



Children from different schools hold certificates that they earned after taking lessons on reading and writing in their mother tongue -- Chakma. Inset, a volunteer from Changma Sahitya Bah gives lessons on Chakma alphabet to school going children. The photos were taken recently from a language centre of the organisation at Shimultoli village in Dighinala upazila of Khagrachhari.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

For the love of a language

Non-profit organisation out on a mission to save Chakma language from going extinct

ANVIL CHAKMA, Rangamati

In a country where people laid down their lives about seventy years ago to uphold the dignity of their mother tongue, Bangla, the struggle is still on to preserve mother tongues of smaller ethnic communities.

In an attempt to preserve the languages that are on the verge of extinction, the government in recent years has started publishing textbooks for pre-primary and primary-level students who speak in those languages, such as Chakma.

The effort however met with a setback caused by unavailability of teachers who can read and write using the Chakma alphabet.

The setback did not deter the young members of 'Changma Sahitya Bah' -- a literary and cultural organisation -- from following a dream, in which every Chakma is able to read and write in their mother tongue.

In an initiative that started in 2004, the volunteers of Changma Sahitya Bah so far gave Chakma alphabet lessons to about 10 thousand native Chakma speakers,

including a good number of students of all ages as well as teachers in primary schools.

Currently, the organisation provides free Chakma language lessons at 200 locations across the country, but mostly in Chattogram hill tracts and Dhaka. They also have their own alphabet lesson book, titled 'Pattam Adi Pudi'.

This correspondent recently visited one of the Chakma language teaching centres at Amrokanan Buddhist Monastery in Khagrachhari, where a good number of students from different local schools and colleges gathered to take lessons in Chakma language from volunteer teachers of Changma Sahitya Bah.

Toshi Chakma, one of the teachers there, said she has been working with the organisation for a long time and she takes pride in this great endeavour that aims to preserve a language.

Their efforts are being praised by native Chakma speakers who are also showing

keen interest in learning how to write and read in their own alphabet, she also said.

University student Anweshan Chakma said lots of Chakma students like him, enrolled at different universities, still do not know how to read or write in their mother tongue.

Utilising the free time, which became available after the closure of educational institutions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he took Chakma language lessons at the monastery and finally he has learned to read and write in his mother tongue, he added.

Sohagi Chakma, an assistant teacher at Babuchhara Friendship School in Dighinala upazila of Khagrachhari, said she did not know the Chakma alphabet when she started teaching at the school. But after taking lessons from Changma Sahitya Bah, she is now able to give lessons in Chakma language at her school.

Changma Sahitya Bah President Injeb Chakma said languages and alphabets of

many nations in the world went extinct due to a lack of practice and the Chakma language runs that same risk as most Chakmas cannot read or write using the Chakma alphabet.

In order to prevent it from happening, they made it their mission to provide free Chakma alphabet lessons to native Chakma speakers of all ages, he also said. "We want every Chakma -- from children to the elderly -- to know how to read and write in our alphabet."

Reached for his comments over the initiative of Changma Sahitya Bah, Ananda Mohan Chakma, a Chakma language writer and a member of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, said the youths of Changma Sahitya Bah are playing a pivotal role in the advancement of education by providing Chakma alphabet lessons to students and teachers in the Chakma community.

All out support should be extended to them for their commendable efforts, he added.



BABUL MURDER Key accused still at large

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Nearly two months have elapsed, police are yet to arrest the main accused in connection with the case for killing a physically challenged man in Sadar upazila in December last year.

Earlier on December 25 last year, physically challenged Mozammel Hossain Babul, 50, a small grocer in Kalyanpur area in Sadar upazila, was killed by his rivals allegedly over a land dispute.

The following day, Babul's wife Sheuly Akter filed a murder case with Kotwali Police Station accusing seven people, while Suruj Ali, 35, a Chowkidar of Khagdahor union parishad (UP), was made the prime accused in the case.

On January 27, a police team led by Inspector (Operation) Wazed Ali of Kotwali Police Station conducted a raid in Gazipur and arrested Suruj's wife Elma Begum, 30, also one of the accused in the case.

After primary interrogation, police produced her before a Mymensingh court the same day.

After recording her confessional statement under Section 164, the court sent her to jail, the Inspector said.

Slain Babul's wife Sheuly, who works as a domestic help in the capital, said Babul lost his right leg in a road accident in Dhaka in 1995.

He later returned to his native village in 2007, and had been running a grocery shop adjacent to his house since then. During their stay in Dhaka, key accused in the case Suruj and his accomplices grabbed Babul's three decimals of land out of his 16 decimals of homestead.

Moreover, Suruj and his men were threatening Babul and his family members with dire consequences in a bid to grab his entire homestead.

Sheuly, mother of three children, alleged that her husband lodged several general diaries (GDs) with Kotwali Police Station and also informed the local UP chairman and members but no steps were taken in this regard.

On January 23, slain Babul's family members and relatives arranged a press conference at Mymensingh Press Club, demanding immediate arrest and their exemplary punishment of the accused in the murder case.

Khagdahor UP Chairman Anwar Hossain Nannu said he failed to make any official process against Suruj due to retirement of the UP secretary.

Man to die, 5 get life term

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A Kishoreganj court on Tuesday sentenced a man to death and five others to life term imprisonment for killing a man in 2016.

The death row convict is Jewel Mia, 32, of Boromaipara in Bajitpur upazila of Kishoreganj.

The lifers are Jewel's father Jouj Mia, 57, mother Rahima Khatun, 52, brother Kakon Mia, 25, and their relatives -- Mahub Hasan, 42, and Saiful Islam, 42. Of them, Saiful and Kakon were tried in absentia.

Kishoreganj Additional District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Abdur Rahim also fined them Tk 1 lakh each.

According to the case statement, Jewel had an altercation with one Siddique Mia of the same area over constructing a washroom (Latrine) at the compound of a local primary school on January 22 in 2016.

At one stage, Jewel hit Siddique on the head with an iron rod. Later, the other convicts joined him, beat up Siddique and threw him in a nearby pond.

Family members rescued Siddique, took him to Jahurul Islam Medical College Hospital, from where he was referred to Dhaka. He died on way to the hospital the same day.

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