



Freedom fighter Nripendra Nath Roy, 70, at work in a sawmill of Domar town under Nilphamari.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Freedom fighter toils away without recognition

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

With cataracts in his eyes and difficulty in breathing, the frail 70-year-old man was toiling to bark logs with his axe in a sawmill of Domar upazila town.

Asked why he still has to work at this age, Nripendra Nath Roy alias Sinial said he has six mouths to feed and he cannot look away from them when they need him.

Likewise, when the country needed him 50 years ago, he took up arms and fought in different battles under Sector 6 until the country was free from the enemy.

As a means to honour the sons of the soil and to recognise their services for the country, the government has been disbursing monthly allowance for them every month.

However, valiant freedom fighter Nripendra, who fought in Burimari, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari, has been deprived of the much-needed allowance due to a couple of callous errors made during the process of issuing his national identity (NID) card in 2008.

Not only his birth date was erroneously changed to 1960, instead of 1951, his alias, Sinial, was added next to his full name on the NID.

For the next seven years -- from 2008 to

2015 -- the elderly man tried in vain to get the error corrected despite spending countless hours during numerous visits at the Election Commission offices in Domar upazila and Nilphamari.

Ilius Hossain, former deputy commander of Muktiyoddha Sangsad's Domar unit, said, "Nripendra Nath is a genuine freedom fighter as his name is included in the freedom fighters' list, compiled in India in 1971, which is accepted by all quarters. And this needs no



further verification."

"My year of birth is 1951... My name is correctly mentioned as Nripendra Nath Roy in the Indian list, under serial number 37429," Nripendra said.

"But in the NID card prepared in 2008, the callous enumerators put down Sinial, my nickname, as part of my full name. On top of that, they entered my birth year as 1960, which is incorrect. These mistakes have had disastrous effects on my life," the war veteran

said frustratingly.

In 2017, after the government launched a verification of the freedom fighters' list, Nripendra turned in necessary documents -- including a copy of the freedom fighters' list, compiled by Indian authorities in 1971, and recommendation letters from his co-fighters and from the committee tasked with the verification of freedom fighters' list in the upazila -- to Jatiya Muktiyoddha Council (National Freedom Fighters' Council).

The Council, four years later, is yet to make a decision on the case of Nripendra, who was an active freedom fighter under the command of Capt Iqbal, sub-sector commander of Sector 6.

Domar unit Muktiyoddha Sangsad's former commander Mohammad Nurunnabi said, "All of us consider him to be a real freedom fighter and he should get the recognition."

Contacted, Domar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Shahina Shabnam said, "We are considering the case with sincerity and we await the decision of Jatiya Muktiyoddha Council."

Nripendra is originally from Chowki Bhajini village in Debiganj upazila of Panchagarh. He later became a permanent resident of his wife's native home at Pashchim Boragari Bagdokra village of Domar upazila in Nilphamari.

Topsoil removal wrecks fertility of cropland

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Cutting off top soil from croplands for selling it to the brick kilns is still going on unabatedly at different places in Tangail, defying laws.

A section of greedy earth traders is cutting off the top soil from the croplands after buying from the landowners.

The ill practice is damaging the fertility of the lands alongside destroying environment and ecological balance.

Moreover, rampant movement of numerous earth-laden heavy trucks and other illegal vehicles like tractor is damaging the rural roads and posing risk of accidents.

"Fertility of cropland is reduced to a great extent and production declines due to cutting the top layer, increasing risk of food shortage in future," Ahsanul Bashar, deputy director of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Tangail, said.

Meanwhile, the illegal activities of cutting of top soil are going on in different places of Ghatail upazila, including Sadhur Gologondo, Bosubari, Birchari Chande Para, Deopara, Sholkipara, Taltala and Garobazar.

Local people said in addition to cutting croplands, the earth traders are also flattening the hillocks of red soil from different places in the upazila.

A section of public representatives is also involved with them, they alleged.

The locals cannot register protest against the ill practice fearing repercussion from the earth traders as they are influential people having political clout.

"Being informed, we launched a mobile court drive against the earth plunderers at Digholkandi and Deolarbari areas on Tuesday and realised Tk 30,000 as fines from them," Anjan Kumar Sarkar, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) in Ghatail, said.

"Action will be taken if we are informed of such illegal activities anywhere in the upazila," he said.

On the other hand, the same practice is going on at different places in the other upazilas in the district. Mirzapur is one of them.

Mobile court drives were also launched at different places in the upazila in the last couple of days and Tk 2,50,000 was realized as fine from the earth plunderers, said Jubayir Hossain, assistant commissioner (Land) in Mirzapur, adding that an excavator was also destroyed during the drive.

Mujahidul Islam, deputy director of Directorate of Environment (DoE) in Tangail, said permission is a must from the local administration for cutting earth for brick kilns from anywhere.

A total of 270 brick kilns remain operational at 12 upazilas in the district. Mirzapur hosts 98 and Ghatail upazila has 68.

Many of the brick kilns were set up violating the laws and running even after filing writ petitions to the higher courts, he said.

"We have already fined 27 brick kilns at different upazilas in the district," he added.

Drives will continue against such brick kilns in future," he said.



The men of brick kiln owners use excavator in digging soil from cropland in Tele Galaganda area of Tangail's Ghatail upazila. The picture was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

The trio meets

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Upon leaving the President's House that day, Bangabandhu noted publicly that he had had discussions with Yahya and that Bhutto had also happened to be there.

Soon after the meeting, Yahya declared postponement of the March 25 National Assembly saying it was deferred to create unity among the political parties and leaders through discussions.

At night, Bhutto told a news conference at Hotel Intercontinental, Dhaka that his party was examining the broad agreement reached between the president and Bangabandhu and assured that his party would make every effort to reach an understanding to end the present crisis.

'DON'T TRUST THE MILITARY'
After meeting with the president, Bangabandhu took the opportunity to draw Bhutto aside to have a few words with him. Bhutto recalls his meeting with Mujib in the following words:

"He [Bangabandhu] told me that the situation was very grave... went on to say that things had now gone too far and there was no turning back. According to him the best way out was for me to agree to his proposals. He emphasised that there [was] no other alternative. ... He cautioned me against the military and told me not to trust them: if they destroy him first, they would also destroy me. I replied that I would

much rather be destroyed by the military than by history. He pressed me to give my consent to his proposal and to agree to the setting up ab initio of the two committees. He went on to say that in the present circumstances it would be impossible for the National Assembly to meet at all as one body; it should be adjourned sine die. [Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, The Great Tragedy, PPP, pp. 37-38]

'VICTORY IS OURS'

In a special message given on the occasion of publication of special supplements captioned "Emancipation of Bangla Desh" by most dailies in East Pakistan, Bangabandhu described the present movement as the struggle for total emancipation of seven crore Bangladeshis. This struggle will continue until the final goal is achieved, he said and added that the people of Bangladesh could no more be silenced by bullets, guns and bayonets because they are united today. "Ours is the right cause and hence victory is ours," declared Bangabandhu.

Retired members of armed forces took an oath to work along the Sangram Parishad to achieve the demands made by Bangabandhu on behalf of the 70 million Bangladeshis. The public meeting was held at Baitul Mukarram today.

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Half of all UK adults get first

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who had AstraZeneca's vaccine on Friday, tweeted "Let's keep going" after the announcement that half of all adults had had a first shot.

Yet worries were also growing about a new wave of infections in continental Europe as cases rise in countries including Germany and France.

A scientist who advises the British government warned on Saturday that holidays abroad were "extremely unlikely" for most Britons this summer due to the risk of importing new variants of Covid-19. Britain's vaccination roll-out, using the

AstraZeneca and Pfizer jabs, is one of the fastest in the world. Israel tops the world in terms of the proportion of its population it has vaccinated, followed by the United Arab Emirates, Chile, then the UK.

By comparison, 23% of the US population has received at least one dose of a vaccine, and less than a 10th of the EU population has been vaccinated, reports Reuters.

Saudi Arabia and neighbouring United Arab Emirates said yesterday health authorities have expanded Covid-19 vaccinations to all citizens and residents aged 16 and above as Gulf states race to bring the virus under control.

SSC registration starts online

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of business studies and humanities would have to pay Tk 1,650.

Candidates have been asked to pay their tuition fees until December 2020. The notification said tuition fees for 2021 cannot be realised.

Usually, SSC and HSC candidates need to qualify in test exams and have at least 70 percent class attendance to be allowed to sit for SSC and HSC exams.

On March 17 last year, the government closed all educational institutions aiming to contain the spread of coronavirus.

On February 27 this year, after a year of

closure and significant academic losses, the government announced that all schools and colleges will be reopening on March 30.

The government decided to resume in-person classes in all primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools in phases, Education Minister Dipu Moni said.

She said fifth graders, and SSC, and HSC candidates would be brought back to schools and colleges for daily classes.

She also said SSC exams would be held on the shortened syllabus and the lessons for those could be completed in 60 working days.

Cuet student

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Prevention Tribunal, Golam Farukh, passed the order after the arrestee was produced before it, said Court Inspector Jahangir Alam.

The 17-year-old student of Eco Pathshala and College in Thakurgaon was arrested after police filed a case against him under the DSA for sharing a video clip on Facebook with inflammatory remarks about Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Bangladesh.

Sperm whales

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the rate of successful harpooning, or "striking" sighted whales fell by about 58 percent within the first few years of industrial exploitation.

The study, led by cetacean scientists Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendell alongside data scientist Tim D Smith, concluded that the whales were sharing vital information about the hunts with each other and changing their behaviour to survive.

The drop-off in successful harpooning could not be attributed to other factors such as better competence among early whalers or the initial killing of particularly vulnerable individuals, said the scientists.

Models used in the study, published by The Royal Society journal, showed that "social learning" led to the whales learning "defensive measures" from other whales who had survived previous experiences with the whalers.

In the logbooks, whalers observed defensive methods they believed the whales were adopting to escape being killed, such as communicating danger within social groups, fleeing upwind or deep diving.

No proper study done in years

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million surveyed tube-wells were arsenic contaminated.

No such major screening was done ever since to know about that real picture of arsenic contamination.

But the department's annual report for 2019-2020 found the presence of arsenic in tube-wells in 61 out of 64 districts.

"The extent and intensity of the arsenic in the country did not change since the very first detection, but people have learnt how to avoid the contaminated water," said Saifur Rahman, superintendent engineer of DPHE Groundwater Circle.

"Now people are aware and using alternative water sources," he told The Daily Star.

He said the department took up a project in 2019 to screening tube-wells in 3,200 unions out of 4,500 unions across the country to see the extent of the arsenic.

The screening activity is likely to complete by this year, said Saifur.

Under this project, arsenic-contaminated tube-wells will be painted red and arsenic-free tube-wells will be painted green. The tube-wells that contaminated water will be replaced under this project, he added.

Arsenic is a chemical substance that forms several poisonous compounds.

It is widely distributed throughout the earth's crust and can be released into the environment and water through natural and human activities.

Chronic exposure to arsenic results in various ailments in the body, causing multiple dermatologic signs and even skin cancer (especially in palms, soles, and

abdomen), non-specific abdominal pain, and lung and bladder cancer.

Experts said although people are now more aware of the danger of arsenic, the problem still exists to a quite large extent.

Prof Quazi Quamruzzaman, who has been studying arsenic since 1993, said Bangladesh have a very practical National Arsenic Mitigation policy, but it is only partially implemented.

"It should be properly implemented to save lives," he said.

"Arsenic mitigation is one of the most successful achievements for Bangladesh. But the problem is it still exists but not in the scale which WHO mentioned in 1998 that 2 lakh people will die of arsenic-related cancer in Bangladesh," he added.

Quamruzzaman, an Ekushey Padak winner, said, "We have still a long way to go and need to work especially in some remote areas where the problem still exists with serious health problems."

Water resource and climate change specialist Ainun Nishat said the problem is environmental and it still exists in the environment.

"It is true that people became aware of arsenic pollution. The government should take the issue seriously as it is a silent killer."

About the lack of a comprehensive study, he said, "It is a shame for us that it is our problem but we are dependent on the donors' funds for research."

The government, however, in recent years stressed research and hope that a detailed study would be done to assess the arsenic situation in the country.

IFC hopes solid steps during

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on March 16 made no visible progress, it said.

IFC said Bangladesh is home to 54 out of 57 rivers that flow into the country through India. Due to the withdrawal of water from upstream, more than 30 rivers in Bangladesh have died, especially in the absence of sustainable water management.

The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, based on the faulty idea of water sharing at the border, is not serving its purpose in Bangladesh, it said.

The Bangladesh part of the Teesta dries up every lean season due to unsustainable diversion of its entire flow from the Gazaldoba Barrage. But in the wet season, the people of Bangladesh suffer from devastating floods from the Ganges and the Teesta, IFC said in the statement.

It believes, if the rivers die at their

downstream in Bangladesh, the upstream in this natural water flow are also bound to die over time.

Rivers flowing through their natural floodplains remain alive and healthy because the groundwater of floodplains keeps them alive during the dry season.

A recent survey conducted under the leadership of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) in different countries showed that integrated management of rivers from their sources to the sea (S2S) can ensure sustainable development and pollution control all along their banks, it said.

The signatories to the statement are Atiqur Rahman Salu, Chairman, and Sayed Tipu Sultan, Secretary-General, IFC New York; Prof Jasim Uddin Ahmad, President, Dr SI Khan, Senior Vice President, and Syed Irfanul Bari, General Secretary, IFC Bangladesh; and Mostafa Kamal Majumder, Coordinator of IFC.

3 more held

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his relatives Jalfor Ali and Lima Aktar said he is the president of union Jubo League.

However, Khairul Huda Chapol, convener of Sunamganj Jubo League, on Saturday told The Daily Star that Shahidul is neither the president of the local unit nor a leader of Jubo League.

"Since 2007, there have been no Jubo League committees in Derai and Shalla upazilas and Shahidul was not a leader even before," he said.

Meanwhile, police yesterday claimed that Jhumon Das Apon, who allegedly uploaded the Facebook post criticising a Hefajat leader's statement that triggered the mayhem, is an activist of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, pro-BNP student body.

Jhumon was a former joint general secretary of Shalla upazila unit JCD, said Mizanur Rahman, superintendent of Sunamganj police.

The SP disclosed the information at a press conference at his office's conference room yesterday, four days into the incident.

He added that charge sheets of the cases would be submitted within the shortest possible time.

Jhumon was arrested under section 54 of the CrPC and later he was sent to court, said the SP.

"Police are investigating the incident considering its all aspects. As the attack was carried out over a Facebook post, police started probing from this angle," he said.

"Those who are involved in the attack will be brought to book. But no innocent people will be harassed," he added.

Contacted, Shalla upazila unit JCD Convener Tarek Hasan admitted that Jhumon was a joint general secretary of the unit.

"The committee formed in 2018 was dissolved within six months. Jhumon remained inactive since then," he added.

On Wednesday morning, several hundred supporters of Hefajat-e Islam attacked, vandalised and looted at least 90 Hindu houses in Noagaon village over the Facebook post.