

## 4 kids drown in Netrakona, Lalmonirhat

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Four children drowned in Netrakona and Lalmonirhat in the last two days.

Two girls drowned in a pond at Dakkhin Paruliya village in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila yesterday, reports our correspondent.

The deceased were Nishi Akhter, 5, daughter of Tota Miah, and her neighbour Taha Akhter, 6, daughter of Ershadul Haque of the village.

Police and family sources said the duo accidentally fell into a pond near their house and drowned when they were playing on its bank.

Later, the bodies were recovered from the water, said Omar Faroque, officer in charge (OC) of Hatibandha Police Station. Meanwhile, two kids drowned in Netrakona on Friday, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

The victims were Halima Akter, 3, daughter of Dulal Mia, and one and half-year-old Niyon, son of Milon Mia of Gogda Konapara village in Kendua upazila.

Fahima Akter, 3, who was rescued from the pond in critical state, was taken to adjacent Tarail Upazila Health Complex and later referred to Kishoreganj General Hospital, said OC Imarat Hossain Gazi of Kendua Police Station.

The condition of Fahima, daughter of Rustom Ali, has improved, said the OC quoting doctors at the hospital.

Family sources said the trio fell into the pond near their house when they were playing on its bank in the evening. Locals later rescued the kids from the water.

Of them, Halima and Niyon were found dead, said OC Imarat.



Rezaul Islam nurses his cardamom plants at Natun Chiliarchar village in Kurigram's Rowmari upazila. Inset, cluster of Sri Lankan cardamom plants.

PHOTO: ABDUL WAHED

# Rezaul shines in Sri Lankan cardamom cultivation

ABDUL WAHED, Kurigram

The life of Rezaul Islam, a youth from Kurigram, was nothing out of the ordinary.

While poverty held him back from continuing his studies beyond his SSC in 1997, he held odd jobs here and there in Dhaka to make the days pass.

In 2006, a flustered Rezaul came back to his home in Natun Chiliarchar village under Rowmari upazila, where he began a nursery business to grow fruit plants on a small piece of leased land.

He visited Dhaka in 2008 to take part in the Bishwa Jtama, an annual gathering of Muslims in Tongi.

"I used to watch a group Sri Lankans prepare their meals on small burners and the strong, pungent flavour and aroma of their spices, which they brought from their country, used to intrigue me," recalls the 37-year-old.

He became friends with Abdur Rahman, 55, who said the distinct curry flavour came from the Sri Lankan cardamom.

"He told me that the cardamom is one

of the world's most expensive spices, next to saffron and vanilla, promising to bring back more the next year."

True to his word, they kept contact over the phone and Abdur brought two spawning plants and some cardamom seeds in Bangladesh the next year.

Like an excited child, Rezaul planted those on unused lands behind his home. The plants soon grew tall but were near withering under amateur care.

With much trial and error and guidance from agriculture officials, he was able to expand the number of cardamom plants to one decimal of leased land.

The plants first bore cardamoms in 2011, said Rezaul. "I shared the herb with my neighbours and used it in our cooking as well. Everyone gave me feedback that the flavour was more aromatic than cardamoms otherwise available here."

A cardamom plant can form a cluster of 20 plants in a year, he said. Each green cardamom, sweet and small variety, plant may yield around 20 grams of the dry herb a year, while the black cardamom, larger and smoky flavour, plants may

produce around 30 grams.

In 2015, he contacted his relative Saiful Islam, a wholesaler of spices at the Kattimari Bazar of Rowmari upazila, some two kilometres from his house, and sold his first batch of Sri Lankan cardamoms.

"I sold one kilogram of the spice for Tk 3,000 a kilogram to Saiful. He would sell the spice to retailers for more at various markets in Tongi, Gazipur."

With business picking up slowly but surely, he expanded cultivation to five decimals of land near his home and around 30 decimals of land at Himbazar area of Gazipur, said the farmer.

"I sold eight kilograms of green and black cardamoms in 2016, 15 kilograms in 2017 and 20 kilograms last year."

"This year, I expect to sell the seeds worth over Tk 13 lakh. He sold cardamom seeds and plants worth Tk 5 lakh last year," he added.

The plant, best suited to warm tropical climates, grows well in the shade and loamy soil, said Rezaul, who lives with his mother, wife and two children.

"Rowmari Upazila Agriculture Officer

Abdulla Al Mamun visited my garden in 2017 and found the plants infected with fungus. He guided me on spraying antifungal medicine on the plants in case of disease. I use a mix of organic and inorganic fertilisers as well."

In addition to selling the herb, he also sold some plants to fellow farmers in Comilla, Meherpur and Cox's Bazar districts. "I sold each plant for Tk 1,000."

D Mostafizar Rahman, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Kurigram, said, "I was pleasantly surprised by visiting Rezaul's garden recently. I advised him to spread his know-how to local farmers as well. I think the cultivation would improve when the spices research department would work with these cardamoms."

Giving in to his adventurous spirit, he took a lease on two acres of land in Himbazar area of Gazipur in August, to expand operations.

"I prepared 30 decimals till March this year and sowed cardamom seed this month. I aim to grow around 1,000 plants at first," he said.

## 'Thief' beaten dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushiya

A suspected thief was killed in a mob beating in Rail Bazar area of Chuadanga town on Friday.

The deceased was Faruk Hossain, 22, son of Abu Bakar Siddik of Thanapara area in the town.

Abu Zihad Md Fakhru Alam, officer in charge of Chuadanga Sadar Police Station, said Faruk along with his few accomplices was breaking locks of some grocers' shops in the area around 2:30am.

At the time, night guards of the area caught Faruk red handed. However, his accomplices managed to flee the scene.

Later, the grocers gave Faruk a good beating. He died on the spot, said the OC.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body and sent it to a hospital for autopsy.

The law enforcers arrested two men involved in the theft, said the police official.

## 23 Shibir men held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police arrested 23 activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, from Haitapur-Shahpur Hafijia Madrasa in Jashore's Monirampur upazila on Friday night.

They also recovered four bombs, a banner and some books of the organisation from the spot, said SM Enamul Haque, officer in charge (OC) of Monirampur Police Station.

The arrestees include Abdullah, publicity secretary of Jashore district unit of Shibir, Monirul Islam, lecturer of Chuknagar College, Shamim Hossain, teacher of Jashore Moshir Rahman Law College, Habib Hasan of Sagardhari area in Keshabpur upazila and Billal Hossain, Rasel Ahmed and Sirajul Islam of Monirampur upazila.

The Shibir men were arrested on charge of creating violence.

## 2 traders killed as launch hits trawler

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Two traders drowned in the Karkhana river as a Patuakhali-bound double-decker launch from Dhaka hit a buffalo-laden trawler in Sontoshdee area under Dumki upazila of the district yesterday.

The victims were buffalo traders Md Monir Hossain, 40, son of Khorshed Hossain, and Nur Alam, 65, son of Mofijur Rahman of Laxmipur district.

The bodies were sent to Patuakhali General Hospital for autopsy, said Md Moniruzzaman, officer in charge of Dumki Police Station.

A buffalo trader, Md Elias, who was also in the trawler, said their trawler was going to Laxmipur district town from Patuakhali's Galachipa area.

When the trawler was crossing Sontoshdee area, the launch hit it around 3:30am. At the time, three buffalo traders fell into the river. Of them, Abdul Khaleq managed to swim ashore while the duo went missing, said Elias.

Firefighters rescued the bodies from the water around 11:00am, said Md Jafarullah, chairman of Muradia Union Parishad in the upazila.

Md Kabir Hossain, driver of the launch, said they did not hit any trawler in the river.

Khwaja Sadiqur Rahman, assistant director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority in the district, said four double-decker launches come to Patuakhali from Dhaka through the route regularly. So they are not sure which launch is responsible for the accident.

They will take necessary steps after proper investigation, said Sadiqur Rahman.

## College boy found dead in Jaflong

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Divers of Fire Service and Civil Defence yesterday recovered the body of a college student, who went missing in the Piyain river in Jaflong of Sylhet on Friday.

The victim was Akikur Rahman Anik, 20, son of Dhola Miah of Nabiganj upazila in Habiganj, and a first year student of the economics department at Murari Chand (MC) College in Sylhet.

The divers recovered the body from the river around 11:00am, said Abdul Aziz, officer-in-charge of Gowainghat Police Station.

The body was sent to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital for autopsy, said the OC.

Anik along with his seven friends went to visit tourist hotspot. Anik went missing when he tried to swim in the river around 2:00pm.



A college girl receives a cheque of Tk 12,000 from chief guest Dr KM Kamruzzaman, deputy commissioner of Thakurgaon, at a programme organised by Eco Social Development Organisation (ESDO) in the town yesterday. Cheques of Tk 12.84 lakh were distributed among 107 underprivileged students, who passed SSC examinations last year, under a project of PKSF.

PHOTO: STAR



Rampant sand lifting at Musullibad village in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila poses threat to the nearby farmlands and dwellings.

PHOTO: STAR

# Mindless sand lifting threatens croplands, houses

Locals submitted complaint to the deputy commissioner in Patuakhali, seeking his intervention

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Mindless sand lifting from a local ditch, surrounding vast tracts of agricultural lands at Musullibad village, some eight kilometres from Kuakata Zero Point, in Kalapara upazila is posing threat to nearby farmlands and homesteads.

Locals alleged that a section of some local influential people is allegedly carrying out the illegal sand lifting.

Meanwhile, protesting the heinous act, villagers submitted a complaint to the deputy commissioner (DC) in Patuakhali, seeking his intervention in this regard and take necessary step to

stop such illegal activities.

A syndicate of local sand traders, led by one Moniruzzaman of Kuakata area, are lifting sand from a ditch that surrounded huge croplands and many dwelling houses for the last two weeks, locals alleged.

The syndicate members are lifting sand from the ditch using a locally assembled dredging machine and supplying those to different areas through pipes, they said.

Buyers are also showing interest as the price is much cheap here, compared to other places, villagers said, adding that due to the illegal sand lifting nearby croplands and dwelling houses

are facing threat of erosion.

They said several cracks have already developed in some of the adjacent croplands.

On April 17, some villagers, including Mohammad Musa, Jalil Biswas, Alauddin Biswas and Habibullah, submitted a written complaint to Patuakhali DC, seeking immediate steps to stop the illegal act.

Contacted, Moniruzzaman said they had bought the land beside the ditch to supply sand to different development project at Kuakata area.

Patuakhali DC Matuil Islam Chowdhury said they will take necessary steps in this regard soon.