

# Thousands in three villages suffer for want of a bridge

*Collapsed during 2012 flooding, yet to be rebuilt*

ABM AMINUL ISLAM, Jamalpur

Thousands of people of three villages in Melandah upazila are suffering much as the bridge over Datbhanga river that collapsed during floods in 2012 is yet to be rebuilt.

Commuters from Amirti, Charalkandi and Charsaguna under Ghosherpara union are facing severe problems in reaching destinations through Amirti-Khayerpara-Beltoli Bazar road. They now use a 1.5km-long alternative way which is lengthy and more troublesome as villagers have to cross crop fields or walk by river bank.

Patients, school, college

students, kids and farmers who need to carry their agro-products to local markets for sale, are the worst sufferers because of the disrupted communication, locals said.

As Beltoli Government Primary School, Beltoli High School and a qawmi madrasa are located near the bazar, several hundred students of the villages often cannot attend classes on time due to the bad communication since the collapse of the bridge, said Gulzar Hossain and Mizanur Rahman, head teachers of the primary school and the high school respectively.

Villagers face an uphill task when they are in need of taking their patients,

particularly pregnant women and old-aged relatives, to the upazila health complex and to Jamalpur General Hospital for emergency treatment as no rickshaws or rickshaw-vans can ply through the alternative path, said local elite Abdullah master of Amirti village.

During a recent visit to the spot, farmers Motahar Hossain, 50, Toiyoz Uddin, 60 and Abdur Rouf, 40 of Amirti village told this correspondent that the growers of the three villages face untold sufferings while taking their products to Beltoli Bazar and Hazrabari Bazar for sale during weekly market days.

The bridge at Amirti must

be rebuilt soon as over 20 thousand people of the villages cannot bear the problem any more, said the sufferers.

Moreover, services provided by Ghosherpara union to the beneficiaries of the villages are being hampered for the situation, said the UP chairman Obaidur Rahman.

Contacted, Md. Mubarak Hossain, LGED engineer of the upazila, said the tenure of the scheme that was taken up by the government for constructing a bridge had already expired.

"We can now send a fresh proposal to the higher authorities concerned to build a bridge by extending time of the scheme, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Thousands of three villages in Melandah upazila of Jamalpur district suffer much as the bridge over Datbhanga River at Amirti village that collapsed during the flooding in August 2012, is yet to be rebuilt. Inset, the villagers now traverse croplands or river bank to reach their destinations.



## Little effort to better turnout

FROM PAGE 1

At the polling centre at Uttara Girls School and College in Dhaka-18 constituency, voting started at 8:20am. Out of 2,996 voters, only 373 cast their votes, which is 12.45 percent.

No polling agent of Awami League nominee Shahara Khatun's opponent was seen in any of the seven polling booths of the centre and during the final hour of voting, a number of Awami League supporters managed to cast votes more than once. There were under-aged youths casting false votes as well.

At Matuail Adarsha Uchcha Biddalaya polling centre of Dhaka-5 constituency, 711 votes, out of a total of 4,298, were cast between 8:00am and 2:00pm.

The number jumped to 1,807 after 4:00pm thanks to rigging by polling agents of Awami League candidate Habibur Rahman Mollah.

At Natun Jurain KM Mainuddin Unchchya Bidlya polling centre of Dhaka-4 constituency, none turned up to cast votes in the first half hour of voting.

There were hardly any voters until 11:00am, when a small trickle of voters was seen.

However, many could not vote as they were not on the voter list of that centre. Out of the 1,077 voters who went in, around 300 returned without casting their votes.

Of the 8,154 voters of the centre, only 798 cast their votes, a miserable 9.78 percent.

Only 9.28 percent votes were cast at Sher-e-Bangla Govt Primary School of Dhaka-15 constituency. Most first-time voters went back without casting their votes as they were not on the voter list.

They complained that the candidates did not notify them of their serial numbers on the voter list, unlike what they had done ahead of previous elections.

Out of 6,422 votes, 596 votes were cast.

At the Gandaria High School women's polling centre, only 14 percent votes were cast. Anwarur Rashid, presiding officer of the centre, said 546

voters, out of 2,930, turned up to vote.

At Shahjhadpur Najar Mahmud Alim Madrasa centre of Dhaka-17 constituency, some local Awami League leaders and activists were seen working for the newly formed BNP party's candidate, allegedly after being instructed to do so by the Awami League high command on Saturday night.

The ruling Awami League did not nominate any candidate in the constituency as it had left it for Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad, who later withdrew.

Local Awami League leaders and activists expressed their frustration before The Daily Star reporters at the seat being left without a candidate and the fact that they were now working for a person largely unknown to people.

Only 477 voters (8.27 percent) exercised their right, out of 5,767 voters at the centre.

However, the atmosphere at Shahid Community Centre polling at Lalbagh of Dhaka-7 constituency was livelier.

Although there were no queues, voters continued to come and cast their votes. Out of 3,855 votes, 1,177 votes were cast, over 30 percent.

The reason behind the better turnout was two ruling Awami League leaders were battling each other. Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin contested as an Awami League nominee while former Awami League lawmaker of the constituency Haji Selim was an independent candidate.

The Bangla daily Prothom Alo also stationed its reporters at 19 polling centres in the capital. It reported that out of the 47,729 voters there, only 12,196 cast their votes. It also reported that there were irregularities and incidents of vote rigging in four polling centres.

The Daily Star had sent two reporters to Dhaka-1 constituency just outside the capital.

From Katakhal Primary School polling centre in Dohar, they reported that for over two hours in the morning some polling agents of Awami League

candidate Abdul Mannan Khan forced voters to cast their ballots in front of them to make sure the votes were cast for Mannan.

The reporters witnessed poor turnout in several other centres in Dohar-Nawabganj as well.

The low turnout was outside the capital too as voters preferred to stay home fearing violence. The Daily Star had 50 correspondents covering around 300 election centres across the country.

Polling officials at many polling centres were sitting idle with almost no voters showing up. At least 41 polling centres recorded zero voters, according to reports from our district correspondents.

Voting in most of the polling centres in Feni-3 was very low.

Only two people cast their votes in Char Chandia Hossainia Government Primary School centre. The centre located in Sonagazi upazila has 2,432 constituents. In the same upazila, only one cast his vote in Sawdagar Hat Mahmudia Madrasa centre, which had 2,379 voters.

In Gunak Government Primary School Centre in Bagdha Union of the upazila, only 11 out of 1,726 voters turned up, said presiding officer Abu Tayeb.

In Shialdanga Govt Primary School centre in Sathkira Sadar, only one person cast his ballot. Only 162 out of 2,874 voters cast their vote in Raichpur Govt Primary School centre.

In Kushtia-3, only 623 out of 2,356 voters turned up at Shimulia Primary School centre until 3:40pm. Other centres in the constituency projected a similar picture.

At Paikarihati Shahidnagar centre in Santhia upazila of Pabna-1, only 239 out of 1,957 voters were cast, said Shakhawat Hossain, presiding officer of the centre.

In Boroil Government Primary School centre of Dinajpur-3 constituency, a total of 855 voters out of 2,289 cast their votes. In KBM College centre, only 455 voters cast their ballots, out of 2,336 votes, said their presiding officers.

Narayanganj-1, Amirul Islam Amir of Noakhali-6, Ataur Rahman of Sirajganj-5, Badiuzzaman Badsha of Sherpur-2.

Meanwhile, Abu Sayeed, a rival AL candidate, brought allegations of vote rigging against former state minister for home Shamsul Haque Tuku at several polling centres in Pabna-1 constituency.

He demanded cancellation of the voting results of 52 centres and re-election there.

Ruling AL men allegedly cast false votes at some polling centres in Kotwali area under Chittagong-9 and 11 constituencies.

Motaleb Khan, younger brother of AL candidate Abdul Mannan Khan of Dohar-Nawabganj constituency under Dhaka district, allegedly forced voters to cast their ballots in favour of his brother, locals said.



PHOTO: STAR

Jubo Dal of Faridganj upazila in Chandpur district yesterday noon sarcastically arranged a 'shraddha' (post-funeral function) joined by its activists and supporters, at Border Bazar, announcing 'demise' of the 10th parliamentary election.

## PATUAKHALI GENERAL HOSPITAL

# Neonatal deaths increasing

*Doctors identify child marriage, premature birth and malnutrition as main reasons*

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Neonatal death cases have increased in the district.

Of the 140 neonatal deaths at Patuakhali General Hospital in 11 months from January last year, 45 occurred in three months of September, October and November, said hospital sources.

Doctors have identified child marriage, pre-mature birth, and malnutrition as main reasons of neonatal death.

Meanwhile, the 250-bed hospital struggles to provide medical service to treatment seekers as only 16 doctors are serving there against 58 posts, said Tarun Kanti Halder, superintendent of the hospital.

Umme Ayesha, 15,

wife of Mojibur Rahman of Nogorerhat in Baufal upazila, gave birth to her first issue, a female baby, at Patuakhali General Hospital on November 26 but the pre-mature child, born only after seven months of conception, died an hour later.

Jesmin Begum, 16, wife of Mahbub of Dakkhin Charkhali village under Galachipa upazila, gave birth to a premature boy who died after 12 hours at the same hospital on November 24, according to record of the hospital.

Shirina Begum, 17, wife of Dulal Mia of Golbunia village under Amtali upazila in Barguna district, gave

birth to a premature baby after seven months of conception and the newborn is fighting in the children's ward of Patuakhali General Hospital.

"I was married off at the age of 13 when I was studying in Class VI. During pregnancy, I could not afford to visit any doctor as my husband runs our five-member family with his small income as a day labourer," said Shirina.

The premature child weighs only half kg and is kept in an incubator as it is suffering from respiratory problem, said Dr Mostafizur Rahman, junior consultant of the children's ward at the hospital.

The 42 vacant posts at

Patuakhali General Hospital include that of senior consultant (child), senior consultant (cardiology), senior consultant (orthopaedic), junior consultant (cardiology), junior consultant (eye), junior consultant (cardiology), junior consultant (anaesthetist), junior consultant (radiology), resident physician, resident surgeon, resident medical officer, and all three anaesthetists.

"Amid acute shortage of doctors, we are facing serious problem to run the hospital as about 1000 patients visit outdoors and over 800 patients come to the emergency department on an average daily," said the hospital superinten-

## Terror on Hindus

FROM PAGE 1

Villagers and police said wielding sharp weapons and sticks some 250 Jamaat-Shibir and BNP men led by Ariful Aksu and Kashem Ali had attacked the village around 6:00pm. During the 30-minute havoc, the attackers also looted valuables from the Hindu houses.

Officer-in-Charge Emdad Hossain of Abhaynagar Police Station said the attack was made after 70 to 80 men had beat up two Hindu men, Biswanath and Shyamol, for casting vote.

To save the two and disperse the attackers, members of the joint force fired six blank shots. While leaving the scene Jamaat-Shibir men threatened the Hindus of dire consequence for casting votes defying their directives.

About an hour after the attack had been launched on Malopara, a contingent of the joint force led by Maj Anisur Rahman of Border Guard Bangladesh reached the scene.

"We were on election duty. In spite of that we rushed here to protect the villagers," Maj Rahman told The Daily Star last night.

According to Maj Anis of the joint force, several houses were ransacked and only one house was torched in the attack.

"Most of the villagers returned home," he said, adding that a temporary police camp had been set up in Malopara on villagers' request.

The villagers last night filed a case naming 100 Jamaat-Shibir and BNP men in connection with the attack.

The joint force has launched drives in the area to arrest the culprits.

Meanwhile, a handful of Hindus cast their votes in Lalmonirhat and Sathkira yesterday as the majority of the community there either feared attacks by Jamaat-Shibir or were unhappy with the ruling party for not protecting them.

The two constituencies of Lalmonirhat, where the voting took place, spread over the sadar, Hatibandha and Patgram upazilas. Minorities in these areas have recently come under attack by activists of Jamaat-e-Islami, a major component of the BNP-led opposition, and its student body Islami Chhatra Shibir.

At Ghoshpara village in Patgram, only 10-12 out of 280 voters exercised their franchise in the 10th national polls.

"The remaining voters did not turn up as they were under threat from Jamaat-Shibir men of the village," said Rajani Kanto Ghosh, a voter aged 48.

He added he had stayed at home all day

in fear of attacks.

Besides, Rajani said, he had no interest in the election because the ruling Awami League had not extended its support to the Hindus even after the November 28 and December 15 attacks.

Alleged Jamaat-Shibir activists beat up women and children and looted and torched shops and houses in Ghoshpara village on November 28 during an opposition-enforced countrywide blockade. At least 55 Hindu families fled the area on December 15 following threats and attacks.

Sindurmoti village in Lalmonirhat has 4,000 voters, 90 percent of whom are Hindus. But not a single vote was cast at Sindurmoti Government Primary School polling centre, reported our correspondent.

At Bawra village of Patgram upazila, some 25 Hindus cast their votes whereas the total number of minority voters is 300.

Local community leader Niharanjan Das, 56, told The Daily Star that they had not gone out to vote fearing attacks by opposition men, especially those of Jamaat-Shibir.

Gopal Chandra Barman, general secretary of Lalmonirhat Puja Uddjapan Parishad, claimed that only 4 to 5 percent of the Hindu voters had exercised their franchise.

Similar cases were reported from Sathkira.

Not a single voter was seen at 4:00pm at Godaghata Government Primary School in Sathkira's Shibpur union, reported our correspondent.

The presiding officer of the polling station said opposition men had blasted cock-tails there at dawn. The centre had been partially burnt the day before.

A farmer passing by, Aftab Hossain said, "They [Jamaat-Shibir] threatened us with dire consequences if we vote. Why get into all the hassle?"

Presiding officer Azizur Rahman of Agordari Kamil Madrasa in Godaghata said not a single vote had been cast though he had a list of 1,876 voters.

"How will voters of these areas cast their votes? The Hindus fled because they had been targeted by Jamaat-Shibir men. And those who belong to Jamaat-Shibir are on the run from the joint forces," said Lavlu Rahman of the area.

Meanwhile, two houses of Hindu families in Bagha upazila of Rajshahi were burnt down Saturday night.

An attack on a larger scale was made in Dinajpur on the minority community around 6:00pm yesterday, in which 30 shops, 65 houses, and paddies were torched.

## 31 candidates withdraw from race

FROM PAGE 16

forced out of the polling centres after their advance signatures were taken on the result sheets.

Abul Kalam Azad, officer-in-charge of Shibbalaya Police Station, had assisted in casting fake votes in favour of AL candidate Naimur Rahman Durjoy, Afzal alleged.

Sadekul also alleged vote rigging by former state minister for primary and mass education Motahar Hossain and his party men.

Robindranath Soren, a Workers Party candidate for Dinajpur-6 constituency; Anwarul Kabir Chowdhury, central publicity secretary of JP (Ershad) from Feni-3; Nasir Uddin from Jhalakathi-1; MM Anwar Hossain from Gazipur-4; Farid Uddin and Kazi Mamun-ur-Rashid from

Bramhanbaria-3 and 5, Sirajul Islam from Chittagong-12, Taha-Yahiya from Cox's Bazar-4, Khorshed Alam from Sherpur-3, Golam Kibria Tipu from Barisal-3; Shankar Paul and Atiqur Rahman from Habiganj-2 and 3, Jatiya Party (Manju)-backed candidate advocate Babor Ali from Jamalpur-5 and Rashida Karim from Khulna-2, boycotted the polls, bringing similar allegations against their rivals.

The independent candidates who boycotted the polls, are: Ekhlash Uddin Mollah of Dhaka-15, Sabina Akhter of Barisal -2, Abul Hossain Sikder of Barguna -2, Shaheed Uddin and Azad Uddin Chowdhury from two constituencies in Laxmipur, Aziz Ahmed Hassan and Atikur Rahman Luis of Jamalpur-1 and 2, Nayeb Ali Joarder of Jhenaidah-1, Dr Shawkat Ali of

Narayanganj-1, Amirul Islam Amir of Noakhali-6, Ataur Rahman of Sirajganj-5, Badiuzzaman Badsha of Sherpur-2.

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