

# School becomes marketplace

Bogra primary school seeks respite from land grabbing

MAMUN-UR-RASHID with ANDREW EAGLE

What's the name for a place where people sell paddy and rice, livestock, trees and sugarcane? For a resident of Durgapur union in Bogra's Kahaloo upazila an obvious if unfortunate answer to the question would be: Durgapur Government Primary School.

"We can't play on the field anymore," says class-V student Chandan Kumar Srijaya, 11. "And it's difficult to pay attention to our classes due to the disruption of vehicles honking their horns outside."

School authorities are calling for an end to the land grabbing of the school's grounds by local businessmen who have even constructed a shoddy and smelly latrine in the middle of the school's field to serve their makeshift marketplace.

"We are always scared of being kicked or butted by cows in the market," says Chandan's classmate

Zakiya. "There is too much dust from the market and we really suffer," complains Maloti Rani Paul, a student of class-IV.

Parents share their children's concerns. "The unhygienic and risky environment at the school is really a worry," says one guardian, Mohsin Ali.

According to teachers, the school, established in the farming community in 1940, has performed well in every Primary School Certificate exams in recent years, with many students having secured scholarships under both talent-pool and general quotas in the upazila.

Good results are in one sense not surprising since the school is blessed with motivated staff, evidence of which can be found by a visit to any of the eight classrooms, equipped with white-boards, toys for pre-primary children and other educational materials; and painstakingly decorated with picture galleries.

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Sugarcane is put on sale on the ground of Durgapur Government Primary School in Bogra's Kahaloo upazila. Local influential people have set up the market there, leaving school children to suffer. The photo was taken early this month.

PHOTO: STAR

## One held for Facebook post demeaning Bangabandhu

A CORRESPONDENT, Narail

Police have arrested a man in Narail for allegedly making derogatory remarks on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on Facebook.

Ali Ahmed Mollah, 58, was arrested in Tularampur village of Narail Sadar upazila on Monday night.

Earlier, Mahafuzur Rahman, president of Narail Sadar Jubo League, filed a case against Mollah and his son Nazmul Hossain under the Information and Communication Technology Act, police said.

Mahafuzur, in his case, alleged that the accused made disparaging remarks about the Father of the Nation and the National Mourning Day on Facebook on August 14.

The arrestee is involved in Jamaat politics, said police.

Subash Biswas, officer-in-charge of Narail Sadar Police station, said they were trying to arrest the other accused.

## Where are they now?

FROM PAGE 1

came. Every time she went to the broker, she got conflicting information. Then one day, he said Monir died in a shipwreck.

In all probability, he lied; just as he lied about the "highly paid job" in Malaysia.

According to a list prepared by the Special Branch (SB) of police in October last year, Monir and at least six other Bangladeshi trafficking victims are in various prisons in Myanmar. Two of these six are from Monir's village, three from Cox's Bazar and one from Nababganj in Dhaka.

Like Panna, families of these victims first waited for the news from their loved ones. When no news came, they came to fear the worst without actually knowing their fate.

**THE LIST**  
On October 15 last year, the SB prepared a 48-name list (ref no. 2821) of Bangladeshi citizens languishing in Myanmar's prisons.

The list referred to a 22-digit home ministry reference number that ends with 12/2824, dated October 4 the same year.

The Daily Star has spoken with the families of 36 listed victims during the past three months. Of them, 29 confirmed that their loved ones returned home, while seven, including Monir, did not.

'MUTTON AND FOOTBALL MATCH'

At the time he was duped, Monir was struggling to earn a living in his Chitu Matbar Kandi village on the bank of the Kirtinasha river, which cuts through Naria upazila and separates his village from Panna's.

He'd tried selling cattle feed and running a tea stall, but income was forever scant, especially with the additional responsibility of supporting his aging parents. With the arrival of their second son in 2009 the financial situation became yet more precarious.

It was then that Mobarak Khan approached Monir with an offer of good employment in Malaysia.

As a manpower broker, Mobarak has vast experience. He and his younger brother Ziaur Rahman, who is in Malaysia, have been doing this for years. He can easily spot his victims and knows how best to exploit them. Like Monir, two other youths -- Rubel and Harun -- from the village were struggling to make ends meet.

"You will need no papers, no advance payments," Mobarak told them. They would only have to pay after reaching Malaysia. It's a common ruse.

The three hesitated. They'd heard of the dangers of the sea journey on wooden boats.

"This is no ordinary ship. It's one of those ships where they serve mutton

fortune-seekers to another boatman called Sukur Majhi, for between Tk 10,000 and 30,000 each.

The four from Shoilakupa were among those sold. When they protested, demanding to be sent home, Sukkur Majhi's men beat them until they bled, before holding guns to their chests and threatening to shoot. They begged for their lives.

"They beat us as though we were animals," recalls Sobel, another of the Shoilakupa survivors. "There aren't words to describe it."

He still takes painkillers as a result of his treatment at the hands of the traffickers.

The vessel continued to float around for about another month, looking for an opportunity to anchor. Then on one night, they were disembarked near a hill on the Myanmar border.

It was time for torture, recalls Ramjan. There was almost no food and water during the 30-40 days they were held in the jungle. They often ate wild fruits or tender parts of bamboos and other trees, which they boiled.

As anticipated, the ransom demands began. Victims' families were called with demands for sums ranging between Tk 1.5 lakh and 2 lakh each for their relative's release.

Mobarak, the broker in Shariatpur, took Tk 4.8 lakh from the families of

Thailand and Malaysia and these syndicates routinely hold people hostage in the bordering areas of Myanmar and Thailand for ransom.

According to the UIN, about 53,000 people from Bangladesh and Myanmar travelled by sea to Thailand and Malaysia in 2014, in a trade Brac estimates was then worth \$100 million per annum.

But some would-be migrants, like Monir, don't make it as far as mainland Thailand or Malaysia. They're captured instead by Myanmar's authorities and wind up incarcerated.

**THE ENDLESS WAIT**

It is because of such ordeals of irregular labour migrants and their families as well as the failure of the government to check it that Bangladesh fares poorly in terms of migration governance in the Migration Governance Index 2016, prepared by the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit.

The three areas where the country lags are: institutional capacity for regular migration, migrants' rights and safe and orderly migration.

Yet migrant workers remain the main engine of Bangladesh's economy despite slow growths in countries where they toil to send money home.

Between 1976 and 2015, more than 10 million Bangladeshis have migrated to 159 countries in search of better opportunities -- over 81 percent of

## AL bodies occupy govt land to set up offices

STAR REPORT

The Awami League and its associate body Jubo Mahila League are setting up offices on government land in Kalai upazila of Joypurhat.

Kalai AL is erecting a building on 2.85 decimal land of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) near Kalai bus terminal, said RHD officials.

Jubo Mahila League is constructing its office on 3.24 decimal land of Zila Parishad near the Kalai upazila bungalow, said Zila Parishad officials.

In June, Khandakar Halimul Alam, president of Kalai AL and also Kalai municipality mayor, inaugurated the construction work of the building near the bus terminal.

Contacted, Halimul Alam said they have sent a letter to the Prime Minister's Office recently, seeking permission to build the structure there.

Minfuzur Rahman Milon, organising secretary of district AL and also chairman of Kalai Upazila Parishad, inaugurated the construction work of the Jubo Mahila League office on April 22.

Visiting the spots recently, our

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## Eat up or pay up

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finish all the food on their plates. Yuoki, a sushi restaurant in Stuttgart, Germany, is not your everyday all-you-can-eat buffet. For starters, there isn't an actual buffet to fill your plate. Instead, patrons are seated at a table and provided with iPads which they can use to order up to five small dishes every ten minutes.

They can eat as much as they want for 120 minutes, but having the food delivered at short intervals allows diners to constantly assess how hungry they are and order accordingly, preventing food waste.

Also, owner Luan Guoyu believes our "eyes are bigger than our stomachs", so not being able to see the cooked food at the buffet prevents people from ordering more food that they can actually eat just because they like the way it looks.

But Luan Guoyu's most effective way of fighting food waste, and the one that has attracted media attention, is his €1 (\$1.15) fine for food still left on the plate. It's called 'all-you-can-eat, not all-you-can-chuck-away,' he says, adding that the extra charge is not meant to increase his profits, but to act as a reminder not to waste food.

In the two years since Yuoki implemented this "eat up or pay up" policy, Guoyu claims he has collected €900 (\$1,020) to €1,000 (\$1,133) in food waste fees, which he plans to donate to charity.

Guoyu says he has received no complaints from patrons so far, and the few interviewed by local newspaper Stuttgarter Zeitung seemed to agree with his policy. "At home, we try to produce as little waste as possible, so why not do the same at the restaurant," said James and Jessica Moss, a California couple on vacation in Germany.

Luan Guoyu's system is unique in the state of Baden-Württemberg, but not in Germany. Okinii, a Japanese-style restaurant in Düsseldorf, has been charging patrons the same €1 tax for unfinished food on their plates since 2013, and also claims it has not received major complaints.

## NO ONE KNOWS WHERE THEY ARE!



Monir Hawlader  
Naria, Shariatpur

Harun Khan  
Naria, Shariatpur

Rubel Dewan  
Naria, Shariatpur

Ziaul Hoque  
Ramu, Cox's Bazar

Md Salimullah  
Nondakhali, Cox's Bazar

Nizam Uddin  
Ramu, Cox's Bazar

Saimon D'Costa  
Nababganj, Dhaka

Families of the remaining 12 victims could not be contacted since the phone numbers on the list are wrong, invalid (10 or 12-digit numbers rather than the standard 11 digits) or switched off.

The photos and details of the seven victims who this newspaper can confirm are yet to return were emailed to the Bangladesh embassy in Myanmar and also to the Myanmar embassy in Dhaka, requesting information about their whereabouts.

Both the missions said none of these seven matches their existing list of Bangladeshi prisoners in Myanmar. "Nonetheless, if the embassy could trace their whereabouts anytime in future, it would take necessary measures," said Md Reyad Hossain, the first secretary (labour) of the Bangladesh mission in Myanmar.

Currently, there are 57 "verified and unverified" Bangladeshis in Myanmar prisons, most of them facing charges of illegal entry or serving jail terms, he added. The Myanmar embassy in Dhaka put the number at 58 -- 56 male prisoners, one female prisoner and one detainee.

The International Organisation for Migration, which facilitated the repatriation of some of the 29 victims named on the same list, has no information about the seven either. It said it would take up the matter with the relevant authorities.

But that's no consolation for any of the victims' families. All these months and years, they didn't even know that the names of their loved ones were on the SB list. Now that they know, they want their people back.

for lunch and you can play football on deck. It's that big! They will treat you like a bridegroom!" Mobarak told them, according to family members and neighbours with whom the three men shared the conversation.

The bait worked. They must have heard of such ships; now excited about the prospect of seeing one and riding one, they took the gamble.

"They took my son with a false promise and then made him disappear," says Halima Begum, 45, as tears rolled down her cheeks. She's the mother of Rubel, who was only 15 years old when trafficked on the same day as Monir.

'BEAT US LIKE ANIMAL'

No doubt that was a false promise. Although the details of Monir's experience are unavailable, those who have returned from Myanmar prisons and travelled around the same time, though not together, speak of deception, hunger and torture.

Ramjan Sheikh, 19, from Jhenidah's Shoilakupa who has since returned to work as a mason's helper, is one. He, along with three others from his area, left from Teknaf, a major trafficking port. A total of 18 men were put in a flimsy dinghy in the dead of night.

Further out to sea a medium-sized vessel waited. There were about 300 people aboard, he says, including women and children aged as young as two.

They weren't taken anywhere near Malaysia.

Rather, the gang confined them for over a month near Myanmar's border with Thailand. There, the boatman named Monnaf Majhi sold 118 of the

Monir, Rubel and Harun, saying they were taken hostage by a gang and that he needed the money for their release.

However, he later returned the money in the face of pressure from villagers, after he himself spread the news of their deaths. Facing a case for trafficking he now hides in Dhaka. His wife, who still lives in the village, refused to give his phone number.

Back in the Myanmar hills, law enforcers raided the camp one day, catching 45 people, while others fled. After their capture, they were beaten with sticks and rubber belts, and taken to a prison camp so close to Bangladesh that they could hear the call to prayer, said Sobel.

From there, the four Jhenidah victims along with several others finally came home with assistance from the government and the IOM.

**THE TRAFFICKING TRADE**  
Their plight is only a glimpse of how irregular labour migrants and their families suffer with hardly anyone to care for them.

Lured by the hope of escaping poverty, thousands of jobseekers become victims of irregular maritime migration syndicates every year. While some make it to their desired destinations, others perish at sea or die of torture and hunger in jungle camps en route.

Only in May last year, the Thai authorities discovered several mass graves in Sadao district of Songkhla province, with 26 bodies believed to be those of trafficking victims from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

NGOs and returnees say several transnational smuggling gangs are spread over Bangladesh, Myanmar,

them labour migrants, according to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training.

In Fiscal Year 2014-2015, they sent home \$15.31 billion in remittance, which is equivalent to nearly 14 percent of the total GDP (Bangladesh Bank Report 2015).

Despite their immense contribution, the labour migration process is riddled with legal and structural constraints, according to a recent study -- Irregular Labour Migration from Bangladesh: Crises and Ways Forward -- by Manusher Jonno Foundation.

Irregular labour migration is the outcome of governance failure of both the sending and the receiving countries. More specifically, either the government is unable to tackle irregular migration because of institutional inefficiencies or is unwilling to do so for political-economic concerns, analysis shows.

Ultimately, these setbacks lead to migration through illegal channels, forcing thousands to face the sea.

Because of their irregular status, these migrants get little or no legal protection at destination countries, and their stories are seldom told.

Like the stories of these seven and possibly thousands more as well as their relatives back home who wait for their fathers and sons and brothers and husbands.

Panna still counts her days. June 4, June 5, June 6... Sometimes she feels she's been doing this for a lifetime. And with each day that passes, she is one day farther away from the day she said goodbye to Monir.

## Josna Begum

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necessary procedure for an MRP. When she went to collect her digital passport from the Munshiganj office, she came to know about the fraudulence.

For the last eight months, whenever she had gone there, officials told her to contact the Dhaka office.

Receiving her new passport, she said, "I am very happy. I can now go abroad again for work."

She had been facing troubles because a fake Josna got an MRP bearing Josna's hand-written passport number on January 29, 2014 from the head office -- Department of Passport and Immigration (DIP) in the capital's Agargaon.

As The Daily Star dug deeper into the story, it found a syndicate of brokers, recruiting agents and a section of officials at passport offices across the country involved in such forgery, which takes place quite often.

In Josna's case, it was seen that a group of brokers and officials at the DIP forged the data of her hand-written passport. All her information was then copied onto the MRP of the fake Josna.

A report on the forgery titled "Two passports, one number" was published in The Daily Star on August 15.

The DIP last year during an internal probe found that a syndicate had issued at least 170 official passports to civilians between November 2014 and April 2015. The authorities then suspended a director, an assistant director and two employees for their involvement in the scam.

Last month, the Anti-Corruption Commission arrested two suspended officials of the DIP for issuing official passports to private citizens.

Halima Khatun, assistant director at the Munshiganj office, told The Daily Star that it gave the MRP to Josna as the DIP already cancelled the passport given to the fake Josna last June.

"The process took long because we had to verify the authenticity of the information of both the passports by the police. Our head office found that the earlier one was fake owner. So, they cancelled her passport and issued the new one for Josna."