

Swechchhasebak League activist hacked to death

UNB, Chuadanga

A Swechchhasebak League activist was hacked to death by unidentified criminals in Chuadanga's Alamdanga upazila yesterday.

Imran Hossain, resident of Alamdanga municipality area, was the general secretary of the Alamdanga municipal unit of Swechchhasebak League.

The criminals killed Imran over previous enmity while he was heading for work at 11:00am, said Saiful Islam, officer-in-charge of Alamdanga Police Station.

Later, he was rushed to Kushtia General Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he added.

"Efforts are on to nab the killers after identifying them," said the OC.



Experts work at a place of mass burial during an exhumation, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in the town of Izyum, recently liberated by Ukrainian Armed Forces, in Kharkiv region, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Biden appeals for unity in anti-extremism 'summit'

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden appealed Thursday for a united front against hate crimes and political violence in a speech building on his bid to present himself as champion of moderate values at a time of rising extremism.

"We have to face the good, the bad and the truth. That's what great nations do and we're a great nation," Biden told a packed hall at the White House's United We Stand Summit. "You must choose to be a nation of hope, unity and optimism -- or a nation of fear and division and hate."

Biden recounted, as often before, how he took the decision to challenge then president Donald Trump in the 2020 election after the Republican initially declined to condemn a 2017 neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, Virginia.

"Charlottesville changed everything, because I believe our story is to unite as people in one nation, in one America."

Graves, 'torture centres' found in recaptured east

Says Ukraine; Zelensky blames Russia; UN wants to send team to determine circumstances of deaths

AGENCIES

Ukrainian investigators descended on a pine forest outside the recaptured town of Izyum yesterday and began pulling hundreds of hastily buried bodies from the sandy soil.

At least one of the corpses had been buried with bound hands, an AFP journalist saw. Kyiv officials said they had counted 450 graves at the mass burial site and found 10 alleged "torture centres" after the Kharkiv region was recaptured from Russian invaders.

In the forest outside Izyum, AFP journalists saw graves topped with makeshift crosses and marked with numbers, with one inscription reading:

"Ukrainian army, 17 people. Izyum morgue."

Kyiv's forces recovered a swathe of territory in recent days in a lightning counter-offensive in the east, liberating several towns from Russian forces but also uncovering what they say is a grim legacy of occupation.

Police chief Igor Klymenko said torture rooms were found in the town of Balakliya and elsewhere in Karkhiv, while presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said the Izyum mass grave site alone held at least 450 bodies.

"In the occupied territories, rampant terror, violence, torture and mass murders have been reigning for months," Podolyak said.

The United Nations in Geneva said it hopes to send a team to determine the circumstances of the deaths in the forest graves.

"Russia is leaving death behind it everywhere and must be held responsible," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a video address.

Russia has been accused of carrying out attacks on civilians that could amount to war crimes, notably in suburban towns outside the capital of Kyiv after fighting in March.

Dozens of civilians bearing signs of extrajudicial killings were found in places like Bucha, outside Kyiv, after they were recaptured by Ukraine's forces earlier this year.

Cut, polished and sold to deceive

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takes out the bran and geranium, said Nahidul, who has done extensive research on the nutritional value of rice while studying in Odense, Denmark.

Sadly, the whole investment for the miniket gimmick is designed for greed. Millers make up to Tk 300 extra profit per sack in case of modifying the BR 28 variety of rice, according to a food ministry report, released last month.

The report reaffirms that the rice loses its nutritional value in the process of becoming miniket. The automatic husking machine leaves only carbohydrate in rice, removing fibre, vitamins and minerals like zinc, iron, etc.

Rice fibre helps reduce cholesterol and constipation. Rice without fibre or minerals becomes the cause of health hazards, mentions the report.

WHAT IS MINIKET ANYWAY? According to the food ministry report, the West Bengal government in 1985 distributed kits of Shatabdi paddy seeds and fertilisers to flood-affected farmers of the state. With the word "kit" in mind, farmers started calling the rice miniket or miniket.

From 1985 to 1990, this rice came from India to Jashore and later spread to nearby districts.

It is common knowledge among traders that Abdur Rashid, a businessman of Kushtia district bordering India, commercially launched the so-called miniket rice in Dhaka market, it added.

According to the ministry, Bangladesh produces around 3.84 crore tonnes of rice annually; nearly half of it is sold in the market as miniket.

Talking to about 50 millers, huskers, rice traders and farmers, it was found that millers are making miniket rice from paddy varieties including BRRI 28, BRRI 29, BRRI 33, BRRI 43, BRRI 48, BRRI 50, BRRI 51 and BRRI 98.

Besides, the millers also process Katari, Shampa Katari, Bina-7, Swarna-5, Gutti Swarna, BRRI 49, Jirashail, Jira, Subol Lota, Paizam, Hira, Mamun Gutti, Ranjit and Suman Swarna to brand them as "super miniket".

"We sell at least 40 varieties of miniket rice with the prices ranging from Tk 55 to Tk 75 per kg. Half the rice varieties we sell are called miniket," Mamunur Rashid of Lamia Rice Agency from Mohammadpur Krishi Market said last week when non-miniket rice price was between Tk 48 and Tk 72.

KM Layek Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Auto Major and Husking

Mill Owners' Association, however, said, "Actually, there is no rice called miniket. Over the last 10 to 12 years, millers have been marketing miniket because of the public demand."

Every year, the Department of Agricultural Extension offices across the country prepare a database of different varieties of rice being produced in their respective districts, for sending a list to the ministry. They have a name called miniket on their record.

But Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), which supplies some 34 varieties of rice seeds across the country, has no seed named miniket in its long list. "It is clear that millers are processing hybrid rice and naming it miniket," the ministry report states, citing Dr Mahmudul Islam Nazrul, chief scientific officer of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

The Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU), an agency under the food ministry, conducted a survey in 2020, which found the total rice stock of 10 traders from different wholesale markets in Dhaka was 213 tonnes, which included 92 tonnes of miniket.

In Sylhet, some 10 rice wholesalers had a total of 2,110 tonnes of rice -- 716 tonnes of it miniket.

Our reporters visiting different

wholesale and retail rice markets in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Bogura and Pabna found shops filled with the so-called miniket rice.

Traders also estimated that "miniket rice accounts for over 40 to 50 percent of their total sale".

Recently, the Directorate of National Consumers Right Protection (DNCRP) has decided to launch a drive to stop sales of miniket rice in the market as per the request of the food ministry, said AHM Shafiquzzaman, director general of the DNCRP.

Dr Mosammat Nazmanara Khanum, former secretary of the food ministry, who led a ten-member probe committee on miniket last year, said traders sell more than 50 percent of rice in the market as miniket.

"In some parts of the country, farmers grow an Indian variety of paddy, which is locally known to them as miniket. But it would not be more than 0.5 percent of total rice production," she said.

"So, we recommended preparing a guideline for millers and also wrote to Bangladesh Rice Research Institute to take measures about it," added Dr Nazmanara, who went on leave preparatory to retirement last month.

She insisted the traders should sell any rice variety calling it by its original name.

1 killed as shell from Myanmar

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Contacted, Ashok Kumar Paul, additional superintendent of police in Bandarban, said he had been informed that a Rohingya youth got killed after a shell exploded in the camp.

Three shells landed on the camp around 8:30pm and one of them exploded, said Dil Mohammed, adding that the unexploded shells fell within 10 yards of the refugee settlement.

He further said Iqbal had arrived at the no-man's land in 2017 amid a military crackdown on the Rohingyas in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, the authorities last night ordered moving all SSC examination centres from Ghumdum area to Kutupalong in Cox's Bazar, said Yasmin Parvin Tibrij, deputy commissioner of Bandarban.

BANGLADESHI MAN INJURED A Bangladeshi man lost his leg in a "landmine explosion" inside Myanmar territory near Bandarban's Naikhongchhari border yesterday.

Aoung Gya Thowai Tanchangya, 22, of Tumburu Hedmanpara area at Ghumdum union, was trying to bring back his cattle that crossed the border while grazing, said witnesses.

Ghumdum Union Parishad

Member Anwar Hossain said many people in the area rear cattle and the animals often cross into Myanmar.

The explosion took place around 300 metres inside Myanmar border. Aoung's ankle and foot were severed, he said, quoting locals.

Ghumdum Union Parishad Chairman Jahangir Aziz also confirmed the incident.

Aoung was rushed to a local hospital after the incident.

Later, he was shifted to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital and then to Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

Contacted, Naikhongchhari Upazila Nirbahar Officer Salma Ferdous said, "Border Guard Bangladesh has beelied up its surveillance in the bordering area after the incident."

Asked, Tantu Saha, officer-in-charge of Naikhongchhari Police Station, said he was unaware of the incident.

Lt Col Md Mehedi Hossain Kabir, commanding officer of 34th BGB battalion, could not be reached over phone after repeated attempts.

[Our Bandarban and Cox's Bazar correspondents contributed to this report]

Essentials getting pricier

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of wheat in the market.

"We are selling flour at Tk 50-55 per kg based on quality," he said.

Md Sagor, manager of Al Kora Traders in Station Road in Tejgaon, said the price of eggs shot up over the last three days due to production costs.

"At the wholesale level, 100 eggs are being sold at Tk 1,030, which was Tk 860 two weeks ago," he said.

Vegetable traders at Karwan Bazar said the supply of vegetables dropped in the market due to rain, triggering a price rise between Tk 10 and Tk 20 for every item.

Nasrin Begum, a homemaker from Kathalbagan who visited the kitchen market in Karwan Bazar yesterday, said the prices of a few essentials dropped over the last two weeks but that did not last long.

"We are struggling to buy all items on our shopping list due to the tumultuous nature of the kitchen markets. Last week, I bought a dozen eggs for Tk 115, providing relief for us but this week it is Tk 145. Broiler chicken was sold at Tk 165 per kg last week; now it is Tk 180 per kg. It's the same case with vegetables," she said.

"I turned up at the market with Tk 2,000. I had to exclude three items from the list due to the volatile price.

"We're a family of five solely dependent on my husband's income, who works as a driver and earns a meagre income of Tk 20,000. House rent, utility bills and price of daily essentials increased over the last four years, but not a single extra paisa was added to my husband's salary. Our hardship is going beyond words," she said in a frustrated voice.

The correspondent yesterday talked to other shoppers, who expressed similar anger and frustration at the price hike of essentials after just a week.

Jashore board

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-- Pari Shankar Pilot Girls High School, Baoisona Kamshia Secondary School in Kalia upazila and Dighalia High School in Lohagara upazila of Narail.

The authorities postponed the test so that no controversy is created regarding the exam, he said, adding that law enforcers and the board would investigate the incident.

Woman murdered by in-laws

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A mother of two was hacked to death allegedly by her nephews in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj yesterday morning over setting up boundary walls of her home.

Ayesha Akther Poly, 30, was attacked and killed with a sharp weapon during an argument with Masuk, Mamun and their sister Shefa.

She was the wife of Akther Mia, an expatriate of Jalalia Gojaripara village.

Quoting locals, Ali Ashraf, officer-in-charge of Chunarughat Police Station, said Poly and her in-laws were not on good terms and they often fought over the boundary wall.

Poly recently accused them of harassing her in a case, he said, adding that police were looking for the suspects.

Elephant kills farmer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A 64-year-old farmer was killed by a herd of wild elephants in Haluaghat, Mymensingh, early yesterday.

The incident happened when Nawsher Ali and several other villagers were trying to scare away the herd of elephants from a paddy field in Koroitoli Kuchpara area, said Shahinuzzaman Khan, officer-in-charge of Haluaghat Police Station.

The elephants attacked Nawsher who died on the spot, said the OC.

Man lands in jail for raping girl with disability

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sent a man to jail on charges of raping an 11-year-old girl with speech impairment in Santhia upazila.

Anwar Mollah, 40, a farm worker of Punduria area, was arrested by police on Thursday night after the girl's father filed a case against him.

Asif Siddikul Islam, officer-in-charge of Santhia Police Station, said the girl went missing on Thursday and she was seriously ill when her parents found her at a quiet place at night.

During primary interrogation, Anwar admitted that he had raped the girl, said the OC.

Kyrgyz, Tajik leaders order forces to 'withdraw' after clashes

AFP, Bishkek

The leaders of ex-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan met yesterday and ordered their forces to withdraw after deadly clashes along their disputed border raised fears of all-out conflict between the Central Asian nations.

Their meeting at a summit of regional leaders in Uzbekistan came as Russia offered to mediate and called for "urgent" measures to halt fighting that left dozens injured and several dead.

Fighting regularly flares up between the two countries that share a 970 kilometre-long (600-mile-

) border, with around half of the frontier contested.

In 2021, unprecedented clashes between the two sides killed 50 people.

The Kyrgyz presidency said in a statement after yesterday's meeting that the two leaders "agreed to instruct the relevant structures to cease fire and withdraw forces and assets from the line of contact".

They gave the orders after officials in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, said security chiefs in the two mountainous and poor states had agreed to a ceasefire that began at 1000 GMT yesterday.

BTCL defaults on Tk 2,259cr

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division's secretary, who is also the BTCL chairman, seeking his intervention about the unpaid dues but to no avail, according to the report.

Had BTCL furnished the sum to the exchequer on time, the government would not have needed to borrow the amount from domestic sources to meet the deficit and pay high interest on the loan, it said.

The CAG audit team also found that BTCL's internal control system was weak. And there is no responsible officer or cell for monitoring it.

This made paying the dues challenging.

Despite repeated requests from the CAG audit team for documentation of how the BTCL was keeping track of the huge amounts of dues to the telecom regulator, nothing was provided.

Although the BTCL is a large organisation with a purchase committee in place, it has not adopted a purchase plan.

The CAG also found that the guidelines issued by the National Board of Revenue for the collection of value-added and income taxes were not being followed by the different departments of BTCL.

No register is maintained properly in this regard, it said.

What is more damning is that the CAG found no trace of any internal audit system: the independent audit agency could not find any report from the previous year.

Asked about the dues unearthed by the CAG audit, BTCL Managing Director Rafiqul Matin said a portion of the dues has been cleared already in nine instalments.

"We are now regular with the payments," he said.

However, a recent BTRC document

shows that its dues from BTCL's IGW service stand at Tk 1,136 crore -- Tk 192 crore more than what the CAG audit had found.

The BTRC is trying to collect its share of the revenue from the BTCL, said its Vice-Chairman Subrata Roy Maitra.

"In some cases, the operators go to the court, leaving us unable to take action," he added.

Once a hugely profitable enterprise, the BTCL has been racking up losses since fiscal 2009-10 save for fiscal 2012-13, when it turned in a profit of Tk 5 crore. It last logged in proper profit back in fiscal 2009-10: Tk 106.1 crore.

With the view to giving relevance to the dated company, the government has been sanctioning one project after project worth thousands of crores of taka.

Since 2009, it has implemented 10 projects involving about Tk 6,000 crore.

Its ongoing projects are worth about Tk 7,500 crore, with the biggest chunk -- Tk 3,314.9 crore -- allocated to the project styled "Modernisation of Telecommunication Network for Digital Connectivity".

The project will introduce modern telephone exchange, high-speed internet and sophisticated telecommunication network systems at the district and upazila levels.

Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar is buoyant that the lumbering company will turn the corner this year.

"I have been informed by the BTCL management that they are doing great this year -- I think they will make a profit."

Asked if the BTCL will clear its dues to the BTRC, he said: "Everything will go in the right direction from this year."