



Ray of Anirban

How a library changed the lives of people in a remote village of Khulna with its educational, cultural, social activities

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Myth says that the philosopher's stone was a substance that could turn ordinary metal into gold.

While the residents of Mamudkathi may not have literally struck gold, they have found some kind of a philosopher's stone in the form of a library.

The Anirban Library, set up by four local students three decades ago, has changed the lives of many villagers -- transforming the illiterate into literate, those financially deprived to self-sufficient.

Villagers' access to education and employment have increased significantly since the library was set up in 1990 in remote Mamudkathi village of Khulna's Paikgachha upazila.

One former member is Faruk Hossain Mahaldar of Jeley Para in Mamudkathi, who is now working at Bangladesh Railway on graduating from a Khulna college.

"I have been involved in various activities of the library since my childhood. I used to come here and read books whenever I had time.

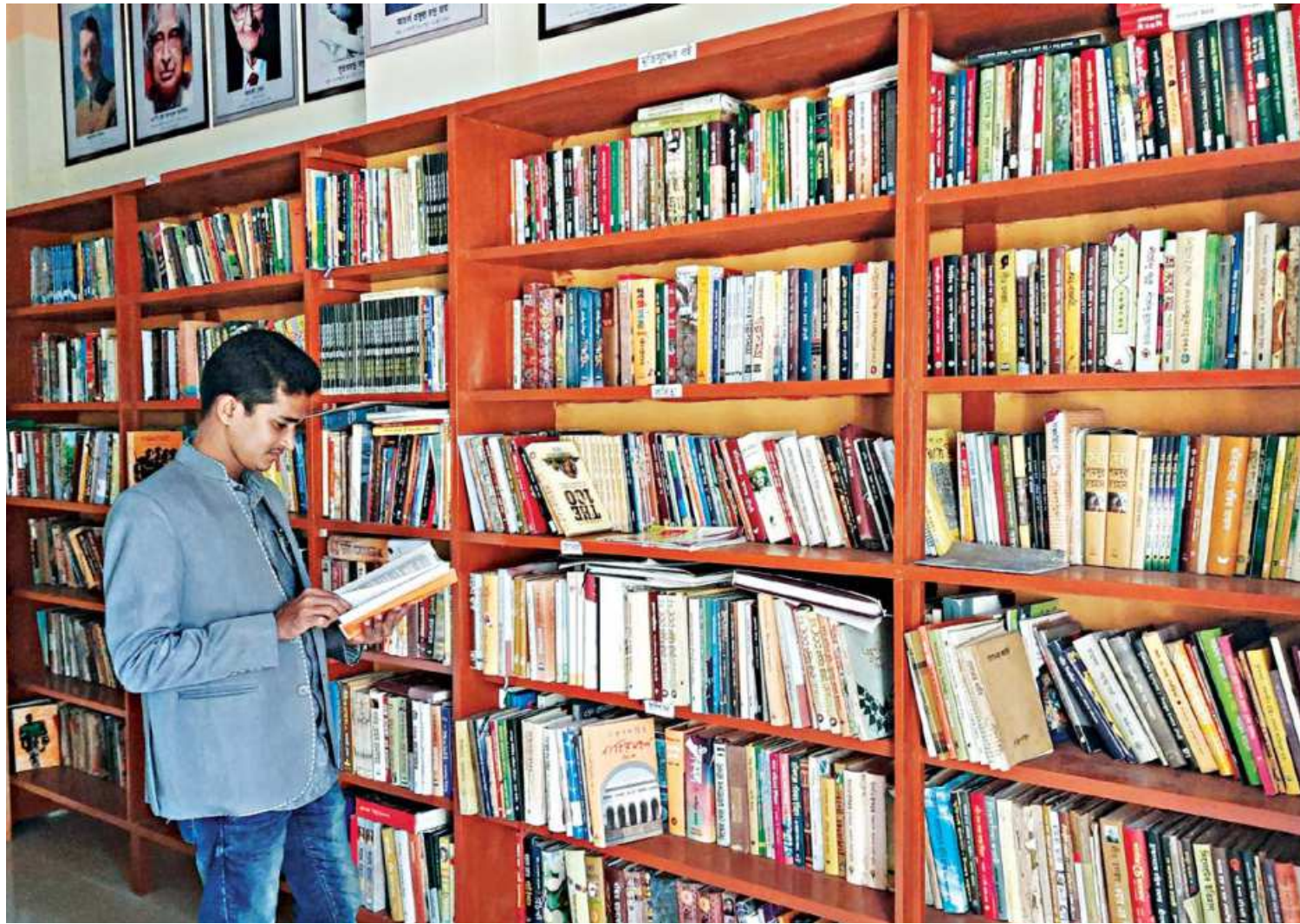
"The activities of the library have opened my eyes. It has changed the lives of our Jeley Para inhabitants," he said.

Faruk is not the only villager to attain higher education.

Former general secretary of the library, Ramkrishna Debnath, cannot hide his happiness when talking about the library's contributions in the area.

He said he was the second man from the village to attend the University of Dhaka and now many others are studying at the same seat of learning as well as at other universities and medical colleges.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2



Awal Sheikh, a visitor, browses through a book at Anirban Library. Set up in 1990 in Mamudkathi village of Khulna's Paikgachha, the library has changed the lives of many villagers. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

'I will not spare the scoundrel'

Kalabagan rape victim's sister says

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and NILIMA JAHAN

Showing the handmade card she made for her elder sister on her 17th birthday on October 9 last year, eight-year-old Reana Asif (not her real name), the younger sister of an English-medium school student in Dhanmondi who died after rape, said, "I will not spare the scoundrel who killed my sister. I want justice."

The card, kept in a paper bag on her bookshelf, reads, "Apu, you are the best sister in the world and I love you."

Reana would frequently make cards and handmade gift items for her elder sister, with a small and simple note to express her love. Sometimes, the gift was a box of earrings, which their mother would buy for them, or sometimes a funny sketch of her sister.

The elder sister would preserve all the cards and gifts on her bookshelf. "But now, these have become

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

AL gagged critics, journos using pandemic as an excuse: HRW

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League-led government used the Covid-19 pandemic as a pretext to censor free speech and crack down on critics, Human Rights Watch said in its World Report 2021 Wednesday.

It said the authorities arrested journalists, artists, students, doctors, political opposition members, and activists who spoke out against the government's response to the pandemic, or otherwise criticised the ruling party.

"The ruling Awami League showed in 2020 that it will stop at almost nothing to maintain its grip on authoritarian control, even in the face of a global pandemic," said Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW.

"The ruling Awami League needs to stop worrying about cartoonists and kids criticising the prime minister on Facebook, and start worrying about abuses by its own authorities amid the pandemic."

In the 761-page World Report 2021, its 31st edition, HRW reviews human rights practices in more than 100 countries.

The report said protests broke out after several gang rape cases came to light,

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

2nd year of pandemic 'could be worse'

Warns WHO

REUTERS, Geneva

The second year of the Covid-19 pandemic may be tougher than the first given how the new coronavirus is spreading, especially in the northern hemisphere as more infectious variants circulate, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday.

"We are going into a second year of this, it could even be tougher given the transmission dynamics and some of the issues that we are seeing," Mike Ryan, the WHO's top emergencies official, said during an event on social media.

The worldwide death toll is approaching 2 million people since the pandemic began, with 92 million people infected.

The WHO, in its latest epidemiological update issued overnight, said after two weeks of fewer cases being reported, some five million new cases were reported last week, the likely result of a letdown of defences during the holiday season in which people - and the virus - came together.

"Certainly in the northern hemisphere, particularly in Europe

and North America we have seen that sort of perfect storm of the season - coldness, people going inside, increased social mixing and a combination of factors that have driven increased transmission in many, many countries," Ryan said.

Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead for Covid-19, warned: "After the holidays, in some countries the situation will get a lot worse before it gets better."

Amid growing fears of the more contagious coronavirus variant first detected in Britain but now entrenched worldwide, governments across Europe on Wednesday announced tighter, longer coronavirus restrictions.

That includes home-office requirements and store closures in Switzerland, an extended Italian Covid-19 state of emergency, and German efforts to further reduce contacts between people blamed for failed efforts, so far, to get the coronavirus under control.

"I worry that we will remain in this pattern of peak and trough and peak and trough, and we can do

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Two held over rape in Lalmonirhat

Joypurhat court sentences rapist to 42 yrs in jail

STAR REPORT

Police yesterday detained two men over raping a teenage girl in a house in Teesta village of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila and rescued her from there.

The detainees are: Atiqul Islam Atiq from Teesta village and Nirmal Chandra of China Bazar area in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila.

Police said the 17-year-old girl was in a relationship with Atiqul. She went to Teesta village from China Bazar with Nirmal on Wednesday evening on the promise that Atiqul would marry her.

The girl was gang-raped in the house at night, said police.

Acting on information from locals, police raided the house yesterday noon, detained the alleged rapists

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

World's oldest cave painting found in Indonesia



AFP, Washington

Archaeologists have discovered the world's oldest known cave painting: a life-sized picture of a wild pig that was made at least 45,500 years ago in Indonesia.

The finding described in the journal Science Advances on Wednesday provides the earliest evidence of human settlement of the region.

Co-author Maxime Aubert of Australia's Griffith University told AFP it was found on the island of Sulawesi in 2017 by doctoral student Basran Burhan, as part of surveys the team was carrying

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

DEFAMATION CASE BLAST employee gets bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A female employee of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) yesterday secured bail in a defamation case of Tk 100 crore filed against her by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Senior Judicial Magistrate Tamanna Farah in Cox's Bazar passed the order around 11:30am yesterday, said BLAST

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 15
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:36 7:00
JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:40 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

16 more die from Covid, 813 infected in a day

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's Covid-19 fatalities soared to 7,849 as the health authorities confirmed 16 more deaths and 813 new cases in 24 hours till yesterday morning.

The national caseload now stands at 5,25,723 with 470,405 recoveries, according to a handout from the Directorate General of Health Services.

As per the latest data, the daily infection rate has dropped to 4.9 percent.

The country recorded 8.29 percent infection on January 10, 7.52 percent on January 4, and 8.18 percent on January 1.

The overall infection rate stood at 15.38 percent, the DGHS said, adding that 89.48 percent of the patients have recovered till date.

So far, 3,418,114 tests have been carried out, including 16,608 in 24 hours till yesterday

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



A bluethroat spotted in a mustard field in north Keraniganj of Dhaka recently. This small, migratory bird usually lives in bushes and catches small insects from the ground.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ASKER IBNE FIROZ

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION Tripartite meeting on January 19

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A tripartite meeting between Bangladesh, China and Myanmar will take place in the capital on January 19 with Dhaka seeking quick start of Rohingya repatriation that has not been possible in more than three years since the refugee influx.

This will be second such meeting between the three countries. Earlier, they held a foreign minister-level meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2019.

Ambassadors of China and Myanmar in Dhaka and an official of Bangladesh foreign ministry are expected to lead their respective delegations at the meeting, said a foreign ministry official, seeking anonymity.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said, "We are hopeful that China will play a vital role here. What we want is quick start of repatriation of the Rohingyas."

He also mentioned that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday held a meeting with Myanmar high-ups in Naypyidaw where he sought to expedite the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from camps in Bangladesh.

China, a major investor in Myanmar, plays a crucial role in peace negotiations between Myanmar's army and ethnic armed groups. China is also a major trade and development partner of Bangladesh.

Two attempts to repatriate the refugees to their homeland ended in failure after around 750,000 Rohingyas took shelter in Bangladesh to escape a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State in August 2017.

Rohingyas say there is no guarantee of safety, citizenship and basic rights in Rakhine where many Rohingyas were killed, women raped and their houses burnt -- for which

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2