

People of enclaves to gain access to state services



PHOTO: STAR

Children of Indian enclave Bashkata, located in Bangladesh's Jongra Union of Patgram upazila are elated at the announcement of enclave transfer and access to state facilities.

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

"We face difficulty in almost every sphere of life in the enclave. Although situated in Bangladesh, ours is an Indian enclave. We don't have access to any kind of state facilities, and our children cannot go to school and there are no health facilities," said Noor Hossain, an elderly inhabitant of Latamarienclave in Sree Rampur union at Patgramupazila. "After 68 years of sorrow, we are finally going to be Bangladeshi nationals and we are very happy," he added. Like Noor Hossain, many other inhabitants of the enclave explained their miserable experience of confined living in the enclaves. An enclave is any portion of a country that is entirely surrounded by the territory of a different country. People in enclaves along the bordering areas of India and Bangladesh found them literally in the middle of nowhere in 1947, as the Indian subcontinent got divided into two countries, leaving them virtually 'stateless.' The people of enclaves blamed the Indian government's indifference for prolonged miseries of the people living in 111 Indian enclaves in four northern districts of Bangladesh. They said the 'invisible borderline' demarcated with some pillars installed during the 1947 partition had kept them away from all government facilities including health and education and forced them to lead an inhumane life. Neither the governments of India nor of Pakistan (prior to 1971) had recognized the residents of the landlocked areas as their

citizens and therefore they were deprived of all basic rights of a citizen, said a number of enclave dwellers, who had seen both the British and the Pakistani regimes before Bangladesh was liberated from Pakistan in 1971. The enclave dwellers said that none of them were eager to move to India. "The issue of the enclaves has long been hanging in the balance. The people living in the enclaves have been deprived of citizenship and other civic facilities for the last 68 years. We had a united world until it was divided into Hindustan and Pakistan. I can remember the pillars that divided us from Pakistan and from India," said Samad Miah, 90, an inhabitant of Indian enclave Bhotbari, situated in Bangladesh's Islampur village of Patgramupazila. He said that all those living in the enclave in a three km radius from Patgramupazila headquarters had suffered a lot due to poverty and none had come to help them. Shamsul Islam, an inhabitant of Indian enclave Bashkata is situated in Bangladesh's Jongra union of Patgramupazila said, "What the people of enclave want is nationality and access to state facilities. We were happy over the latest development in the process for exchanging 162 enclaves between Bangladesh and India under the land boundary agreement signed back in 1974," he said. The people will now have the right to stay where they are, as nationals of the state to which the areas are transferred. Mainul Islam, President of Indo-Bangla Enclave Exchange Coordination

Committee said that Indian Lok Sabha, lower house of parliament, unanimously passed a bill seeking amendment to the constitution to implement the historic Indira-Mujib pact to facilitate the exchange of the enclaves, transfer of adversely possessed areas and demarcation of 6.5km of unmarked border lands between the two neighbours. Bangladesh ratified the pact on November 27, 1974 after the two countries had signed it on May 16, 1974 for demarcation of the 4,156 km land boundaries, he said.

A total of 51 Bangladeshi enclaves, 18 of Kurigram and 33 of Lalmonirhat, are located in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal and out of 111 Indian enclaves, 12 are situated in Kurigram, 59 in Lalmonirhat, four in Nilphamari and 36 in Panchagarh of Bangladesh. Under the agreement, India will hand over 111 enclaves measuring 17,160 acres of land with a population of over 37,369 to Bangladesh and take over 51 enclaves covering an area of 7,110 acres with a population of nearly 14,090.

As the enclave exchange deal going to be implemented very soon, the local administration has enhanced vigilance around the Indian enclaves located in four northern districts of Bangladesh. "We are holding meetings with the enclave dwellers to convince them so that they stay patient until the LBA is implemented and they get their identity," said Azizul Islam, president of Lalmonirhat District Unit of Indo-Bangla Enclave Exchange Coordination Committee. "We have also expressed our concern to the local administrations, seeking steps to strengthen vigilance around the landlocked areas for an interim period as there are no authorities to ensure security," he added.

The Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner Md. Habibul Rahman said that they have already taken measures to beef up security around the enclaves to avoid any trouble that might mar the land swap process. A group of people were spreading seeds of dissent at Dahagram and Angarpotaat Patgram, but the issue of the area has been settled and the dwellers have 24-hour access to the mainland, said the DC, adding that the local administration and police have been alerted about people spreading rumours. People of the enclaves have urged the government to take up development work in their region quickly, especially to establish educational institutions, health centers and communication networks.

Drive against child marriage at Aditmari

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Underprivileged people are the ones who commonly marry off their daughters when they are still children in Bangladesh, and the scenario is no different in the northern bordering district Lalmonirhat. A large number of poor families at chars and remote areas usually get their daughters married very early. Lack of awareness about the adverse impacts of child marriage among the mass people is the cause behind this, local people said.

Recently at Dewdoba village of Palashu union at Aditmari upazila, the father of a girl was jailed for one month because he arranged his daughter's marriage despite her being underage. The bridegroom was jailed as well. Jahurul Islam, the executive magistrate of the mobile court as well as the Aditmari upazila UNO convicted them on the spot in presence of the police and local people. Jahurul Islam has taken stern measures against child marriage. As a result of his actions, the people of the upazila are more aware about the bad impact of child marriage. "Regular drives against child marriage and social crimes has had an impact in the last four months," Jahurul said. UNOs at four other upazilas Lalmonirhat sadar, Kaliganj, Hatibandha and Patgram have also taken similar steps against child marriage in their respective upazilas.

Mosaddeque Hossain Chowdhury, Chairman of Teesta River basin union parishad Mahishkhocha at Aditmari upazila said that the people living at remote and char villages are building awareness among themselves against child marriage. The rate of child marriages in this union has already decreased, the UP chairman said.

Salma Akhter, 13, daughter of Mainuddin Miah at Utarsaptana village in Lalmonirhat sadar got married when she was only 11. "I become a

mother of a son last year, and the baby is now one year old. I have been facing numerous physical and mental problems," said Salma, adding that her husband Nasir Ali has run away and how she lives with her parents. "We were wrong to marry off our daughter at such an early age, and now all of us are suffering," said Salma's father Mainuddin Miah. "Our daughter did not agree to the marriage but we forced her into it, thinking that it will be good for her future. But it was a great mistake," he added.

Like Salma Akhter, Nur Banu Akhter also got married too soon. At the age of 15, she is the mother of two children at Teesta char village Kalmati. "I get very sick often and my two children are also ill. We are receiving treatment at my parents' house. My parents are paying for the treatment and my husband never comes to visit us," said Nur Banu, adding that her husband already said that he will divorce her if she fails to comply with his demand. Nur Banu's father Nasir Ali said, "We settled the marriage of our under aged daughter because we were afraid of her future and her security. Also, getting your daughter married early is a tradition in the char area. We had no idea how we would all suffer as a result."

Mousumi Akhter, 13, daughter of Akher Ali of Teesta char Kalikapur village at Kaliganj upazila was married a year ago but she was divorced after nine months of marriage as she fell terribly ill and could not keep up with her husband's demands.

Ahsanul Kabir Bulu, the Char Health and Education Project Manager of an NGO informed that the people of chars face health difficulties due to child marriage, and their lack of awareness to the possible future sufferings expose them to making the wrong decisions about their daughter's marriage. Now the char people are becoming aware about health and education, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Salma Akhter, mother of a one year old son, got married when she was only 11 and now she is 13 years old. Her husband Nasir Ali has run away and how she lives with her parents at Utarsaptana village.



PHOTO: STAR

Huge quantity of cucumber arrives at Singra in Birganj upazila under Dinajpur district that sees good yield of the popular summer fruit this season.

Bumper cucumber yield makes growers happy

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Bumper production of cucumber and its good market price have made Dinajpur farmers happy. "We did not get fair price for our winter season vegetables due to blockade and hartals early this year, but we grew cucumber, which is helping us to recoup the losses," said Md Abdur Razzak of Singra village under Birganj upazila.

correspondent found farmers are selling their produce directly from the farmlands at Tk 10 to Tk 12 per kilogram. Cucumbers are also being sent to other places in the country. Gulzar Mia of Motihara village of Nawabganj said they are getting good price in the market by selling cucumber. "We are also getting buyers from outside the district almost every day," he said.

Susanta Borua, a trader from Chittagong, said the cucumber produced in Dinajpur is in high demand in their region and he comes to Dinajpur almost every year to buy it. However, he said cucumber price is high this year. According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), around 258 hectares of land have been brought under cucumber farming in Dinajpur, and the production target was 4,880 tonnes. Officials of DAE said the target will be exceeded as the farmers got abundant production this year due to favourable weather.

Azizur Rahman, a farmer of Birganj, said last year he had earned nearly Tk one lakh from one bigha of land, but this year he got healthy production and is expecting around Tk 1.5 lakh from one bigha. "We spent nearly Tk 50,000 on one bigha," he said. Cucumber farming usually starts at the end of December and continues till January. Planting, growing and harvesting cost around Tk 50,000, said Md Khokon of Birganj upazila.

Farmers use public roads for paddy processing

Vehicles face serious problem, commuters' safety at stake

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUABAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Farmers in different areas of Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts are using the roads and highways for threshing and drying paddy and straw in the ongoing boro harvesting season, disturbing vehicular movement and posing risk of accidents.

The tendency of using public roads for paddy processing is increasing because action is not taken against those who are doing this callous act, sufferers alleged.

Many roads, including Thakurgaon-Pirganj, Thakurgaon-Baliadangi, Thakurgaon-Ruha, Thakurgaon-Farabari and Thakurgaon-Gorea in Thakurgaon district; and Boda-Debiganj, Panchagarh-Atwary, Boda-Atwary, and Panchagarh-Tunirhat in Panchagarh district; are now mostly covered with newly harvested crops and straw.

Very often, straw gets entangled with the wheels of the vehicles, sometimes causing them to slip off the road. Motorcyclists face the most difficulty.

During a visit to Thakurgaon-Farabari road, Boda-Debiganj highway, this correspondent saw many farm labourers threshing and drying paddy on the roads, ignoring the safety of commuters.

Mohammad Dulal, 40, of Jolpakhuri village in Boda upazila, told this correspondent that they did threshing and drying of paddy and wheat on the metalled roads to keep the colour of the crops fresh. The crops get dirty because they get mixed with earth and sand if they are

threshed on open fields or in the yards. Besides, after threshing paddy alongside the road we can take the produce to the market directly, which saves time and carrying cost, he added.

Md Selim, a lecturer of Balarampur College in Atway upazila of Panchagarh, said he goes to the college from Thakurgaon town on a motorbike through Thakurgaon-Farabari road. "During this season, it is a nightmare to ride my motorbike as the road is covered with straw and

paddy. Last year, I met an accident as my bike slipped and fell on the road," he said.

Another motorbike rider, Mokbular Rahman of Madrashapara in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, said he narrowly escaped serious accident due to this menace on the road about a week ago. Locals urged the authorities concerned to take steps to stop threshing of paddy on the roads to avert road accidents and save lives of commuters.

Hasan Ali, a truck driver, told this corre-

spondent on Boda-Debiganj highway at Chandanbari village in Boda upazila that when he was taking stones from Banglabandha Land Port to Dhaka, he could not drive normally, fearing an accident.

Contacted, Abul Kalam Azad, superintendent of police of Panchagarh, said over cell phone that the roads are maintained by the Roads and Highways, LGED or Zila Parishad. If they seek help to clear the roads, law enforcers will do the job.



PHOTO: STAR

A portion of the Boda-Debiganj road at Jolpakhuri village in Boda upazila under Panchagarh district is being used for threshing paddy, causing problem for vehicular movement and adding to the risk of accidents.