Islam Rintu told this correspondent.

Subhodini Bala said she does not have the money for taking legal procedure with the court.

Babul Hossain, a local leader at Shahitri village, said he tried several times to settle the dispute but Mazidul Haque declined to settle it without a judicial court's order.

Mazidul Haque, the alleged land grabber, claimed that the land was purchased from late Abu Sayeed of the same village 30 years ago.

But he kept silent when asked why he failed to show any document against the land to the village court.



The alleged land grabber set a signboard at Subhodini Bala's land.

Bhasani's contribution recalled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The 137th birth anniversary of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, a legendary politician and a dreamer of independent Bangladesh, was observed in Tangail yesterday.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Mohammad Alauddin of Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University with teachers, students and other officials of the institution placed wreaths at his grave in Santosh area in the town.

A doa mahfil was arranged at the Central Mosque of the university seeking eternal blessings for his departed soul.

Besides, different political and socio-cultural organisations held various programmes marking the day.

Born at Sirajganj's Dhangara village in 1880, Bhasani was the founding president of Awami Muslim League and later formed the left-leaning political organisation National Awami Party (NAP).

He played a vital role in the mass upsurge in 1969 and also led the historic Farakka March in 1976 to ensure the country's share of the Ganges river water.

Throughout his entire life he worked relentlessly for the oppressed people that earned him the title "Mazlum Jana Neta."

Saline water threatens crops

Farmers worried as the collapsed dyke yet to be repaired in Galachipa

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The collapsed dyke on Bhadra canal in Bauria village under Galachipa upazila has remained without any repair for over a year, as a result of which saline water enters the nearby farmlands.

Farmers of Bauria, Chalitabunia, Khandakhali, Gerabunia, Ramando, Sonakhali, Kanchonbaria and Algee villages in Amkhola union under the upazila are worried over cultivation of crops as saline water enters the fields through the damaged sluice gate.

Water Development Board (WDB) Sub-Assistant Engineer Md Javed Iqbal said WDB built the two-door sluice gate in 1991 at a cost of Tk 50 lakh to protect agricultural land of the

villages from saline water of nearby Buragourano river.

The dyke on both sides of the sluice gate was washed away by heavy tidal surge in the rainy season in 2016, but the sluice gate still stands. Saline water enters the villages through the damaged portions on both sides of the sluice gate.

Md Delwar Hossain, 40, a marginal farmer of Bauria village, said he is worried about cultivating crops as saline water enters the fields.

"I got good profit by cultivating watermelon for several years on my fields, but from last year crop cultivation has become uncertain," he said. The sluice gate is useless, he added.

Golam Mostafa, another farmer, said they tried to save the dyke, but in vain. He cultivated mung bean, dal

and watermelon on his nine acres of land last year, but saline water entered his fields, he said. They are worried that saline water will enter the crops fields this year also, he added. Like Delwar and Mostafa, several thousand farmers of the villages are also worried over the same issue.

Upazila Agriculture Extension Officer Abdul Mannan said there are 410 hectares of cultivable agricultural land in the eight villages and the farmers are in uncertainty over cultivation of crops. The authorities concerned should take immediate steps to repair the dyke, considering the interest of farmers, he added.

Sub-assistant engineer of WDB said they are planning to build a three-door sluice gate and repair the dyke at an estimated cost of Tk 4.83 crore.



The sluice gate on Bhadra canal in Bauria village under Galachipa upazila of Patuakhali has become useless as the dyke has collapsed.

PHOTO: STAR

Pirojpur, a witness to Pak army's brutality

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

During the Liberation War, Pirojpur town saw horrible scenes of brutalities by Pakistan occupation army.

After entering Pirojpur town in late April in 1971, they started killing innocent people there.

Picking up people from the town and nearby areas with the help of their local collaborators, Pakistan army would bring them near the ghat (landing station) on the Baleshwar river and shot them dead. Then they would kick the bodies into the river.

"Almost every day, Pakistani army would kill people at Baleshwar ghat," said Ratan Halder,

65, from Hoglabunia village under Morrelganj upazila in Bagerhat.

He witnesses the massacres on the Baleshwar river several times when he came to Pirojpur town.

"At times the Pakistan army shot the captives dead. Sometimes they killed people by slitting throats or piercing them with bayonet," said Ratan, who still feels scared to remember the gory scenes.

"Stink spread from water as dead bodies floated on the river and connected canals," he said.

Al Helal, 35, a resident of Pirojpur town, said, "We came to know about the massacre of Pakistani army in Pirojpur during the Liberation War from elderly people."

The killing spot is now a preserved place.

"The memorable spots related with our Liberation War must be preserved to inform the next generation about the supreme sacrifices of the freedom loving people," he said.

The Pakistan army also committed massacres with the help of their collaborators at several other spots in the district.

"During the Liberation War, I was outside Pirojpur. But we heard about the barbarities of Pakistan army in the then sub-divisional town," said MA Rabbani Firoj, deputy commander of Pirojpur Muktijoddha Sangsad.

Tokyo

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a seat is wanted. Its purpose is to ensure passengers who would not notice their existence because they are looking at their smartphones' are alerted to pregnant women in their midst.

The trial is being run on the last carriage of eight trains a day along the Ginza Line, which travels through the centre of Japan's capital, according to the Japan Times.

The messages will only be sent to people near the pregnant woman who indicates she wants a seat.

Nearby users of the app can then offer their seat by specifying their location and permitting the woman to take their perch.

The trial is being organised by the Tokyo Metro Co, Line Corp and Dai Nippon Printing Co.

A Dai Nippon official said that, if the trial should be successful, it could expand to include other people more likely to need a seat.

The spokesperson said: "By putting the service into practical use, we are aiming to create a system that is helpful not only for pregnant women, but also for disabled and elderly people."