

Ban AL, punish its leaders

Protesters across Bangladesh demand justice for July massacre

STAR REPORT

Leaders and activists from several political and student organisations staged demonstrations across the country yesterday, demanding a ban on the Awami League and the trial of its leaders for their involvement in the July massacre.

In Dhaka, the United Peoples of Bangladesh, a newly formed political group, brought out a protest procession from the Bijoynagar Water Tank to the Old Paltan intersection. Led by Chief Coordinator Ali Hasan Junaid, protesters chanted slogans calling for justice.

"Awami League cannot avoid its responsibility for the July killings. Therefore, banning it is our only demand," demonstrators said.

Participants also called for capital punishment for ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and others alleged to have been involved in the incidents.

Meanwhile, in Narayanganj, the National Citizens Party (NCP) held a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar, followed by a procession along Bangabandhu Road. Leaders from the Students Against Discrimination also joined in solidarity.

Addressing the rally, NCP Joint Member Secretary Abdullah Al Amin, Southern Region Organiser Shawkat Ali, Joint Chief Coordinator Tuhin Mahmud, and others reiterated their demand for the trial of AL leaders for their roles in the July violence.

In Gazipur, the NCP Metropolitan unit organised another rally at Chandana Crossroads demanding a ban on AL's political activities. Central leaders Ali

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2 arrested over attempted rape of minor girl

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Two men were arrested on Friday night in Kishoreganj in a case filed over the attempted rape of an 11-year-old girl.

The arrestees are Hasu Mia, 60, and Moti Mia, 55, said Sakhawat Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Pakundia Police Station.

The arrests were made after the victim's mother filed a case with Pakundia Police Station on Friday evening.

According to the case statement, Hasu and Moti tried to rape the girl around 12:30pm on Tuesday.

After the arrest, police initiated an investigation into the matter, said the OC, adding that the arrestees would be produced before the court today.



A child heads to the field with his kite, his face glowing with joy. In the southern winds of Baishakh afternoons, children fill the sky with kites. The photo was taken in Kadamtala village of Shyamnagar upazila, Satkhira yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

TEESTA CHARS

High pumpkin yield, low profit for char farmers

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Farmers in char areas are happy with the pumpkin production on the sandy chars of the Teesta riverbed. However, they are disappointed as prices have fallen compared to last year. Due to an urgent need for cash, char farmers are being forced to sell pumpkins at low prices.

Officials from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) said pumpkins have been cultivated on 12,500 hectares of land across five districts of the Rangpur region – Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Rangpur, Gaibandha, and Nilphamari – this year.

The yield of pumpkins per hectare is between 25 and 30 tonnes. Around 80 percent of pumpkins are produced on the sandy chars of the Teesta riverbed.

Abdul Wahed, a farmer from Char Jamirbari area of Kaliganj upazila in Lalmonirhat, said he is growing pumpkins on abandoned sandy char land. Earlier, no crops could be grown on these sandy chars, which would remain barren after the monsoon water receded.

He said it costs Tk 6-7 to produce a kilogramme of pumpkin. Last year, he sold a kilogramme of pumpkin at Tk 17-18. This year, the price has dropped to Tk 11-12. He has produced 3,000



kilogrammes of pumpkins on one bigha of land, which cost him Tk 18,000. Had he received the same price as last year, he would have made a profit.

Nadirul Islam, a farmer from Char Bajra area of Ulipur upazila in Kurigram, said he has produced 12,500 kilogrammes of pumpkins from four bighas of land. He has sold half of the pumpkins as the price is low, and stored the remaining half at home.

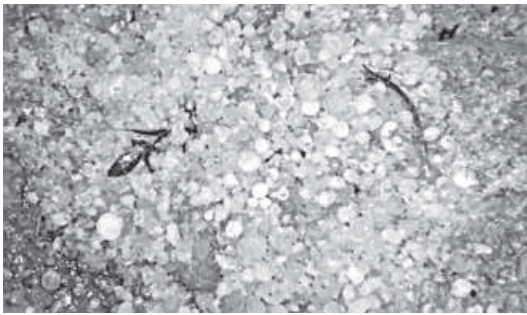
Abdus Samad, a farmer from Char Isli area of Gangachara upazila in Rangpur, said 10 farmers have formed a group to grow pumpkins on the abandoned sandy char of the Teesta riverbed. This year, they cultivated pumpkins on three

hectares of land and yielded 73 tonnes. They spent Tk 3.7 lakh and sold 30 tonnes of pumpkins for Tk 3.6 lakh at a rate of Tk 12 per kilogramme.

Nazrul Islam, a vegetable seller from Gangachara area of Rangpur, said the supply of pumpkins in the market is very high, leading to lower prices.

Shafiqul Islam, additional director of the Rangpur Regional DAE, said as all the farmers harvest pumpkins simultaneously, the market supply has increased.

He said pumpkins can be stored at home for six to seven months, but most farmers are unable to store them due to their need for cash.



15 VILLAGES IN NETRAKONA

Hailstorm, nor'wester ravage Boro crops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

A sudden hailstorm, accompanied by a nor'wester, severely damaged boro crops across 15 villages in Kalmakanda upazila of Netrakona early yesterday.

Beginning around 1:30am, the storm lasted for 30 to 40 minutes, destroying paddy that was almost ready for harvest and damaging numerous homes in Kharnoi, Lengura, and Sadar union.

Kalmakanda Upazila Agriculture Officer Saiful Islam said the hailstorm and strong winds caused the most damage in Kharnoi and Lengura unions.

"Preliminary estimates suggest that around 2,000 paddy fields have been destroyed. Overall, approximately 10 percent crop damage has been recorded across the upazila," he added.

According to residents and the upazila agriculture office, the storm flattened thousands of acres of boro rice fields near the hill areas of Lengura and Kharnai.

Many villagers fled their homes in fear as hailstones punctured tin roofs.

Wabaydul Haque, chairman of Kharnoi Union Parishad and a resident of Bausam village, said, "We were preparing to harvest within a few days. But just 30 minutes of hailstorm destroyed everything. Farmers, who had planted their rice with loans and immense hardship, have lost it all. People are devastated across villages like Ranigaon, Bishwanathpur, Laxmipur, Bausam, and Govindapur."

Md Saidur Rahman, chairman of Lengura Union Parishad, reported that approximately 2,000 acres of farmland had been affected in his union. Chaitangor, North Goragao, and South Goragao villages suffered the worst, with about 40 percent of crops lost in other areas.

Ashaduzzaman Ershad, a resident of Kalmakanda Sadar union, noted that although his area suffered relatively less damage, around 10-20 percent of crops were still affected.

"Since the rice was not fully ripe, the damage was somewhat less severe. Had it ripened, the loss would have been even greater," he added.

Rahim Uddin, a poor farmer from Ranigaon, said, "All the tin sheets of my house have been punctured. On one side, I have lost my crops; on the other, my house is ruined."

Faizul Wasima Nahat, upazila nirbahi officer of Kalmakanda, said initial information is being collected.

"After consulting with the Upazila Agriculture Officer and assessing the extent of the damage, further action will be taken," she said.



Rituals, rhythms, and reverence

Manipuri community celebrates ancient 'Lai-Haraoba' festival in Moulvibazar



MINTU DESHIWARA

The Manipuri community in Kamalganj upazila of Moulvibazar celebrated the ancient Lai-Haraoba festival, a vibrant cultural event rooted in centuries-old religious tradition.

The three-day festival began on Wednesday afternoon at the Manipuri Cultural Complex in Tentigaon village, with religious rituals and folk performances marking the opening ceremony.

Organised by the Lai Haraoba Steering Committee, the festival concluded early yesterday.

The celebration brought together a diverse group of participants. Apart from the people of the local Manipuri community, many priests, dancers, researchers, and cultural activists from Manipur in India, alongside representatives from the Bangladesh National Museum,

Unesco, and other cultural organisations, joined the festival.

The vibrant festival also attracted a wide range of visitors.

Ibunghal Singh, convener of the festival committee, said the programme included traditional Maithai religious messages, folk songs, dances, and various rituals.

He added that the festival honours the deities of the Sanamahi/Apokpa religion, reflecting the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Maithai people.

Oinam Lanthai, the committee's member secretary, explained that "Lai-Haraoba" originates from "Lai Haraoba Jagoi," one of the oldest folk dances in Manipuri society.

"Lai means God, Haraoba means joy, and Jagoi means dance – it's a way of offering joy to the deities through song and dance," he said.

The dance portrays every phase of human and natural life – from creation, household life, and farming to birth and death – intertwined with the rhythm of music and movement, he said, adding, "Elements such as Laishem Jagoi (creation dance), Yumsharol Jagoi (household dance), and Laisa Jagoi (maiden dance) are performed as part of this rich folk tradition."

The event was organised in collaboration with several organisations, including the Bangladesh National Museum, Poroi Apokpa Marup Religious Cultural Organization, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the Consortium of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bangladesh (CIB), and Sadhana – A Center for the Advancement of South Asian Culture. The programme was funded by Unesco Bangladesh.

SINHA MURDER

Quick execution of convicts demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ex-Forces Association yesterday demanded the execution of former Teknaf OC Pradeep Kumar Das and Inspector Liaquat Ali within seven days after completion of the legal proceedings in Maj (ret'd) Sinha murder case.

The platform of retired military and paramilitary personnel also sought conclusion of the death reference and appeal hearings within a month.

At a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity, the association's convener, Lieutenant Commander (ret'd) Mehedi Hasan, said, "We want to send a clear message to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Law: no threats, temptations, or political pressure should influence the execution of the verdict. The sentence must be carried out within seven working days after the judgment is delivered."

Member secretary Lt (ret'd) Saifullah Khan Saif also spoke on the occasion.

Major (ret'd) Sinha was shot dead at a police checkpoint in Baharchhara, Teknaf, on July 31, 2020, sparking nationwide outrage.

On January 31, 2022, a Cox's Bazar court sentenced Pradeep and Liaquat to death and handed life sentences to six other accused in the case.



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