

Trader found dead in train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj
 A turmeric trader was found dead in a local train at Chapainawabganj Railway Station yesterday. Government Railway Police (GRP) recovered the body after receiving information from passengers of a Rajshahi-bound train from Rohonpur. Amnura railway junction GRP check post Sub-Inspector Nurul Huda said the deceased was Bablu, 50, son of Azizul Haque of Arani-Hamidkura village in Rajshahi. He was a turmeric trader. Police took the body to Rajshahi GRP police station, he said. They suspected that aggyan party men might have killed Bablu and snatched his valuables, he added. Locals rescued Selim, 32, son of Tajul Islam of Parboripur-Rahgram under Gomostapur upazila in the district, from the same train in an unconscious state. Selim was admitted to Gomostapur Upazila Health Complex.

'Robber' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon
 A suspected robber was killed in a 'gunfight' with detectives in Sadar upazila early yesterday. The identity of the victim, aged about 30 years, could not be known as of filing of this report around 6:30pm yesterday. Four policemen also sustained minor injuries in the incident. Thakurgaon Superintendent of Police (SP) Farhad Ahmed at a press briefing in the afternoon said robbers looted the house of Dabirul Islam, lawmaker from Thakurgaon-2 constituency, at Gaalkari Dangibazar in Baliadangi upazila on March 13. Police filed a case with Baliadangi Police Station in connection with the incident, which was handed over to Detective Branch (DB) of police a week after the incident, he said. Later, DB police raided different areas and detained five robbers—Rubel Islam, 25, Mamunur Rashid, 33, Sabedul Sabed, 36, Mamunur Rashid, 47, and Kamal, 60. According to the information provided by the arrestees that a gang of bandits was making preparation to commit robbery in the area, a team of DB police conducted a drive at Haripukur village in Sadar upazila around 3:00am. Sensing presence of the police, the robbers opened fire on them, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate, which triggered the 'gunfight'. One of the unidentified robbers was caught in the line of fire during the gunfight while his cohorts managed to flee the scene, the SP said, adding that detectives took the injured robber to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.



A ghatla (landing spot) under construction on Rajapur canal in the name of bazar development project in Rajapur upazila of Jhalakathi. The photo was taken from Rajapur Bazar recently. PHOTO: M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL



SOLAR-POWERED IRRIGATION: Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation is successfully using this solar panel to draw water for irrigating Boro fields at Pashchim Baniary village in Matibhanga union under Nazirpur upazila of Pirojpur. The first of its kind initiative to provide low-cost irrigation has drawn appreciation from local farmers. PHOTO: STAR

Canal grabbed by LGED!

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, Jhalakathi
 The main canal of Rajapur Bazar in the district is being grabbed by a union parishad (UP) chairman in the name of bazar development project. The project is financed by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and is being implemented by Rajapur Union Parishad Chairman Mojibur Rahman Mridha, also president of Rajapur Bazar Committee. A ghatla (boat landing steps), three one-storied buildings and a road are being built under the project, said district LGED Executive Engineer Md Ruhul Amin. An enclosure has been erected by blocking three-fourths of the canal for the ghatla, and it will be filled up with sand. Blocking of the canal poses a threat to communication by boat, agriculture, fisheries and drainage system of the locality, local people said. The canal was over 100 metres wide five years ago, but it is nearly dead now due to continuous grabbing, said Foisal Ahmed, a resident of the town, adding that the canal has been killed in the name of so-called development by the chairman. Hundreds of acres of land along the canal will become barren if it is not saved from the clutches of the grabbers, said Alamin Hossain, a farmer of Monohorpur. The canal will be totally grabbed by the construction, which will encourage other people who live along the canal to grab it, said Abdus Sukur, a resident on the bank of the canal. "We use the canal water for our daily purposes although the water is not clean due to narrowing of the canal and dumping of waste into it. We will not get any water if the canal is killed," said Hasina Begum, another local resident. The whole town will be submerged in the rainy season if the canal is blocked, local people said, adding that different areas already go under water during rainy season. "I carry bricks and sand on trawler and boat through the canal, but it is not possible now due to construction of the structure," said Saiful Islam, a brick supplier of the area. The four-kilometre-long canal links the Dhanshiri and Jangalia rivers according to the land office in Rajapur. "If the canal is killed, the agriculture of the area will be badly affected," said Rajapur Department of Agriculture Extension Agriculture Officer Tilak Ghosh. "The project is being carried out following the design of LGED," the UP chairman said, adding that he got the construction work through an open tender for Tk 1.08 crore. "Some parts of the enclosure will be opened after completion of the work," the executive engineer of LGED said. "I have visited the spot and the canal will be opened after construction of the ghatla. If the water flow is affected by the ghatla, I will demolish it," said Upazila Nirbahi Officer Afroja Akter Lizu.

Gift of the sun

Solar-powered irrigation boosts Boro paddy capacity in Pirojpur

HABIBUR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE
 The farmers of Matibhanga union in Pirojpur's Nazirpur upazila mastered the cultivation of crops like local varieties of lentils, wheat and sweet potatoes from their forebears. These crops are suited to farmland far from any convenient irrigation source. But profits are modest. Now the introduction of solar-powered irrigation has opened the door to what many farmers believe will be far more lucrative: Boro paddy. "We never imagined it would be possible to cultivate Boro paddy," says Md Modasser Ali Mollah, a farmer from Paschim Baniary village. "It's always been difficult to draw water from the canal which is quite a distance away. For us, solar irrigation is a dream." Throughout Baniary village, Boro paddy sourced from other parts of the upazila has only ever been grown on a small-scale. The cost of water has always been prohibitive. The first solar panel to power the drawing of water from the nearest canal is already operational, with water transported by pipe to village fields. Farmers are elated. Each will pay a fixed yearly fee for the water pump, and nothing more. Mehedi Hasan is the project supervisor for Rahimafrooz Renewable Energy, the company behind the initiative. He says the solar panel will draw water from 8:00am until 5:00pm daily, with marginally poorer performance during times of unfavourable weather. "The panel has fifty solar plates, each with a 300-watt capacity," he says. "It is designed to work for at least twenty years without maintenance. The motor should last at least ten years." "It took time for all the possibilities of solar irrigation to sink in," says local farmer Rezaul Karim. "Now that the project has started there is a lot of interest." Rezaul anticipates the number of farmers choosing Boro paddy will only increase. "So far around 25 acres have been sown with Boro paddy," says the upazila's sub-assistant agriculture officer, Bijan Krishna Howlader. "Irrigation will be available year-round to grow any crop of their choice." Assistant Engineer of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation Jagannath Biswas notes that under the Barishal Division Minor Irrigation Development Project, two such solar projects have already commenced operations in Pirojpur, in Nazirpur and Mathbaria upazilas.

Bogura BCL man arrested with arms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura
 Three people, including a Chhatra League leader, were arrested with foreign arms in separate drives in the district on Sunday. Among the arrestees, Mostafizur Rahman is president of Gohail union unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in Shahjahanpur upazila. Detective Branch (DB) of Police arrested Shamima Akter and Mostafizur from Jamalinagar area in Sadar upazila. A pistol and ammunition were recovered from them, said DB Officer-in Charge Nur e Alam Siddiquee. The two were trying to trap a resident of the area in an arms case, Nur e Alam said. A case has been filed against them with Sadar Police Station, he added.

High yield, less spicy chilli

BINA has developed the new variety of crop
MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh
 Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) has developed a new high yielding variety of chilli, which is less spicy and has a good smell. Senior Scientific Officer, also head of BINA's Horticulture Department, Dr Rafiqul Islam is the man behind development of the variety, called BINAmorich-1. This variety can be used as spice or vegetable, the scientist said. Scientific Officers of BINA Sadia Tasmin, Farid Ahmed and Nurunnabi Majumder assisted Dr Rafiqul. A farmer can get 20 to 30 pieces of the spice from each plant, and it can be harvested eight to nine times a year. The plant is short and erect, and the leaves are dark green and broad. The spice can be up to 16 centimetres long, he said. Flowers appear 30 to 35 days after transplantation and green chilli can be harvested within 28 days. The yield is 30 to 35 tonnes per hectare, which is almost twice as much as the local varieties. The best time for sowing the seeds is October and November. Sandy loam soil containing organic matter and slightly acidic soil are suitable for getting better yield, he said, adding that the variety is resistant to insects and pests. Dr Rafiqul said he collected the chilli seed from a local variety of China in 2012 and later applied gamma radiation in Vienna to change its characteristics. The scientist was successful after four years of research, and the seed was taken to the field for demonstration in 2017. Demonstration plots involving some 700 farmers were set up in M y m e n s i n g h , I s w a r d i , Khagrachhari, Magura, Bogura, Rangpur and Kumilla, and achieved success, Dr Rafiqul said. There was no pest attack or disease in the chilli fields. As the production was satisfactory, the seed was certified by Bangladesh Seed Board in 2017 as a high-yielding variety. Jalil Mia, a farmer of Sutiakhali in Sadar upazila, said he is happy to get this kind of high yielding variety of chilli. Shamim Mia of the same area said he will cultivate the chilli extensively from next year. "We will arrange training programmes for the listed farmers to promote cultivation of this variety," Dr Rafiqul said. A field day was observed marking the development at Sutiakhali village on March 13. BINA's Director General Dr Biresh Kumar Goswami was the chief guest, while Director (Research) Dr Hosne Ara Begum, ex-Director General Dr Amjad Hossain, Deputy Director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Abdul Mazed, and head of Applied Extension Research Division of BINA Dr AFM Firoz Hasan were special guests. This development can open a new horizon in cultivation of chilli, which has great demand worldwide, the scientists said. If this variety is cultivated extensively throughout the country the demand for chilli will be fulfilled, and it can also be exported, they said.



BINAmorich-1 variety of chilli in a demonstration field at Sutiakhali village under Sadar upazila of Mymensingh. PHOTO: STAR

500 chickens poisoned to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur
 Around 500 chickens of a poultry farm were allegedly poisoned to death at Amropali village in Phulbari upazila on Monday night. Three people were held in this connection. Uday Chandra Roy, owner of the poultry farm, said he found the chickens in his farm dead yesterday morning. They were poisoned to death by his rivals. He filed a complaint with Phulbari Police Station accusing five people. Uday said he has a land dispute with Babu Chandra Roy, Probhat Chandra Roy and Ashesh Chandra Roy of the village. They might be involved in the vengeance act, he said.

65 Rangpur pry schools without headmasters

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur
 Sixty-five government primary schools in Rangpur's Badarganj upazila are running without regular headmasters for long, hampering academic and office work. Moreover, shortage of assistant teachers affects education of nearly 9,750 boys and girls studying in those schools. According to Badarganj upazila primary education office, there are 176 government primary schools in the upazila, of which only 111 schools have regular headmasters. Some of the 65 schools are even running without headmasters for more than a decade. Many teachers of those schools said, in absence of regular headmasters, senior assistant teachers are working as acting headmasters and performing additional duties alongside taking classes. Acting Headmaster of Bujruk Hajipur Government Primary School Mohammad Kashem Ali said the school has been running without headmaster for five years. Due to the absence of regular headmaster and teachers' crisis he has been facing huge problems since taking over the charge as acting headmaster, he said. Besides, Madarganj Government Primary School has no regular headmaster for the last 11 years and Firoz Ahmed, a senior teacher of the institution, has been working as acting headmaster since then. Similarly, the post of the headmaster of Matherhat Government Primary School has been lying vacant for nearly 11 years. Upazila primary education office is yet to appoint an acting headmaster since its former acting headmaster Shikha Banu went on one year leave for training. Badarganj Upazila Education Officer Anwarul Islam said they prepared a database of the vacant posts of the headmasters and sent it to Directorate of Primary Education.

In absence of regular headmasters, senior assistant teachers are working as acting headmasters and performing additional duties alongside taking classes.