

Schoolgirls foil two early marriages in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Schoolgirls of two brigades foiled two early marriage bids in Trishal upazila yesterday.

Members of a girls' brigade foiled an early marriage bid at Birrampur village in Rampur union under the upazila. The girl is a ninth grader at a local madrasa.

The marriage was scheduled to be held yesterday. Getting the information, brigade members of Rampur High School, led by Eva Akhter, rushed to the spot and tried to persuade the girl's parents to cancel the marriage, but they refused, said Headmaster Faruq Rezaul Islam.

Later, teacher Md Sheikh Farid, union parishad Chairman Nazmul Hossain and local elites joined the girls' effort. They succeeded in convincing the girl's parents and the marriage was stopped.

The parents also pledged not to get the girl married off until she reached maturity, said the chairman.

In another incident, girls of Kazir Shimla Nazrul High School foiled an early marriage bid of a poor girl at Paar Dhanikhola village in Boilor union under the upazila yesterday.

Rafiqul Alam, brigade coordinator of Trishal, said the marriage of the girl, a ninth grader of the school, was scheduled to be held on Friday.

Hearing the news, the brigade members, led by Reshma Akhter, convinced the parents not to marry her off before maturity.



Students of Sunflower Kindergarten School in Sadar upazila of Nilphamari gather near the tobacco crushing factory wall (X marked) to request the owner to stop operation during school hours as it poses a health hazard, besides hampering their study. *Inset*, a machine operator inside the tobacco crushing factory. PHOTO: STAR



Kids inhale tobacco dust

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

A tobacco crushing factory next to a primary school beside Nilphamari-Domar road in Sadar upazila poses health hazard for students and hampers academic activities as it operates during class time, ignoring the protest of locals and guardians.

Haralal Roy, 55, set up the factory near Palashbari bazar one month ago with the blessing of some ruling party men. He took a trade license from Palashbari Union Parishad (UP) saying that he was going to set up a rice husking mill.

Sunflower Kindergarten School was established in 2001 and gained reputation in the area for imparting quality education. Fifty-four students appeared in the last Primary School Certificate examinations and pass rate was 100 percent, while 19 got GPA-5.

Headmaster Chanchal Chakrobarti said there are 300 students, from Class I to Class V, in the institution.

Class IV students Shuvankar Roy and Sathi

Akhtar said tobacco dust filled the classrooms as the factory was operated during school hours, making it impossible to stay inside.

"Many of us suffer from chronic headache, vomiting, loss of appetite, sneezing and coughing as we are compelled to inhale air mixed with tobacco dust and bad odour," said Eti Rani Roy, a student of Class V.

"Due to the loud noise from the factory, we cannot hear the teachers' words," said students Motina Akhtar and Jibon Chandra.

"Every day, some students feel sick and many of them have stopped coming to school due to the terrible situation, which hampers their education," said Mala Rani, a teacher.

"I submitted a written complaint to the deputy commissioner last week, seeking a solution for the greater interest of the students," the headmaster said.

"Local elites and guardians requested the owner to shift the factory to another place as it is not only hampering education but also causing health hazard for buyers and traders in

Palashbari bazar, but the owner turned down the request with support of his close relative Dipu Roy, who is an influential leader of the ruling party," School Managing Committee President Mojnu Mia said.

"I supply crushed tobacco to a bidi factory in Barisal and thirty poor people, mostly women, work here on daily wage basis," said factory owner Haralal.

"I have permission from the local UP. The factory is not creating a hazard to students as I have built a high boundary wall between the factory and the school to prevent tobacco dust from entering the classrooms," he added.

"We issued trade license in favour of Haralal as he said he would set up a rice husking mill, but he set up a tobacco crushing factory, violating the rules," said Palashbari UP Chairman Momtaz Ali.

"The hazardous factory, set up in a crowded place, is a public nuisance. We will take action as per law," said Additional District Magistrate of Nilphamari Collectorate Shahinoor Alam.

Ordeal of a raped teenage mother

ABM AMINUL ISLAM, Jamalpur

A 36-day-old baby, who came to an unwelcome world through a caesarean on February 20, is now on the lap of his 13-year-old mother, a rape victim in Jamalpur Sadar upazila.

The victim and her hard-pressed parents are now passing days through mental sufferings, observed this correspondent while visiting the family on Sunday.

The girl, raped allegedly by her neighbour Shahjahan, 45, father of three children, at Sheikhpura village of the upazila in mid May last year, disclosed the matter to her parents when she developed pregnancy complications in mid November.

She was taken to a local private clinic where the doctors confirmed her sixth-month pregnancy.

The victim's father filed a rape case accusing Shahjahan under Women and Children Repression Prevention act with Sadar Police Station on November 23 last year, said Inspector Mahabbat Kabir, investigation officer (IO) of the case.

"Despite repeated drives, police could not arrest the accused. After investigating, a charge-sheet against the accused was submitted to a senior judicial magistrate's court on March 4," said the IO.

The victim's mother said, "My husband has to maintain a six-member family with his daily earning of Tk 300 to Tk 400, and so, we cannot provide necessary nutrition to my daughter, mother of a newborn."

"The IO helped us by paying the bill for my daughter's caesarean. Now we are concerned over the legal recognition of the child, along with wherewithal to bring him up with proper care," she said.

Meanwhile, local NGO Unnayan Sangha under a project titled 'Improved Institutional Response to Children Contact/Conflict with the Law' will run the case in favour of the plaintiff, said Human Resource Development director of the NGO Jahangir Salim, also a rights activist.

The district administration should take steps to ease the ordeal of the troubled family, he said.

The girl, raped allegedly by her neighbour Shahjahan, 45, father of three, in May last year, disclosed the matter to her parents when she developed pregnancy complications in November.

FIVE UP CHAIRMAN POLLS TOMORROW

Concern about fair elections

Pro-BNP candidates allege threat by AL men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) candidates for union parishad (UP) chairman post yesterday expressed doubt about peaceful elections in Kalapara upazila.

They expressed this at a press conference at Kalapara Press Club.

Polls will be held on Thursday in Baliatali, Mithaganj, Dhankhali, Champapur and Dalbuganj UPs.

Nurul Kabir Jhunu, BNP candidate for Baliatali union, read out a written statement. Candidates

Monibur Rahman Khondakar of Mithaganj, Kamruzzaman Kazol Talukder of Dhankhali, Md Mostaq Hawlader of Champapur

and Gazi Musfiqur Rahman of Dalbuganj union also spoke on the occasion.

They said Awami League (AL) candidates are threatening BNP men not to cast their votes. Many outsiders have entered the unions to work for AL candidates, violating the election code of conduct, they added.

"We raised the issue before Additional Commissioner of the Election Commission Secretariat Md Mokhlesur Rahman when he met us on March 25," Jhunu said.

AL candidate for Baliatali union ABM Humayun Kabir said BNP candidates are spreading propaganda against them as they (BNP men) realise they will be defeated.

Upazila Election Officer Md Abdur Rashid and UNO Md Tanveer Rahman said they are ready to hold peaceful elections.

Patuakhali Election Officer Khan Abi Shahnur Khan said all possible steps are being taken to hold fair, free elections in a peaceful environment.

The girl who cannot raise her head

Seven-year-old with brain tumours spends time bedridden

KONGKON KARMAKER with ANDREW EAGLE

Childhood should be carefree, a time for novel experience and exploring a newfound world. But for seven-year-old Zannatun from Joypurhat's Shantinagar, such a childhood is far from reality. For the whole of her life, Zannatun has never been able to get out of bed. She suffers from multiple meningiomas, the most common type of brain tumours, which are located just inside the skull. Such tumours are rarely cancerous. They can usually be removed by surgery and often do not return. But Zannatun's family can't afford her surgery. With her head enlarged by the tumours, getting out of bed is no small task.

She can't sit up even with the help of family members due to the weight of her head," says her distraught father Abdul Alim, the imam of Shantinagar mosque. "Her head was unusually large at birth. Due to her condition she cannot talk properly or fully open her eyes. Zannatun can't play like other children."

The couple, who also have a ten-year-old son, took her to hospitals in Joypurhat and



Tumour-affected Zannatun with her father at Joypurhat Sadar Hospital. PHOTO: STAR

Rangpur but found no success in accessing proper treatment. Indeed it is only recently that doctors at Rangpur Medical College Hospital definitively diagnosed her condition.

"Surgery is the only chance she has to live a normal life," says Dr Zobayar Galib, a paediatrician at Joypurhat Sadar Hospital. "We advised her parents to arrange surgery as

soon as possible, but for their financial hardship they haven't been able to do that."

"We have already sold all our belongings of value to pay for her treatment," says the girl's mother Reshma Khatun, sobbing.

"It's so difficult to tolerate her pain and suffering," says the father. "Just to witness it is unbearable."



A house with solar panels at Sangdia village in Kachua upazila of Bagerhat.

Solar power lightens life

Solar energy gets popular in Bagerhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Solar power has become very popular in Bagerhat and many people are installing solar panels in their houses and shops as summer approaches.

Visiting Sangdia village in Kachua upazila, this correspondent found that people are installing solar panels, battery, light and fan for Tk 15,000.

"I have installed solar lights, fans and mobile phone charging sockets, which helps me much," said Sabuj Das, a medicine shop owner in the village.

"In the day time, I do not have to switch off the fans as they take energy directly from the sun. At night I do not have to worry about load shedding as I can use the battery for lights," he said.

"I have installed a solar panel, so I do not have to pay electricity bill," said Pobitra Das of Sangdia village.

"I have installed two solar panels,

although we have electricity. We use the fans and lights directly from the sunlight in the day time," said Robi of Sangdia.

"We use five fans and 12 lights by rotation to keep cool in the scorching heat of the sun without any cost. At night we use the lights and fans during load-shedding," he said.

"I am using an old battery from my van and bought a solar panel only for Tk 1,400 to use at night. I do not buy kerosene now as I do not need lamps anymore," said van-puller Nazir Sheikh of Afra village.

"Using solar power is a good idea to save electricity with a small investment. I urge the people to use solar fans and solar lights instead of electricity," said Bagerhat Pallibiduyt Samity General Manager Motaheer Hossain.

"At least 30,000 people in Bagerhat are using solar panels and more people are buying them," he said.

Gold worth Tk 2.50cr seized at Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Two people, including an Indian national, were arrested yesterday with gold bars in Putkhali and Sikarpur border areas here.

They were carrying a total of 56 gold bars (weighing 5 kg 800 grams) worth around Tk 2.50 crore.

The arrestees are Abdur Razzak, 35, son of Ataur Rahman of Putkhali village and Mithu Dafader, 30, son of Hajrat Dafader of Bagda in North 24 Pargana district under West Bengal state of India.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) 21 Battalion Commanding Officer Lt Col Tarikul Hakim said they arrested them in separate drives at Putkhali and Sikarpur border villages.