



PHOTO: STAR

An elderly person walks cautiously with the help of two companions to cross this bamboo bridge at Gopalpur village in Madarganj upazila under Jamalpur district while locals' long time demand for a concrete bridge there remains unmet.

# Thousands suffer for want of permanent bridge

ABM AMINUL ISLAM, Jamalpur

About 20 thousand people of three villages of two unions in Madarganj upazila under Jamalpur district are suffering for want of a concrete bridge over a canal at Gopalpur village in the upazila.

The affected people belong to Mahishbathan and Dhulirbanda villages under Karoichura union and Gopalpur under Gunaritola union.

The people of Gopalpur village built a bamboo bridge on self-help basis in

2007.

But under the pressure of thousands of people, the bridge turned too risky within a few months and the villagers rebuilt it before the rainy season next year.

The locals do the same with their own labour and money every year but authorities are yet to take steps to solve the problem permanently.

Septuagenarian Mujibur Rahman of Gopalpur village died after falling from the bridge in November 2013 as a portion of it collapsed suddenly, said the victim's

relative Shafiqul Islam.

During a recent visit to the spot, this correspondent met one Solaiman of the village, who got badly injured after falling from the bridge with his motorbike on February 7.

Locals are facing trouble to go to the upazila headquarters, health complex, schools, markets, banks and different government and non-government offices located there, said affected people.

"Every year we need to rebuild the bamboo bridge and for the purpose we

collect around Tk 75,000 from the villagers before the rainy season. We want a concrete bridge over the canal for smooth communication," said Afzal Hossain, a local resident and former member of the union parishad.

Contacted, Jugal Krishna Mondal, LGED engineer of Madarganj upazila, said he sent a proposal for building a 60-metre-long concrete bridge over the canal to the higher authorities one and a half years ago, but they are yet to take any step in this regard.

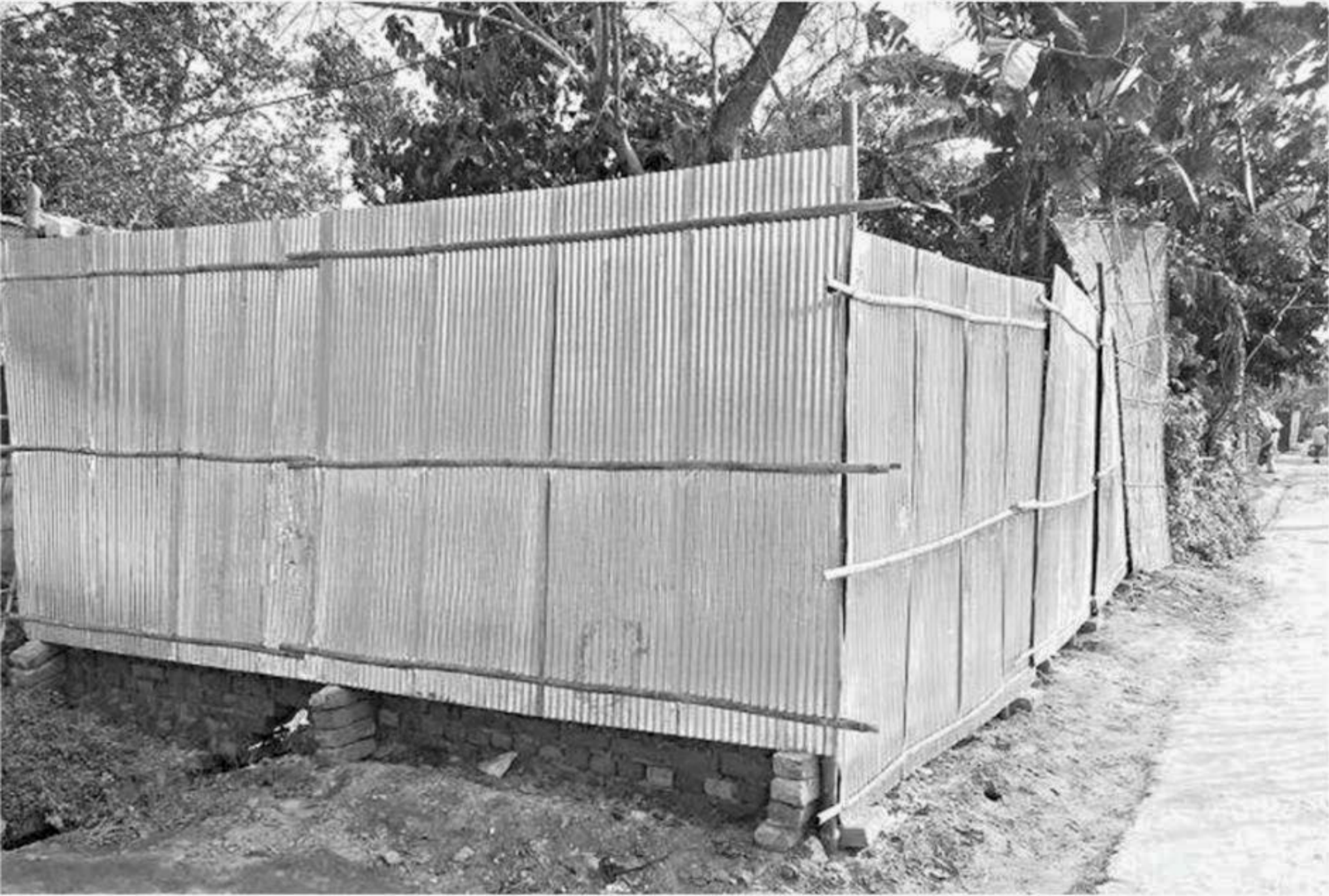


PHOTO: STAR

Illegal occupiers encircled this land belonging to Shahebpura railway colony in Saidpur municipality with corrugated iron sheets after constructing a brick-built structure and blocking a drain passing through the place, hours after police evicted the perpetrators from there on Tuesday.

# Illegal structures rebuilt on rly land in Saidpur

Grabbers committed the act hours into demolition

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Government Railway Police (GRP) demolished an illegal structure on the land of Shahebpura railway colony under Saidpur municipality on Tuesday but illegal occupiers reconstructed the structure at night the same day.

The grabbers also obstructed the flow of wastewater from the colony through a drain running through the land, which is only 50 metres away from Saidpur Railway Workshop, and it poses health hazard in the area, said locals and railway employees living in the colony.

Ahmed Ali engaged some musclemen to grab 250 square feet railway land to make a business set up at Shahebpura rail colony and started construction of a brick built structure there on Sunday," said Touhidul Islam, senior sub-assistant engineer of Railway Works Department in Saidpur.

"As I rushed to the spot and tried to resist the illegal construction, a group of youths identifying themselves as activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League hurled abuses at me. After knowing my identity, they attacked me physically," he said.

Contacted, alleged grabber Ahmed Ali refuted the allegation of assaulting the

railway engineer by local youths and said, "Most of the railway land in the municipality had already been grabbed and the railway officers concerned turned a blind eye. Why should my work be obstructed?"

Following a complaint by Monwar Hossain, an employee of Railway Estate Department in Saidpur, police went to the spot and drove away the grabbers and demolished the illegal structure there on Tuesday noon but the grabbers constructed a brick built structure on the land within hours on Tuesday night, said locals.

"The grabbers obstructed flow of wastewater through the

drain inside the grabbed area, causing health hazard. They are also threatening locals of dire consequences if police or railway officials are informed of the matter," Shakila Banu, a housewife living in the railway quarters close to the spot, told the journalists.

Visiting the spot on Wednesday, it was found that the grabbers encircled the grabbed land including the newly constructed structure with corrugated iron sheet fencing.

Saju Mia, officer in charge of Saidpur GRP Police Station, said police will again demolish the illegal structure and take stern action against the grabbers.

# Snake charmer becomes village dentist

BY ANDREW EAGLE

Nurul Amin, 60, of Sagoria Bazar in Burir Char Union of Noakhali's Hatiya Island, spent his younger years pursuing the career of snake charming. From there, like most snake charmers he knows, he switched to dentistry.

"I felt guilty about cheating people," says Amin, who's been a dentist for 35 years. "It's why I became a dentist. That was a bad business but this is solid."

Village dentists like Amin have no qualification. They arrive at a patient's house with dental tools and experience removing cobras' fangs.

On Hatiya Island with over 400,000 people there is probably only one dentist of the usual sort. The village dentists, often former snake charmers, take care of the vast bulk of dental needs.

Amin's former career began while still at school. A snake charmer visited the area and it would seem he didn't only charm the snake. He also charmed Amin who decided to follow him.

Some days later when Amin returned home his parents hit him. "Why do you want to do that?" they scolded. "It's a cheating profession." It was a turning point. Angry with his parents, he returned to the charmer.

During training he handled snakes daily. By age 17 he had his own snake.

"First we'd milk the snake of its venom," he says, "then cut the fangs out. The fangs regrow three or four times;

after that they don't regrow." Amin force-fed his snakes with small fish once a fortnight. On average, they lived about five years.

One snake survived for seven years but Amin never held any particular attachment. "A snake doesn't recognise anyone," he says, "They're selfish."

During their hibernation months Amin kept his snakes in straw for warmth. But even during those months he would wake them for his canvassing shows, where he sold bottles of fake anti-snake potion and tabiz spell-bracelets to

ward off snakes. As a canvasser Amin made up to 5,000 taka per day – a lot of money back then.

"The trick of snake charming is that they can't see behind them. We grab them from behind."

It's not the only trick. Sometimes he used non-venomous snakes, especially the dharai snake which would make a big bite with lots of blood, impressive to onlookers. They also used Gaultheria medicine, putting the substance in the snake's tooth holes beforehand. When the snake bit, people

thought the drops of medicine were venom. Amin would lick it off his arm and swallow it.

Once, Amin was bitten. "I was told the snake had no teeth," he says, "so I opened its mouth and rubbed my finger inside. I saw blood." For snake bites, charmers believe putting the wound in fire can help. They use sa and opiates.

"If a snake bites an opium addict, sometimes the snake will die," believes Amin.

The day he was bitten was busy. It was the market before Eid and he sold many spell-bracelets. But by evening, in the tea shop, he began to feel dizzy. "I was only half-poisoned," he says. He was unconscious for four days.

Amin's younger brother wasn't so lucky. Amin was teaching him charming in Chittagong when a snake bit him. They hadn't realised the fangs had regrown. Amin's younger brother died at age 25.

But most snake charmers don't die of snake bite. "They drink too much," says Amin, "It's the alcohol that kills them."

As a village dentist Amin makes up to 5,000 taka per month – what he used to make in a day. Now and then the father of four still turns his hand to snake charming, but his sons did not inherit the skill.

"I wouldn't let them near the snakes," he says, "It's a cheating profession. If they'd ever done that, I would've thrown them out of the house."



PHOTO: STAR

Village dentist Nurul Amin with his tools sits at a patient's house in Burir Char union under Hatiya upazila of Noakhali.

## Man killed over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A man was killed and five others were injured as two groups of villagers clashed over the ownership of a piece of land at Dakirpara village in Palashbari upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Azizur Rahman, 45.

Majibar Rahman, officer in-charge of Palashbari Police Station, said there had been a long-standing dispute between Azizur and his neighbour Anwarul Islam over the ownership of the land.

Azizur and Anwarul locked in altercation when Anwarul's men went to the land to take its possession around 11:00am, the OC said.

At one stage, they beat up Azizur mercilessly, leaving him dead on the spot.

Five others, including Azizur's wife Bulbuli Begum, were also injured when they tried to resist the attackers. Locals rescued them and took them to Palashbari Upazila Health Complex.

Police recovered the body and sent it to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

## Three brick kilns fined for burning firewood

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A mobile court fined three brick kilns for burning firewood in Parbatipur upazila of the district on Wednesday.

The fined brick kilns are Teen Bhai Bricks at Khalilpur Sardarpara village, Sohagi Bricks at Dhulaura village and Arnab Bricks at Polashbari village in the upazila.

The court, led by the upazila nirbahi officer, realised Tk 50,000 from each of the brick fields.

The brick kilns were using firewood instead of coal, said the UNO.

## INADEQUATE RIVER MANAGEMENT

# Sluice gates in Khulna losing utility

UNB, Khulna

Most of the sluice gates in the district are heading towards virtual dysfunction due to deposition of huge silt in the rivers and canals, and natural disasters.

The situation, worsened by decline in the water flow in absence of excavation and proper management of the water bodies, poses threat of permanent water logging in the region.

Due to fund constraints, only a few of the rivers and canals are being dredged and maintenance work of

the sluice gates is badly hampered, said sources of Water Development Board in Khulna.

There are 350 sluice gates in different upazilas of Khulna district, including a few ones near the city protection embankments, they said.

But a good number of the sluice gates have already caved in.

Talking to this correspondent, several people of Batiaghata upazila in Khulna district stressed the need of immediate steps for excavating the silted up

rivers and canals in the district to restore their normal flow and keep the sluice gates functional.

Otherwise, the region may see permanent water-logging in the future, said one Makbul Hossain.

Pijush Krishna Kundu, executive engineer of Water Development Board-2, said huge money is needed to protect the sluice gates along with dredging of the rivers and canals but the government allocation for the purpose is only one tenth of the requirement.

# Abducted minor girl rescued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Police rescued a three-year-old girl of Gazaria upazila in the district from Madanpur area in Narayanganj district on Wednesday, a day after her abduction.

They also arrested Farida Begum, a relative of the victim, for her alleged involvement in the abduc-

tion. The abductee is Ruhana Akhter Rima, daughter of Md Rokan, a Saudi expatriate, of Baktarkandi village in Gazaria upazila.

On Tuesday afternoon, a gang abducted Rima from in front of their house and took her to Madanpur area in Narayanganj, said Md Ferdous Hossain, officer-in-charge of Gazaria Police

Station.

The abductors called the family over mobile and demanded Tk 6 lakh for her release. The family members of Rima then informed police about the matter.

After tracking mobile calls, a police team raided the area on Wednesday night and rescued the girl.

They also arrested Farida from the spot, said the OC.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

A brick kiln set up after levelling a hill in Sitakunda upazila under Chittagong district uses firewood collected from the surrounding forest area, defying environment and forest laws.