

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 Environment 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.

Murder attempt

FROM PAGE 1

Sarwar said a militant group might have carried out the attack. He filed a case with Uttara Paschim Police Station last night.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Sarwar said two bearded men, aged between 25 and 30, came to his daughter's flat on the second floor of a building at Sector-7 of Uttara around 10:00pm Sunday.

"They looked for me and enquired about my whereabouts." He said one of the attackers came to his flat on the third floor. "As I opened the door, he [stranger] started threatening me. When my wife tried to shout for help, he tried to strangle her." In the meantime, his son-in-law scuffled with the other attacker and drove him out of their flat. He suffered minor injuries in the process.

Then his son-in-law shouted calling the two "robbers" and his daughter called 999, the national emergency helpline.

As the youths were escaping, two of Sarwar's neighbours came out of their flats. They were hurt as they tried to catch the criminals.

The two attackers managed to escape.

Abul Kalam, officer-in-charge (investigation) of the police station, said they rushed to the flat on Sunday night after being informed about the incident.

Police found a schoolbag, left behind by the criminals, on the ground floor of the building. Seven machetes, a mobile phone set and an electric water heater were seized from the bag, the OC added.

"We found that security guard Md Nazmul had called the mobile phone [seized from the bag] 25 times."

Sarwar said the criminals did not try to snatch money or any valuables. "I think they were not robbers, but members of a militant outfit," he said, adding that some other members of the group might have been waiting on the ground floor during that period.

CEC says it's to ensure no irregularities take place

FROM PAGE 16

machine at all polling centres in the DNCC and DSCC polls, the CEC said there were allegations in the past that votes were rigged, and cast ballots were thrown into ponds, even burnt.

"For getting rid of such irregularities, we are using the EVM," he said, adding that a voter could not cast more than one vote in the EVM system.

The voting machine will not function before and after the polling time, the CEC said.

"We don't have any plan to backtrack on the decision of using the EVM in the elections. We have made all preparations. We are fully ready," he said.

Before the CEC talked to journalists at the commission, BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said they urged the commission to refrain from using the EVM in the city polls.

"EVM is a method for stealing votes silently. EVM's programming will be controlled, and election results will be manipulated," he said.

"We don't know anything about the programming, and there is no paper trail system for verification [after casting votes]. The use of EVM is dependent on presiding and assistant presiding officers. It cannot ensure people's voting right."

He said only four countries out of

200 are using the system. But there is no controversy over the Election Commission and the administration of the four countries.

The BNP leader said they informed the CEC in the meeting that police were arresting and harassing their candidates.

He alleged that a party-backed councillor candidate was arrested, while another was abducted and found in Munshiganj. The house of a party-backed female ward councillor candidate was also vandalised.

About the BNP's allegation, the CEC said there would be no unnecessary arrest till January 30. "Police will take action only in line with the warrant of court. Our officials will talk to the police regarding the issue," he added.

In the meeting, the BNP delegation handed party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's letter to the CEC with a set of demands, including stopping any police drive without approval of the EC during the election time.

Other demands include depositing all legal arms to the police, issuing instructions for not setting up election camps within 500 metre off a polling station, declaration of the area within the purview of the armed forces on the election day, forming a security cell at every polling centre under the armed forces members, and ensuring

entrance of journalists to polling centres.

BNP mayor candidate for DNCC Tabith Awal and its DSCC mayor candidate Ishraque Hossain, among others, joined the meeting.

Replying to a reporter's query about BNP mayor candidate Tabith's allegation that Awami League DNCC mayor candidate Atiqul Islam breached the electoral code of conduct, the CEC said, "The returning officer received the allegations and took actions... Election officials will conduct the polls following the rules and regulations."

SHOW-CAUSE NOTICE
Atiqul was served a show-cause notice yesterday over the allegation.

He, along with a lawmaker, inaugurated an election camp at Uttara in his electoral area on Sunday, which is a clear violation of the Election Code of Conduct Rules-2016, the notice said.

The RO also asked Atiqul to come up with a written answer within the next two working days to explain why legal action would not be taken against him for violating the electoral code of conduct.

No aspirant will be able to carry out electioneering before allocation of electoral symbol, and no lawmakers and ministers are eligible to take part in the electioneering in favour of anyone.

The last date for withdrawal of the is January 9.

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.