

Encroachments spoil Rabindra Kacharibari

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPUI, *Pabna*

Rabindra Kacharibari at Shahzadpur in Sirajganj is gradually losing its beauty as construction activities and encroachment close in on the archaeological site.

The expansion of the adjoining cloth market had now touched the backyard wall of the heritage site, said Md Mujibar Rahman, custodian of the structure, which once belonged to Rabindranath Tagore and currently houses a museum in honour of the poet.

Despite requests from the archaeology department, the Shahzadpur municipality authority was yet to take steps to free the site from the encroachment, he added.

Md Nazrul Islam, mayor of Shahzadpur municipality, said it was difficult to find a solution to the problem immediately.

The size of the market grows every day, he said, with new shops being set up near the backyard wall due to a lack of accommodation elsewhere.

A plan to construct permanent buildings to accommodate more shops has been submitted, the mayor explained, adding that the archaeological site could be freed from encroachment once the crisis is solved.

Meanwhile, the foundation of a five-storey building has illegally been laid near the front-side wall of the age-old

structure. No concrete structures can be built within 250 metres [buffer zone] of a heritage site that undermine the status of the structure, and cause an impediment to visibility of the site, according to the Antiquities Act, 1968, (amended in 1976).

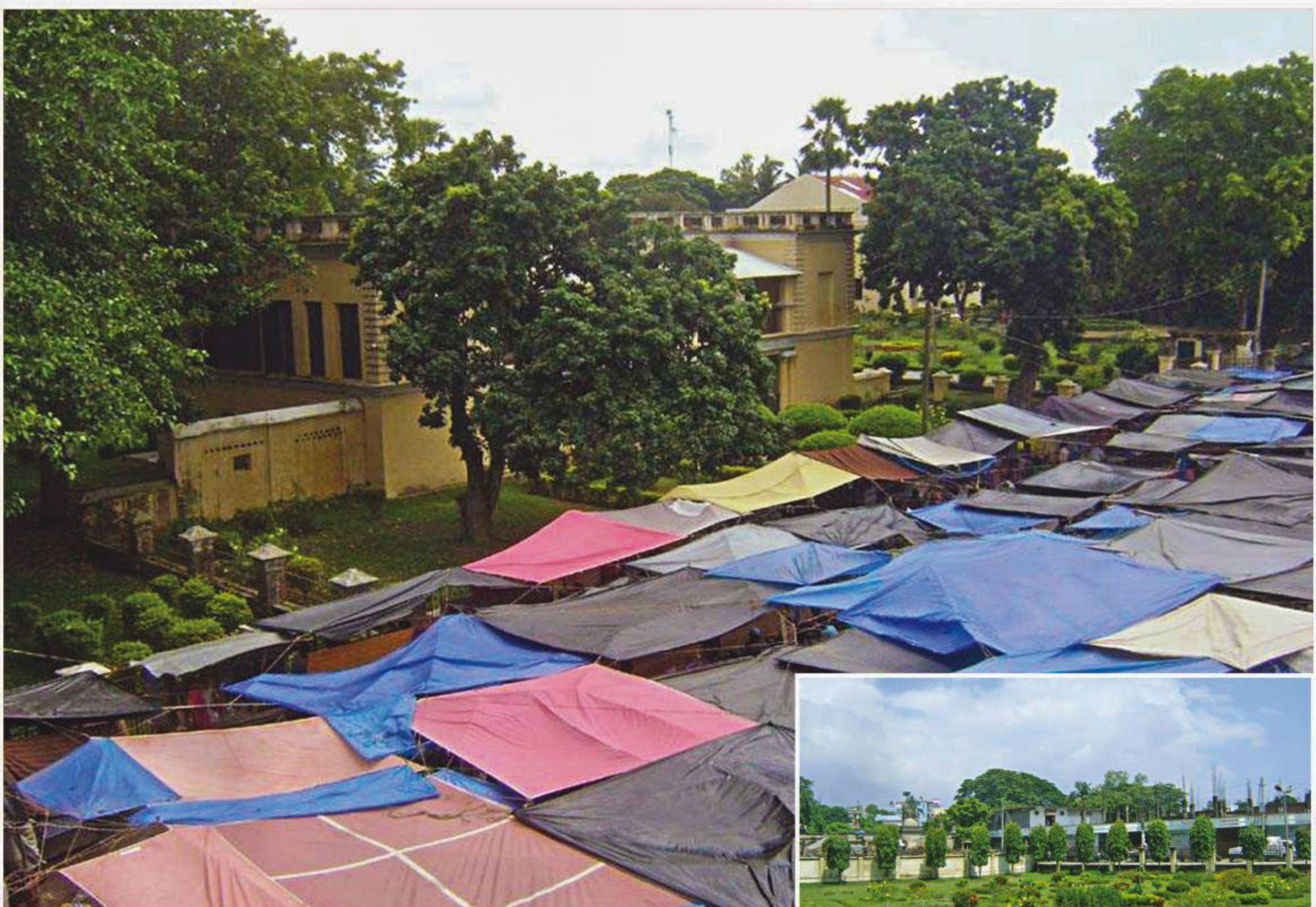
But influential quarters, including local businessmen, had started the construction work before the Kacharibari gate last year, Mujibar said, adding that the ground floor of the building had been completed by June.

Shirin Akhter, director general of archaeology department in Dhaka, issued a notice to the deputy commissioner of Sirajganj on 23 June to stop further proceedings of the construction work, said the custodian of the Kacharibari.

The construction of the first floor was stopped according to the order, said Shahzadpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Russel Subrin.

"The builders filed a case with the High Court against the administration, and sought permission to resume the construction work. But the court did not issue an order in this regard," the UNO added.

Md Nasim Uddin Malitha, a locally known researcher of Rabindra literature, told the Daily Star that the heritage site was losing its value to the illegal settlements.



A cloth market close to the backyard wall of Rabindra Kacharibari in Sirajganj. Inset, an under-construction market in front of the heritage site. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

WAR CRIMES TRIAL

Second witness defends Alim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A defence witness yesterday testified that he had seen Abdul Alim at a home in his village where Alim had taken shelter for security reasons during the Liberation War.

Mozaffar Hossain, the second defence witness in the war crimes case against Alim, also said the Pakistan army and local Biharis had killed many people in their neighbouring village in Joypurhat.

During his 36-minute testimony before International Crimes Tribunal-2, Mozaffar, of Hanail Bambu village in Joypurhat, said he was a student of class IX in 1971.

One day in the last part of April 1971, the Pakistani army and Biharis had come to their village, the witness said, adding that he was compelled to hide

himself inside the village mosque.

From the mosque, he witnessed the Pakistani soldiers and Biharis going to his neighbouring village.

Around 3:30pm on that day, he heard gunshot sounds coming from his neighbouring Karai Kadipur village.

Two or three days later, he heard from the people of Kadipur village that the Pakistani army and Biharis had killed a number of villagers and burnt down their houses.

On June 13, Bhagirath Chandra Barman, the 24th prosecution witness, testified that Alim, a former BNP lawmaker, "ordered" the killing of 350-370 Hindus in Kadipur during the Liberation War.

Mozaffar, however, didn't mention Alim's name while giving description about the mass killing.

He also said he went to the house of Musa Moulana in their village either in the last part of July or in the first part of August 1971 and saw Alim there.

After his testimony, Prosecutor Rana Dasgupta completed his cross-examination and claimed that Mozaffar had given "false testimony" to save Alim from the war crimes charges.

Mozaffar rejected the prosecutor's claim saying, "It is not true."

Meanwhile, the two-member tribunal of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam allowed Alim's son Sazzad Alim to testify as the third defence witness in the case.

The court adjourned the case proceedings until today.

NIZAMI'S CASE
Defence counsel in the war

crimes case against Motiur Rahman Nizami yesterday completed cross-examining Johurul Haque, the 18th prosecution witness in the case.

Defence counsel Mizanul Islam asked the witness whether he had met the investigation officer before May 17, 2013. He replied in the negative.

Johurul in his deposition before Tribunal-1 yesterday said he had given his statement before the investigation officer on May 17.

The defence asked Johurul whether a document of a list of Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams that bore his signature was served to the investigation agency on December 27, 2010. He replied in the affirmative.

Johurul also said he did not prepare the document and handed it over to the

agency without any scrutiny.

In reply to another question, the witness said he never went abroad in 1971.

He had been aware of the activities of anti-liberation forces even before he was informed about a meeting that Nizami had with the locals at Rupshi Govt Primary School on formation of a peace committee in Pabna, Johurul said.

In his deposition on August 29, he said around 400 people of Rupshi Bousgari in Pabna were killed by the Pakistani occupation army following the direction of Nizami in 1971.

Johurul said he had heard about it from locals after the massacre on May 14, 1971.

The proceedings of the case were adjourned until noon today.

Threat to blow

FROM PAGE 16

his family members. It then went on to say that all his family members would have the same fate.

The typed letter had names of seven people who supposedly sent it, said Additional Deputy Commissioner Rezaul Masud. The names are: Dolan, Munni Das, Jasimuddin, Kamal Ahmed of Patherhat, Pradip Das of Patiya, Manna Hasan Mia of Raazan and Mohiuddin Ahmed of Fatikchhari.

The letter, received yesterday (September 1), said the court building, Chittagong Port, Chittagong Railway building, Customs House, P D B, and the Commissioner's building would be blown up if Salauddin was not released by "August".

Additional Deputy Commissioner Rezaul said, "We are investigating the matter." Additional security measures were put in place at the court building and its adjacent areas, he added.

Watch your back

FROM PAGE 16

the flesh-eating fish.

The gangs sell the stolen hair to salons which fashion it into braids in this oil-rich and beauty-obsessed country.

Some disconsolate women have given up and had their long hair cut off pre-emptively to donate it to children who lose theirs to cancer.

Vanessa Castillo cried as her pretty, long jet black hair was snipped for charity. "It is better to give it to kids with cancer than have the piranas steal it," she said, sniffing.

She spoke at a donate-your-hair-to-kids day at a beauty salon.

The alarms went off last month in Maracaibo, Venezuela's second largest city, with the first complaints of hair-stealing commandos made up of men and women.

Braids sold to salons for use as hair extensions can

go for as much as \$1,000, depending on how long, thick and healthy the hair is.

"It is one thing to give it away because you want to and another that people beat you to take it away," said hairdresser Milagros Genao, as she cut off Castillo's locks.

Venezuelans are so upset that the government has got involved, but only after media reports of harrowing stories of women in Maracaibo being beaten and robbed of their flowing manes.

President Nicolas Maduro declared war on the pirana gangs and ordered an investigation into "mafias that cut off young women's hair."

Hairdresser Contreras said recently a woman showed up at his salon with an injury on her back.

"They tried to cut it off, and she preferred to come and have it cut off herself," he said.

PM violating polls

FROM PAGE 1

to BNP founder Ziaur Rahman at his grave in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar on the party's 35th founding anniversary.

Drawn attention to the allegation, Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz said the EC does not have the jurisdiction to watch for violation of the electoral code of conduct before the announcement of the polls schedule.

"We will keep an eye out for it after the announcement of the schedule for the national elections," he told reporters in his office at the EC Secretariat hours after the BNP leader made the allegation.

The prime minister has recently held rallies in different districts across the country, asking people to vote for the ruling alliance to "help

maintain the pace of development in the country".

Fakhrul claimed that the government had been hatching a new plot to prolong its stay in power by amending the constitution.

Replying to a query about the EC's initiatives to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing political impasse over the holding of the polls, Nawaz said, "The EC can engage in dialogues to mediate between the political parties..."

"We hope all the parties will reach a consensus and will participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections. If necessary, we can fix the election date through negotiations with them."

Asked if the EC would hold the elections in case the main opposition refuses to participate, he said, "We have not taken that decision yet."

18,970 Yaba tablets seized in Teknaf

A CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

A Border Guard Bangladesh team seized 18,970 Yaba tablets worth Tk 57 lakh from Nazirpara embankment area in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The team, acting on a tip-off, led a drive around 8:00am at the notorious Yaba entry point in the country and seized the abandoned contraband drugs.

BGB-42 Battalion Deputy Commander Major Shafiqur Rahman said the smugglers fled the scene as they saw them coming.

In another incident in the district town, detective police detained a woman in possession of four kilograms of hemp from the Kolatali hotel area in the morning.

Syria hails US retreat

FROM PAGE 1

congressional consent before taking military action against Damascus for the August 21 attack which he blames on Assad's forces - a decision likely to delay any strike for at least nine days.

Assad, whose regime has faced an uprising since March 2011 that a watchdog said had claimed 110,000 lives, came out fighting yesterday.

"Syria... is capable of facing up to any external aggression just as it faces up to internal aggression every day, in the form of terrorist groups and those that support them," he said, as cited by state news agency SANA.

Syria continues to "record victory after victory", he added.

And Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Muqdad urged US lawmak-

ers to show "wisdom" in their vote, while labelling Obama "hesitant, disappointed and confused".

Syria's opposition for its part expressed disappointment that Obama had put on hold his plans for military action, but said it was confident US lawmakers would green-light a strike.

"We were expecting things to be quicker, that a strike would be imminent... But we believe Congress will approve a strike," said Samir Nashar, a top official of the Syrian National Coalition.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said he has evidence that the Syrian regime used sarin gas in an attack on its people.

"Blood and hair samples that have come to us through an appropriate chain of custody from east Damascus from first

responders -- it has tested positive for signatures of sarin," Kerry told CNN.

The evidence -- which was gathered independently of the United Nations -- strengthens President Barack Obama's call for military action, he said.

Obama made his surprise announcement in a gamble that will test his ability to project American strength abroad and deploy his own power at home.

Republican and Democratic leaders were expected to back the president's call for military action, but support among lawmakers, who have become increasingly restive in recent months, is by no means guaranteed.

With a vote not scheduled to take place until the week beginning 9 September, when members

return from recess, Obama faces days of intense political debate over the evidence of a chemical weapons attack perpetrated by the Syrian government and the rationale for military strikes with limited international support.

In a sign of the looming battle, the Republican senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, both hawks who have urged strikes on Syria, said they would use the vote to push for a more significant intervention than that proposed by Obama, who said that it should be "limited in duration and scope".

Most observers are predicting that a vote would see rebels on both Republican and Democratic sides.

Before Obama put on the brakes, the path had been cleared for a US assault. Navy ships were in place and

awaiting orders to launch missiles, and UN inspectors had left Syria after gathering evidence of a chemical weapons attack that US officials say killed 1,429 people in rebel-held areas.

The team has been trying to confirm whether a chemical attack took place. But it could take up to three weeks for the investigators to analyze the evidence. Even then the team will only say whether chemical weapons were used -- not who was responsible.

Some analysts say that if Assad goes unpunished, Iran will feel entirely free to press on with its nuclear programme. Tehran says this is peaceful but the West believes it wants to develop nuclear weapons. Any US failure to act might encourage Israel to take matters into its own hands, say analysts.

Police won't be free

FROM PAGE 1

police member concerned.

The Awami League-led government has prepared the draft, brushing aside the much-talked about draft police ordinance, 2007, that sought to curtail the government's absolute authority over the force and free it from political control.

The 2007 ordinance, prepared during the last caretaker government, had a provision under which a National Police Commission would shortlist three senior most police officers and the government would appoint one of them as the police chief.

The ordinance added: "The government shall post police officers of or above the rank of additional Inspector General of Police recommended by the National Police Commission."

The 11-member National Police Commission was to consist of, among others, two lawmakers from the opposition party and four non-political persons.

The new draft also dropped the provision for forming a Police Complaints Commission that would take punitive action against the guilty police member being free from the influence of the

force.

The five-member commission consisting of, among others, a retired judge of the Supreme Court, was supposed to receive complaints and initiate action on its own or request the chief justice to appoint a District and Session's Judge for a judicial inquiry.

Asked to comment on dropping this provision, eminent lawyer Shahdeen Malik said all civilised nations had separate and independent mechanisms to deal with complaints against the police.

Under the new draft, the police authority will have powers to appoint any common citizen as a

special member of police for not more than two years. It will be a punishable offence if one refuses to join.

It also has a provision for creating a Public Security Fund to be used for developing the quality of the force.

The fund will come from donations and fine money imposed by traffic police, among other things.

The police chief will also have magistracy powers while police members will be able to do part time jobs at private firms with permission from the authorities.

Plastic surgery is her hope

FROM PAGE 1

"Plastic surgeries will not get my looks back, but still I am not going to lose heart," Mukta has sounded confident although her body suffers 10 to 12 percent burn, mostly on the face.

"I will continue my studies and build a career," added the teenager, who wants to become an engineer and was preparing for admission in a university.

Mukta's cousin Mohammad Mohasin, 22, known as a local thug in Shaldai village of Kapasia, Gazipur, began stalking and disturbing her almost five years ago, when she was in class-VIII.

"He used to threaten me with consequences that I

would regret for the rest of my life if I did not marry him," said Mukta, "But I have never thought, even in my dreams, that he would stoop so low."

However, Mukta's parents decided to send her to a hostel for higher secondary education as Mohasin's disturbance increased.

Mukta's elder brother Shahidul Islam, a student of Mymensingh Medical College, said, "We never complained to police against Mohasin, as he was a member of our extended family. Instead, we secretly sent Mukta to a college in Gazipur town, where she stayed at a hostel and studied."

After the Higher

Secondary Certificate examination, Mukta returned home. But this time Mohasin kept an eye on her.

On the night of August 26, local people saw him smoking cigarettes under a tree outside the window of Mukta's mother's room.

Mukta's mother Begum Salma alleged that Mohasin threw acid at her daughter early on the day, at the time of the Fazr prayers. Mukta was then sleeping along with her mother on a bed placed just by the window.

Arrested the next day, Mohasin admitted to committing the crime to police.

Delwar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kapasia Police Station, said during the attack Mohasin had spilled

some acid on his left leg.

"We took him on remand for five days to find out from where he had got the acid," he added.

Plastic surgeon Samanta Lal Sen of DMCH Burn Unit said Mukta's condition would improve after about three plastic surgeries. It will take about a month.

"Since 1986, when the Burn Unit was opened, we have received about 100 acid victims. Among them, some 40 victims almost got their previous look back," said Samanta Lal.

Mukta clings on this hope. She has not surrendered to the demands of a thug neither would she let the acid injuries stand in her way to a bright future.