

One-man show in 43 govt primary schools

Sad tale of education in remote haor areas of Kishoreganj

MOKLESUR RAHMAN LITON, Kishoreganj

Unbelievable though, 43 government schools in haor (water body) areas of Kishoreganj are run by one teacher each for long.

Seven of the schools are in Karimganj upazila, parliamentary constituency of Education Minister Dr M Osman Faruk.

Of the rest, 31 are in Bajitpur upazila, one in Itna upazila and two each in Nikli and Mithamoin upazilas.

It was about 11 in the morning at Char Koranshi Government Primary School in Gujadia union in Karimganj upazila.

This correspondent saw teacher Provat Chandra Biswas briskly moving from one class to another, giving lessons to students from class one to five.

In class five, Runa Akter (roll no. 4) said, "Sir (her teacher) asked us to do sums. He would come after teaching in classes three and four."

This correspondent found some students in that class who could not say what is the English alphabet next to J.

Moving from one class to another and herding children is not Provat Chandra's only duty. As the 'head teacher', he has to perform other duties like maintaining records and doing other official work. He is also a voter enumerator in the area.

Provat Chandra said he is running the school alone since last year. "I have become weary", he said while talking to this correspondent.

Majharul Islam is the lone teacher for 164 students at Char Nawagaon Government Primary School in Sutarpar union in Karimganj upazila. He is there for about two years.

There are 324 students at South Nansri Government Primary School in Joyka union in Karimganj upazila. "I have been running the school for over one year", said Shamsuddin,



The lone teacher with students of classes three, four and five at Char Kornshi Government Primary School in Karimganj upazila Kishoreganj haor area.

the lone teacher.

At Tamny Bhuyanpara Government Primary School in Gojadia union in Karimganj, Helal Uddin said he is teaching 218 students from class one to five since January.

Same is the condition with many other schools in Karimganj. These include Bhati Gangatia Government Primary School with 183 students, Mokambari Government Primary School with 200 students and Shodhi Government Primary School with 253 students.

In some schools, students said they often return home finding rooms closed without any prior notice.

In some of the schools, the lone teacher has divided classes into two

shifts according to his convenience. Often, students of classes one, two and three huddle in one room and the lone teacher gives them lessons for one class after another.

In some others, the school is run in two shifts. Students of class one and two come for about an hour in the morning. Next come students of class three, four and five.

Karimganj thana Education Officer Tuhidul Islam is aware of the condition of primary education in his area. But he has 'nothing to do as' teachers manage higher officials and leave the haor areas. Most of them cite bad road link and lack of accommodation a reasons for not staying in the area, he said.

District Primary Education Officer (DPEO) Sultan Miah said a

special policy is needed for these primary schools.

Many newly appointed teachers left their jobs within six months after they were transferred to the remote haor areas, he said.

"Raituli union in Itna upazila is about 30 kilometres from the upazila Sadar. To reach there, one must walk six to seven miles in dry season and hire a boat in the monsoon, which costs at least Tk 100 for the 5-6 hours' journey", he said.

Government has provided motorbikes to Upazila Education Officers but these are of no use in haor areas, the DPEO said.

He suggested that local jobless educated youths should be appointed as teachers in their respective areas after training.

Wife strangled for dowry in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A young man strangled his wife for dowry at Mejjunni in Khalishpur Friday night.

Sultana Parvin Shoma, 20, was killed by her husband Golam Kibria, 28, for failure to bring Tk 2 lakh and a television as dowry from her father. Earlier, Kibria compelled her to go to her father's house to bring the dowry last week. But Sultana returned empty handed. This infuriated Kibria who strangled her inside their bedroom.

Police recovered the body and handed it over to her father Shaikh Nasiruddin of Boyra after autopsy at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) morgue Saturday noon.

Family sources said, Sultana Parvin was married to Golam Kibria on November 28 last year. Since marriage Sultana's husband and in-laws used to torture her for dowry.

A case was filed with Khalishpur Police Station naming Golam Kibria, his sister Noorjahan and her husband Ali Akbar as accused.

Police arrested Ali Akbar and Noorjahan but Kibria went into hiding.



Disabled for life by JMB bomb... (from left) cinema viewer Babu, Ajanta Cinema operator Fazal and employee Shaheen.

Hang JMB kingpins

Mymensingh cinema blast victims demand

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Family members and relatives of cinema blast victims in Mymensingh town have demanded exemplary punishment to JMB kingpins Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai and their followers.

Twenty-one young people were killed and over 100 injured in serial bomb blasts in packed Ajanta, Chhayabant, Aloka and Purobi cinema halls on the day of Eid-ul-Fitr on December 7, 2002.

Twenty of the injured have become maimed and disabled for life. Abdur Rahman confessed to interrogators in Dhaka that cadres of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB) blasted the bombs.

Salimullah Babu, owner of Ajanta cinema, told this correspondent that the memory of the fateful event still haunts him.

Babu lost his right leg in blast. Physically handicapped, he now passes days in great hardship.

"I was inside the Hall. It was hellish, unbelievable. There were blood and scattered bodies all around. I also felt pain in the leg but could not understand what had happened. I lost sense a few minutes later. When I regained sense, I found myself on hospital bed", he said.

Babu said he is very happy that Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla



Salimullah Babu, owner of Ajanta Cinema, who lost his right leg.

Bhai have been arrested. "But victims like me will not get back normal life". Many others died or became crippled and their families have been destroyed.

Babu demanded capital punish-

ment to the JMB kingpins and steps to root out such mindless violence from the country.

Nikhil Sarker, a shopkeeper, was one of those killed. His wife Mala Rani and daughter Nira Sarker said their family has been ruined following the killing of Nikhil, the only earning member of the family. Nira is a student of class six now. "I do not know how I will bear her education expenses", said Mala Rani. "They (JMB men) are killers. So they should be given capital punishment. They made us pauper".

"Every year, cinema blast tragedy day (on December 7) is observed and we attend the programme. That is all. We do not get any help to survive".

"JMB leader Abdur Rahman confessed to ordering the cinema blasts, so it is easy to try them under existing laws", added Mala Rani.

Sources said there has not been any headway in investigation into four blast cases. Immediately after the incidents, government arrested 31 leaders and activists of opposition Awami League (AL) including Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Mymensingh district AL president Motiur Rahman.

Pinning hopes on Amropali

JASHIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

This year is supposed to be an off-year for mangoes. But Amropali, a new variety of hybrid mango, is showing signs of a bumper production, to the disbelief of horticulturists in Khagrachhari.

Amropali cultivation that began in hills five years ago has opened up great prospects for farmers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), promising hefty gains.

The production in Khagrachhari this year may be like that of last year, which was an on-year, Horticulture Department officials and farmers said.

The hills with suitable soil and climate may be turned into mango orchards as in Chapainawabganj, they said.

Amropali is now being cultivated in at least 600 small gardens and 36 larger ones in Khagrachhari district, said horticulturist Mizanur Rahman at Khagrachhari Horticulture Centre. Most of the gardens are in Dighinala, Khagrachhari Sadar, Panchhari, Manikchhari,

Mohalchhari and Laxmichhari in the district.

"Budding started late this year as flowering started after the bitter winter cold. The weather, temperature and soil are suitable for Amra Pali cultivation in the (CHT) hills", he told this correspondent.

In a modest target, yield from the gardens in Khagrachhari may be 75,000 mounds if weather remains favourable for two months more, he said. The horticulture centre distributed 37,000 Amro Poli plants in Khagrachhari, Rangamari and Bandherban districts in last two years, Mizanur Rahman said.

But the gardens are facing the biggest threat from brick fields. There are more than 100 brick fields in CHT and around 40 of them are in Khagrachhari, he said. Smoke from the brick fields badly affects mango buds.

"Its price per kilogram remains at least Tk 10 more than other mangoes", farmer Sneha Ranjan Chakma said in Kukichhara.



Feasting on Khagrachhari forests

30 truckloads of illegal wood leave the hill dist daily

JASIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

Plunder of trees from Khagrachhari forests is going on unabated right under the nose of the administration and the forest department.

Every day, at least 30 truckloads of illegal wood find their way to different brick fields and unauthorised timber markets in Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Chittagong districts, sources said.

This correspondent detected that more than 40 areas in the eight upazilas from where the illegal timbers and wood are collected by traders, allegedly by 'managing' forest department staff.

The areas include Zoutha Khamer, Baillahachhari, Guimara and Tabalchhari in Matiranga upazila; Lemuchhari, Zeromail and Zamtali in Khagrachhari Sadar; Chhoto Merung, Babuchhara and Maiddah Boyakhali in Dighinala; Logung, Pujung and Latiban in Panchhari; Patazara and Baganbazar in Ramghar. Laxmichhari and Manikchhari upazilas are the main centres from where the fire-wood are being supplied to different areas and brick fields in Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Chittagong.

Mong Ching Mamma, a timber trader, admitted that he like many others are felling all kinds of trees

almost regularly.

Abdul Jalil, another trader in Merung area in Dighinala estimated that more than 30 truckloads of illegal timber leave the forest areas every day, virtually without any obstruction from the forest department men.

He said these timbers and wood are sold to brick fields or traders in other districts. The plundered

timbers include Kona, Shal, Segun and Jarul, he said. One truckload of such timber is sold at between Tk 20,000 and Tk 30,000, he said. "When forest department staff come we manage them", he claimed.

The district administration and the forest department on several occasions said they would take steps to stop the plunder of trees

from forests, but to no effect. The district officials on January 20 told newsmen that action would be taken against illegal felling of trees. But only Tk 20,000 was realised as fine from two brick fields since then. Neither any timber trader was touched nor any of the illegal brick fields burning hundreds of tonnes of firewood a day was closed, sources said.



Plundered wood stacked near a forest in Khagrachhari for transportation.

BURI TEESTA IRRIGATION PROJECT IN NILPHAMARI

4 decades over, will the 'faulty' plan be at all remodelled?

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The Buri Teesta Irrigation Project in Jaldhaka, the second largest in Nilphamari district after Teesta Irrigation Project, is of little use to farmers now although it has all infrastructure facilities.

Despite demand by farmers, the project is not fully operational because of alleged lack of initiative by the authorities and technical problems.

At many points, valuable materials including components of sluice gates have been stolen due to lack of proper maintenance.

An optimum utilisation of the project could save Tk 10 crore fuel and produce Tk 100 crore rice during the current IRR1-Boro season, experts and farmers said.

The project was initiated in 1963 to irrigate 29,000 acres of land in Jaldhaka, Domar and Dimla upazilas by harnessing the water of Buri Teesta river.

The project comprises a 10.95 km main canal and three branch canals. Branch canal-1 (BC-1) is 5.64 km long, branch canal-2 (BC-2) is 18.60 km and Branch canal-3 (BC-3) is 19.90 km.

To regulate water, there are 15 big sluice gates in the main canal and 25 medium and smaller ones at different points in the branch canals. A vast reservoir was built on 1217 acres, with a provision for another on 1,000 acres for its expansion.

The project provided irrigation



A virtually abandoned sluice gate in Branch Canal-2 of Buri Teesta Irrigation Project at Kaliganj village in Jaldhaka with both its doors stolen.

facilities to 18,000 acres out of 29,000 for long.

In 1991, the Water Development Board (WDB) declared that the project would not be able to yield desired result due to 'wrong planning'.

Since then, survey was done several times by WDB to correct the

'wrong plan' and make the project fully operational, but to no result.

WDB Executive Engineer in Nilphamari, Abdur Razzak, told this correspondent that study is going for remodeling the project. He said the project is not 'totally useless' as irrigation is being provided to 350 acres

through it now.

During a visit on Thursday, this correspondent found that most areas of the canals were dry. Due to lack of proper maintenance, 10 metal doors and other components sluice gates and regulators were stolen.

X-ray machine falls sick in 48 hours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The X-ray machine at Baufal Upazila Health Complex went out of order only two days after its installation.

Health Complex sources said, the Korean made 300 mm X-ray machine installed on January 22 went out of order on January 25. A team of experts identified the fault in the machine during a visit to the health complex on Friday. They hoped to repair it by March 30.

SUST admission from April 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Admission into first year honours classes in Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST) here will begin on April 3, official sources said. It will continue till April 13 and as many as 1,240 students will be admitted in 23 departments, they said.

FERTILISER CRISIS IN DINAJPUR, THAKURGAON

Farmers disrupt traffic, besiege dealers' shops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Several thousand farmers brought out processions and staged sit-in at five points on Dhaka-Dinajpur and Dinajpur-Thakurgaon highways yesterday, demanding fertiliser.

The angry farmers also assaulted two officials of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) who attempted to cool them down.

In Panchagarh, farmers laid a siege to some dealers' shops and confined three AED officials for some time.

Police and other sources said farmers were waiting in a long queue in front of a fertiliser dealer's shop in

Kaharol upazila since morning. As the dealer failed to supply fertiliser, the angry farmers came on the highway and marched towards Dash Mile intersection. They sat on the highway, stopping traffic for about four hours.

The farmers left the road after fertiliser, reportedly procured from dealers in a neighbouring upazila, was distributed among them.

In separate incidents, farmers also disrupted traffic on the Dhaka-Dinajpur highway at Hakimpur and Parbatipur and on the Dinajpur-Thakurgaon road at Birganj.

During the agitation the farmers assaulted AED official Subendunath

Roy of Kaharol and Abul Kalam Asad of Birganj.

In Panchagarh, three AED officials were also confined by fertiliser-hungry farmers for a brief period.

Dinajpur Fertilizer Association officials told this correspondent that they are distributing the allocated fertilisers through 10 dealers.

They got 15,030 tonnes in February against a demand for 26,000.

Dinajpur District AED officials said 1,30,200 metric tons of fertiliser are required to meet the season's demand but 92,813 tonnes have been allocated.