



Workers of food processing factories collect papayas from Badal Miah's orchard in Ghatail upazila of Tangail. *Inset*, Badal, the enterprising farmer.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Badal, an enterprising papaya farmer

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Born to a family of farmers, Badal Miah of Ghatail upazila under the district has cultivated all sorts of fruits throughout his life. But it was papaya farming that catapulted him to prominence.

The 45-year-old from Sagardighi in Ghatail is now a role model to the farmers in his locality.

Growing up in the area, some 100 km northwest of Dhaka, Badal left school at an early age to join his father in farming work. They made a living mainly off growing bananas in the hilly terrain of Ghatail with fertile soils and favourable weather conditions, along with pineapples, turmeric, ginger and arum on a limited scale.

"Banana cultivation is prolific but it requires at least a year for the plants to grow to fruit bearing size," recalls Badal.

It was a bold step that made him invest Tk 5 lakh from his savings to lease 20 acres of land from the local land owners early last year.

He planted the red lady hybrid variety of papaya seedlings in March. The trees grow to mid height at about six feet in three to four months and then begin to bear fruit, said Badal.

Last year, he sold papayas worth Tk 25 lakh from the orchards to commercial fruit

juice processors, bringing in a profit of Tk 20 lakh.

The red lady hybrid variety is more sought after than the local variety as it has a distinctive cerise colour, is sweeter and more fragrant. Papaya is high in demand for its nutritious properties; it is rich in antioxidants and vitamins C and B. It is also a good source of fibre and minerals such as magnesium.

With the success of the previous year, he gained the confidence to lease an additional 16 acres of land, expanding his orchard to 36 acres altogether.

"I spent a total of Tk 20 lakh on leasing, labour costs, seedlings, fertilisers and pesticides to nurture the orchards. I sold the produce to several food processing industries for Tk 50 lakh this year, churning a profit of Tk 30 lakh," said Badal.

"Badal Miah has become an inspiration to all the farmers in the area," said Khademul Mamun, a schoolteacher at Sagardighi.

"We have extended all sorts of support to Badal, including training and advice on nurturing the trees on such a large scale," said Mohammad Abdul Matin Biswas, agriculture officer in Ghatail.

"Papaya cultivation is easy and profitable as the fruit matures throughout the year," he added.

Boda, Bakshiganj municipal polls today

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Elections to Boda and Bakshiganj municipalities in Panchagarh and Jamalpur are going to be held today for the first time.

Four candidates are contesting for the mayoral post while 60 candidates for nine councilors and 24 women for three councillors (reserved for women) in the election to Boda municipality after 16 years of its formation, reports our Thakurgaon correspondent.

Awami League backed candidate for mayoral post advocate Wahiduzzaman Suja is facing tough competition from BNP's 'rebel' candidate AKM Akhtar Hossain Hasan.

BNP backed candidate Hakikul Islam remains behind in the electoral race as he has failed to attract party men's support, said locals.

As many as 13,164 voters are expected to exercise their right to franchise through nine polling centres, said Shahidul Islam, election officer in Panchagarh.

Meanwhile, election to Bakshiganj municipality in Jamalpur will be held the same day for the first time since it was declared as municipality in 2013, reports our correspondent.

Six candidates for the mayoral post, 58 for nine councilor posts of nine wards and 21 aspirants for three women reserved councillor posts will contest in the election.

AL nominated Shahina Begum while BNP candidate Fakruzzaman Matin, independent candidate Solaiman Haque and three AL 'rebel' candidates are contesting in the mayoral race.

There are 30,587 voters, including 15,517 females, under 12 polling centres.

MURDER OF TWO MOULVIBAZAR STUDENTS Main accused scot-free after three weeks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Families of two murdered students are passing days amid worry as the named accused are yet to be arrested, 19 days after the double murder in the district town.

Mohammad Ali, a second year student of Moulvibazar Government College, and Nahid Ahmad, an SSC candidate of Moulvibazar Government High School, were killed in front of the gate of Moulvibazar Government High School dormitory in the district town in the evening of December 7.

Two days after the incident, Mohammad Ali's mother Selina Rahman Chowdhury filed a murder case against 12 named people and 6 to 7 other unidentified men with Moulvibazar Police Station.

Nahid's uncle Golam Imran Ali said, "We have not files any case yet. We are frustrated as the accused in Ali murder case, are not caught yet. The accused would be the same people, if we will file a case for killing Nahid."

Sources said there was a conflict between Mohammad Ali and Chhatra League activist Anisul Islam Tushar, No 1 accused in the murder case, concerning formation of a committee at Moulvibazar Government High School.

Asaduzzaman Rony, president of

Chhatra League's district committee, said, "The dead students were not members of any Chhatra League committee. We didn't make any committee in Moulvibazar Government College, and Moulvibazar Government High School."

However, Saifur Rahman, general secretary of the district BCL, said Mohammad Ali was a BCL activist.

Sohel Ahmed, officer-in-charge (OC) of Moulvibazar Model Police Station, said, "Four or five days before the double murder, Nahid beat up Fahim Muntasir, a follower of Anisul Islam Tushar. Fahim is also a named accused in the case."

"They went to Moulvibazar Government High School dormitory premises for settlement of the issue. Then the killings occurred. There was a conflict concerning internal control and formation of school committee," he said.

Drives are on to arrest the named accused, the OC said, adding that police have arrested three suspects over the issue.

Earlier on December 17, slain Mohammad Ali's mother Selina and father Abu Bakar Siddique met Moulvibazar Deputy Commissioner Tofail Islam and demanded justice.

Houses of 3 indigenous families looted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A gang of robbers looted valuables worth Tk 5 lakh from the houses of three indigenous families in Joypurhat Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Locals said a gang of around 10 robbers carrying sharp weapons stormed into the houses of Bibhudan Sardar, Dilip Aindry and Bipul Kumar at Tetuloli village under the upazila. The gang ran-sacked the houses and looted gold ornaments, Tk 31,000 in cash and mobile phone sets.

The robbers also beat up the family members and left the spot after an hour, said Bipul Kumar.

A police team visited the spot after learning about the incident.

Joypurhat Superintendent of Police Rashidul Hasan said a case was filed with Sadar Police Station regarding the robbery.

Outlaw killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A top cadre of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP-ML) Janajuddho faction was killed in a 'shootout' with police in Sadar upazila of Chuadanga early yesterday.

The deceased, Kohinur Rahman alias Ketu, 43, was accused in six cases including three for murders filed with different police stations in Meherpur and Chuadanga, police said.

"Police arrested Ketu from a hideout of Keraniganj in Dhaka on Tuesday morning. He was brought to Chuadanga Sadar Police Station in the evening. During interrogation, Ketu admitted about his firearms at Bhalipur village in the district," said Amir Abbas, officer-in-charge (OC-operation) of Chuadanga Sadar Police Station.

"Police started with Ketu to recover the hidden firearms. As soon as the law enforcers reached the spot on Chuadanga-Jhenidah highway, Ketu's aides opened fire, triggering a gunfight between them and police," he said.

"Ketu was killed in a line of fire when he tried to flee from police custody with handcuff. The other outlaws managed to flee the scene. Police seized one revolver, six bullets, six crude bombs and six knives from the spot," the OC said.

Five police personnel, who were injured in the incident, were given first aid at Chuadanga Sadar Hospital, said Ahsan Habib, assistant superintendent of police in Chuadanga.

"Ketu, a close aid of Janajuddho founder Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Dada Tapan, fled his home district Chuadanga to evade arrest several years ago. But he continued extortion from different people through phone," the official said.

A witness to brutality of Pak occupation forces

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

freedom fighters

Even more than four decades after independence, no initiative has been taken to preserve an unseen bunker that stands in the district town as a witness to the cruelty of the Pakistani occupation forces and the sacrifices of the local people during the Liberation War.

The bunker, located in the Primary Teachers Training Institute (PTI) area in the town, is hidden from people's eyes due to lack of initiative of the local administration to make it a memorial of the Liberation War.

Local sources and freedom fighters said the PTI area was the brigade headquarters of the Pakistani occupation army in 1971. They dug a 30-foot-long, 25-foot-wide and 10-foot-deep bunker there for torturing local people and

Pakistani forces abducted the then District Council Chairman Azizur Rahman, also convenor of the sub-divisional committee and general secretary of Awami League Moulvibazar unit, on March 26 in 1971 and tortured him in the bunker.

The Pakistani soldiers brought huge numbers of people to the bunker and tortured them there, locals said.

On a visit to the area, this correspondent saw that the bunker is closed on three sides, with a staircase going to the interior.

Head of PTI AKM Saiful Hasan said they are taking care of the bunker.

Azizur Rahman said they will initiate a project to build terracotta statues to depict the torture that was carried out there by the Pakistani army.



The bunker in the Primary Teachers Training Institute (PTI) area of Moulvibazar town where the Pakistani occupation forces tortured local people in 1971.

PHOTO: STAR



A banana orchard at Char Sonagazi of the Dharla river in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. Banana farming has become the main source of income for flood affected char people in the district for the last few years.

Char farmers rewrite fate

Around 80 percent demand for banana in Lalmonirhat is met from Dharla char areas

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Banana farming has become the main source of income for flood affected char people along the Dharla river in Sadar upazila for the last few years.

Flood victim Nur Mohammad of Char Sonagazi said more than 3000 banana trees on his three acres of land were fully damaged by this year's floods. He spent Tk two lakh for farming the fruit.

"After the flood, I have planted banana trees on the affected sandy char land of the Dharla," Nur said, adding that he is trying to recoup his loss.

"We have been farming Malbhog variety of banana on our char lands for the last few years and most of the char people now depend on the farming here," said another flood affected farmer Sultan Hossain of the same area.

Farmer Nuruzzaman Miah of Char

Folimari said banana trees worth about Tk 3 lakh on six acres were damaged fully by the flood.

"I have already planted banana plants on the flood affected orchards and earned Tk 1.50 lakh to Tk 1.50 lakh from one acre of land by spending Tk 65 to Tk 70 thousand per acre. We never face marketing difficulty in selling bananas as buyers come to our doors," he said.

Banana farming areas are Char Khatamari, Char Kharuya, Char Sonagazi, Char Shiberkuti, Char Jatin, Madhya Char, Char Gorokmandol, Char Folimari, Char Banshpochai, Char Nuton and Char Bowalmari in Lalmonirhat Sadar.

Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Enamul Haque said the fertile sandy soil in char areas of the Dharla is very favourable for banana farming here. Around 80 percent demand for banana in the district is fulfilled from the char areas.

Cop held with Phensidyl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A policeman was arrested with banned drugs on Dhaka-Khulna Highway in Madhukhali upazila of the district on Tuesday.

The arrestee is Sheikh Azam, 34, of Pacuria village in Lohagora upazila of Narail, and traffic inspector of Jhenidah police.

Locals said Azam and another man were going to Faridpur by a motorbike when they had an accident and 39 bottles of Phensidyl fell out. Locals caught them and took them to Madhukhali Police Station. Police recovered 43 more bottles from them.

Officer-in-Charge Md Mizanur Rahman said Azam was handed over to Jhenidah police on Tuesday night.