

REMOTE SINDURNA CHAR IN LALMONIRHAT

Now aware, they take medical services for delivery

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Two years back, the people of Sindurna Char, a remote locality in Teesta river basin area of Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila were hardly aware of modern healthcare including institutional delivery.

Once dependent on local kabiraj (herbal medicine practitioner) and untrained midwives, they now seek the doctor, and if not possible due to the odd location of the char (sandy land area emerging from riverbed), they take telemedicine support, thanks to the initiative of local NGO Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO).

Nasima Khatun, 27, who had normal delivery of her second child with medical help recently, said, "I had a bitter experience while giving birth to my first baby at home four years ago. The child, who got injury in the head due to pulling by an unskilled midwife, is still having problems."

Narzina Khatun, 25, also gave birth to her second baby in a normal way through institutional delivery a month ago.

"I took the help after learning that it is safe for both the mother and the baby. I had the first delivery at home with the help of an unskilled midwife in the traditional system, which was unsafe," she said.

"Most women in the char area face odds while giving birth at home with the help of



Officials of NGO Eco-Social Development Organization talk to local women at Sindurna Char in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila, as part of an awareness campaign about the necessity of modern healthcare facilities.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

unskilled midwives. We and our guardians are now quite aware of modern healthcare but many elderly people in the char still seek help

of kabiraj," said Mazia Begum, 26.

Sindurna Char in Lalmonirhat saw at least three maternal deaths in 2017 but no such

incident occurred here during the last one year, thanks to the free of cost prenatal services in the remote area, said Dr Ramjan Ali, health

and family planning officer, Hatibandha upazila.

"Government officials are working there while Eco-Social Development Organization is helping us to provide better healthcare services through awareness programmes in the area. It is encouraging that rural women are now preferring institutional delivery," he said.

ESDO launched the project a year ago and trained four female workers for six months on maternal health. The workers, known as "community skilled birth attendants" (CSBA), provide help to pregnant women in the char area.

Telemedicine care was provided to 310 people in the char area, including 284 mothers, 14 children and 12 adolescents while 78 others, including 54 mothers, 11 children, and 13 adolescents were given direct health service in the last one year, officials said.

The services costing Tk 2.89 lakh and 238 were provided under the ESDO's project, "Integrated Community Development Project-II," funded by Plan International, Bangladesh.

"The char people, especially mothers, children and adolescents are given telemedicine and health support free of cost," said Abdul Mannan, manager of the project.

"When the time of delivery nears, mothers are brought to the mainland and admitted to government hospitals. We bear the cost," he added.

Mindless garbage dumping poses threat

Faridpur municipality continues the act near locality

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

The authorities of Faridpur municipality have continued dumping huge quantities of garbage at Nuru Mia bypass in Kabirpur area under Sadar upazila for the last six months, much to the sufferings of locals and commuters.

The garbage, including waste materials from hospitals and clinics, has spread on the adjacent farmlands and it badly affects crop cultivation, especially due to scattering of needles of discarded syringes, said locals.

During a visit to the area two days ago, this correspondent saw municipality workers dumping garbage at Nuru Mia bypass.

"Every day at least eight truckloads of garbage including waste materials from hospitals and clinics is dumped here," said Idris Sheikh, 55, of Raghunandanpur area, who often collects medical waste from the dumping site.

The garbage piled beside the road spreads bad smell, much to the nuisance for locals as well as commuters,

said Sheikh Khalil, 42, a resident of Kabirpur area.

During rain, the waste spreads on the road, adding to the problem, said Zahangir Hossain, 52, of Kabirpur area.

"The garbage pollutes the environment and spreads diseases among the local residents. Especially children are suffering much as toxic smoke is released when the waste materials are burnt," he said.

Sheikh Ismail, a local farmer, said the mindless act badly affects crop production on over 200 bighas of land.

"Earlier we got at least 50 maunds [a maund = 40 kg] of paddy from a bigha of land but now the yield has come down to only 10 maunds," he added.

Contacted, Faridpur municipality Mayor Sheikh Mahatab Ali admitted that the garbage dumping in the area causes sufferings to locals.

"The spot is being used for dumping garbage as we have no suitable place for it. We are trying to buy land for using as a garbage dumping site. I hope the problem will be solved soon," he said.



A scene of garbage dumping by municipality workers at Nuru Mia bypass in Kabirpur area of Faridpur Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Brick kiln skulks in village for 27 years!

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The brick kiln sits in the middle of a village of about 2,000 inhabitants, in close proximity of an upazila town. It burns wood for its fuel. It uses barrel chimneys. It never obtained any clearance from the Department of Environment.

All of the conditions mentioned above are violations of applicable laws in the country.

And how long have these violations been going on? Not one, not two, but 27 years!

But for the authorities concerned, including the DoE or the district administration, 27 years might not be enough time to go into action against the kiln named Kazi Khandakar Bricks in Murali village under Rajnagar union of Rajnagar upazila.

Shaheda Akther, coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) in Sylhet division, said according to section 465 of the Brick Manufacturing and Brick Kilns Establishment (Control) Act-2010, no brick kiln can be established within a three-kilometre radius of residential areas, upazila headquarters, fruit orchards, farmlands, forestlands and localities.

The local administration needs to step in immediately to save the environment from pollution being caused by Kazi Khandakar Bricks, which violated the law by setting up the kiln on farmland adjacent to a locality, she added.

Not just the villagers of Murali, but about 20,000 others from seven to eight surrounding villages and students of at least ten educational institutions are also being affected by the kiln. The only road -- connecting Murali union with Moulvibazar-Rajnagar road -- they use every day to get to the upazila headquarters or the schools and madrasas, runs by the brick field and frequent movement of heavy vehicles transporting earth for the kiln is damaging the road.

Besides, in addition to the pollution caused by smoke from burning wood, clouds of dust kicked up by the vehicles during movement on the one-kilometre-long damaged road, plastered with layers of earth, is also causing health concerns for the villagers and students.

Other than the air pollution, agricultural



Kazi Khandakar Bricks in Murali village under Rajnagar union of Moulvibazar's Rajnagar upazila. For the last 27 years, the brick kiln has been damaging the environment and an important village road, inset, used by thousands.

PHOTO: STAR

land in the area has started to have a long-term negative impact caused by the brick field.

Farmer Anu Mia of Murali village said yield of crops is on the decline at agricultural farms, including his, located near the brick field.

Another local farmer, requesting not to be named, said they are always under pressure to sell topsoil from their agricultural land to the brick field and many of the farmers, who had to sell topsoil from their land, have been getting poor harvest.

Both the farmers said such a harmful establishment needs to be shut down without any delay.

Shahidul Alam, Rajnagar upazila agriculture officer, said crop yield usually falls when a brick kiln is built next to arable land.

When reached for his expert opinion, Narayan Saha, former head of Department of Forestry and Environmental Science at Shahjalal University of Science and

Technology, said brick kilns are harmful when those are set up in populated areas and those pose risk of massive environmental degradation in the area.

A number of residents from the affected villages, including Murali, Balligaon, Dugao, Paitura, Bangaligaon, Alisargaon and Jamura, said they had been too afraid to speak up against the pollution and sufferings caused by the kiln because Latifur Rahman Chowdhury, the owner of Kazi Khandakar Bricks, is a highly influential person in the area.

Only recently, they submitted written complaints with the deputy commissioner (DC) of Moulvibazar, the upazila nirbahi officer of Rajnagar and other government departments concerned, they also said.

Confirming receipt of the complaint, Badrul Huda, assistant director of DoE in Moulvibazar, said the department will soon take action against Kazi Khandakar Bricks as it has been running without any

approval from the DoE.

The use of barrel chimneys is causing serious harm to the environment and arable land as well as to human health in the densely populated area, he also said.

When asked why the DoE waited so long to take action, he said he was transferred to the area recently and prior to the complaints filed by villagers, the DoE did not receive any information regarding the brick field operating in Murali village.

Contacted, Moulvibazar DC Nazia Shirin assured of action against anyone who violates the law.

The owner of Kazi Khandakar Bricks, Latifur Rahman Chowdhury, however, claimed that he has all necessary approvals for operating the brick field and that was the reason why he could run the kiln for the last 27 years in the village.

A quarter with vested interests has been spreading rumours to destroy his business, he further claimed.



Female students of different schools and colleges pose with bicycles on the ground of Government Jasmuddin Kazi Abdul Goni College in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila on Saturday as Sonali Bank Managing Director (MD) Aatur Rahman Prodhon handed over the items to around a hundred girls as part of the state-owned financial organisation's corporate social responsibility. The bikes will help the girls, mostly from underprivileged families, to attend their classes regularly, hoped the MD.

PHOTO: STAR

Biting cold, untimely rain affect mustard yield in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Mustard growers in the district have expressed fear of loss of the crop due to cold wave and rainy weather.

The cold wave and dense fog for the last couple of weeks and rain for four days since Thursday have caused damage to the crop in different areas of the district.

This may decrease the yield if such weather condition prevails in the next few days, local agriculture officials said.

On the other hand, honey bees cannot come to the mustard fields due to the cold wave and dense fog, hampering pollination.

According to Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Tangail, mustard was cultivated on 41000 hectares of land in the district this year.

Mustard is the second cash crop for the farmers in the region. Many growers cultivate Boro paddy after selling the Robi crop.

During a recent visit to the fields at

different villages in Mirzapur upazila, this correspondent found that most flowers were dropped from the mustard plants.

The villages include Gorail, Chakleshwar, Burihati, Ghugi, Bhaora, Kutubpur, Postkamuri, Baorkumarjani and Baimhati.

Farmer Alamgir Hossain of Postkamuri village said he has cultivated mustard on three bighas of land. But the biting cold and rainy weather damaged his crop field.

Farid Miah of Chakleshwar village said he has cultivated mustard on 2.5 acres of land this year but condition of his field is not good due to the bad weather.

The untimely rain has made the situation worst, he said.

Contacted, Abdur Razzak, deputy director of DAE in Tangail, said cold wave, fog and untimely rain can damage a portion of early variety of mustard, but the farmers who cultivated the crop late in the season will be benefited from the weather condition.