

## 'False' case against journo protested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Journalists formed a human chain in front of Chapainawabganj Press Club in the town yesterday, protesting filling of a 'false' case against staff reporter of The Prothom Alo and member of the press club.

Local businessman T Islam filed the case against 24 people including journalist Anwar Hossain.

On August 23, the case was filed with the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court for poisoning fishes in a pond dead in Sadar upazila.

Terming the case false and baseless, the participants said it was filed to harass Anwar.

Earlier, Adivasi leader Kutila Rajoar filed a case with Sadar Police Station against T Islam on similar charge.

There was a long standing conflict between Adivasi people and T Islam over ownership of the pond.

## Four fishermen kidnapped in Laxmipur

UNB, Laxmipur

Forest robbers kidnapped four fishermen from the Meghna River adjacent to Char Abdullahpur in Ramgati upazila yesterday. Two of the victims were identified as Mahiuddin and Bablu.

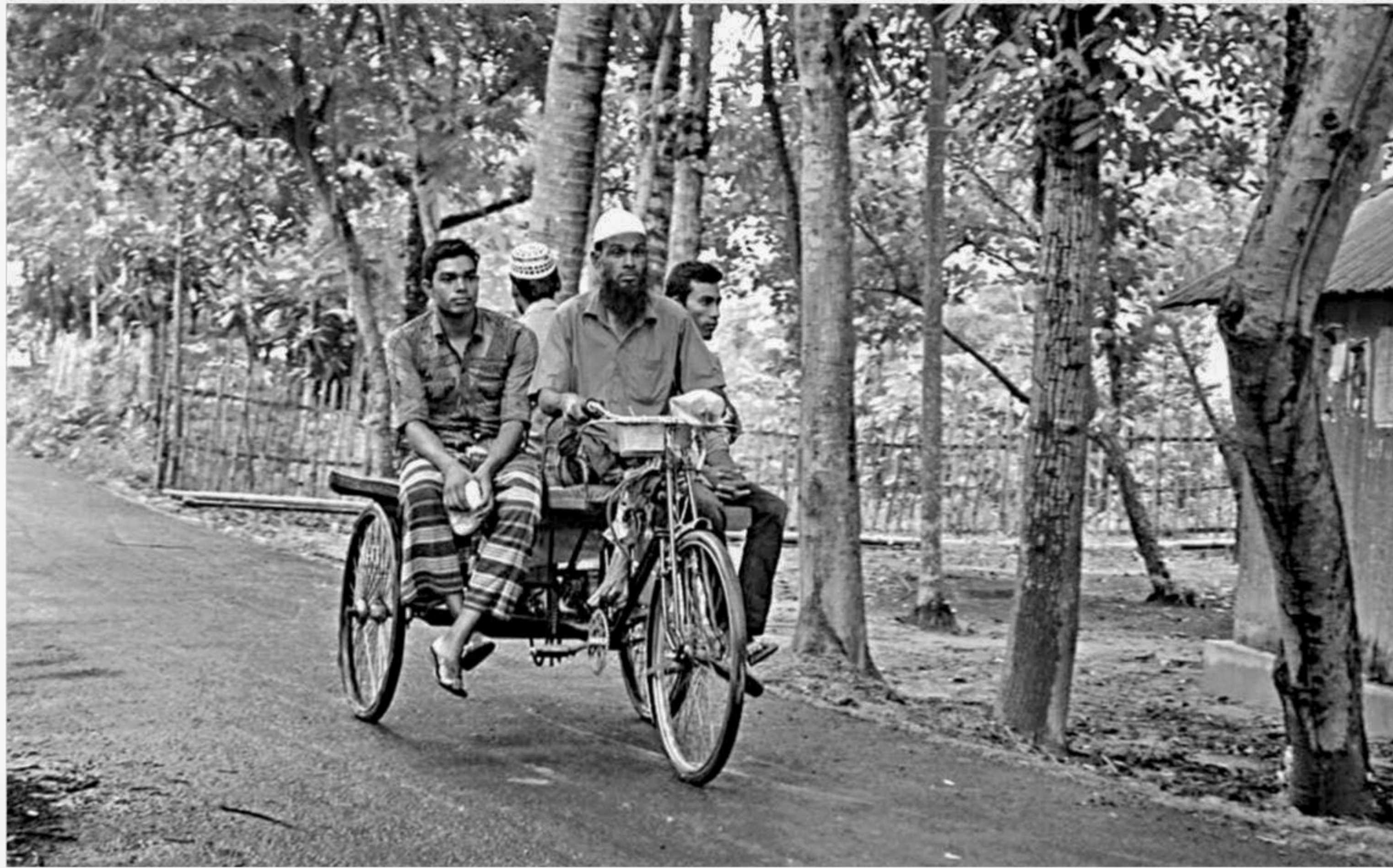
Quoting local fishermen, second officer of Ramgati Police Station M Rafiq said when a group of fishermen were catching fish in the river at noon, a gang of 7/8, including one Majnu, Mizan and Wahed, demanded toll from the fishermen.

As the fishermen denied paying toll, the robbers swooped on them with sharp weapons, leaving Alauddin and another fisherman injured.

Later, they picked up four fishermen and fled the scene.

The kidnappers demanded a huge amount of money as ransom from the family members of the four.

The injured were whisked off to a hospital, Rafiq added.



Double-amputee Babul Pramanik is driving a battery-powered three-wheeler on a village road at Dhorbila in Pabna to support his family, setting an example for others who choose begging for even a trivial problem in most of the cases.

PHOTO: STAR

# Determination is the way

Double-amputee transport driver forges a better future

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU with ANDREW EAGLE

When Bablu Pramanik, 45, from Dharbila Khandaker Para in Pabna Sadar upazila had an accident that ultimately resulted in losing both legs it seemed his future held only darkness. But after much worry and effort, he worked his way back into his former role as a driver, to continue to support his family. Bablu's life is, these days, one of tentative hope.

"It started with a minor injury to my right leg from a hot engine in 2001," says Bablu, who drove a local Kariman transport vehicle at the time. "Later it became gangrenous and in 2003 doctors amputated my right leg."

Bablu continued driving with one leg but sadly, five years later his left leg was also found to be infected with gangrene. "In 2008 I lost my other leg," says Bablu. "My world was only darkness. I'd become a kind of half-man."

Desperate to support his family, he asked many for any small job, with little success.

"Everybody suggested I take up begging," he recalls. "I didn't."

Instead, he went to Dhaka to work at a ticket counter but with earnings too low to support his family, it didn't prove to be a long-term solution. "I earned Tk. 300 per day in Dhaka," he says, "It wasn't enough to support my life there and send money to my family. My colleagues in the capital also suggested I could beg."

Determined to find any legal work, Bablu

returned to his village early this year.

His family suggested he take a loan to buy a battery-powered three-wheeler vehicle to run as local transport. "I wanted to face the challenge in my life," Bablu told The Daily Star.

"Legs are not necessary to drive a three-wheeler, so it suits me."

Having previously worked as a bus driver in Dhaka in the 1990s, Bablu has twenty years driving experience to draw upon; nonetheless passengers were initially skeptical. "When they saw I don't have legs they were fearful of accidents," he says, "Nowadays they know I can do it."

"I don't choose the long-distance rural routes," he continues, "and I can't perform my job with the same efficiency as somebody with legs, which means earnings are less; but I am happy to be self-employed."

Currently Bablu's earnings are up to Tk 350 per day, not enough to cover the daily expenses of a six-member family, but an improvement on his previous income in Dhaka.

In the meantime wife Aleya Begum contributes by working as a domestic help; but their dream of educating their children is proving difficult. Of their four children, the eldest daughter married a few years ago, while the son and younger daughters have struggled to continue study.

"My elder son Alamgir Hossain is a Higher Secondary Certificate candidate but he couldn't register for the exam this year due to our poverty," says Aleya. "He left his study and joined a

garment factory in the capital four months ago."

The schooling of the two younger daughters, one of whom is a Junior School Certificate candidate, is also at risk. "My father cannot provide despite his best efforts," says one daughter, Rabeya Khatun. "I want to study but might have to accept early marriage."

Education expenses are not the only issue. "I am losing strength day by day," says Bablu, who recently had a finger amputated due to gangrene, with another finger also infected.

There are also concerns about the longevity of his vehicle's battery. He doesn't have a spare. "The battery can be damaged at any moment. I don't know how I can replace it because they cost Tk. 20,000," he says.

Despite such ongoing challenges, Bablu has shown that where there is a will there is most often a way. "Although my life has seen massive difficulties," he says, "I never liked the idea of getting pity from others. I lost my legs but not my spirit. The wheels of my vehicle that carry so many passengers also carry my family."

Even when the vehicle has mechanical trouble, Bablu does not rely on others. "I try to fix it through my own efforts," says Bablu, adding that if he cannot do anything to take care of his own affairs he may as well have died.

Unsurprisingly, Bablu's determination is appreciated in the village. "When some will turn to begging for even a trivial problem," says neighbour Md Farhad Hossain, "Bablu has shown how to fight."

## Learning

FROM PAGE 2

typhoid for playing in the dirty water," Royena said.

With an original tin-shed building, the school was founded in 1950 and nationalised in 1973. Later, in 2005, the authorities constructed another two-room building. Due to the lack of a drainage system, the four rooms in the original building remain waterlogged for about two and a half months from late June to early September every year since 2011.

According to the teaching staff, it is utterly impossible to conduct any academic or other activities in that building until it stops raining.

It is because of waterlogging that the classes spanning pre-primary to class-V are taught in two rooms of the other building in shifts, with 55-minute periods reduced to 37 minutes only in the morning shift and 40 minutes for class-IV and -V in the afternoon shift.

"We try our best to teach concentrated lessons," says assistant teacher Fahmida Yasmeen, "but it's not always possible to manage it well."

Assistant teacher Shaila Akter echoed her view.

During a recent visit to the school, The Daily Star observed that the rooms in

the old building were up to knee-deep in water.

"We have repeatedly written to the authorities about the problem, but to no effect," says Royena Begum.

According to district primary education officer Abdul Alim, the issue has already been raised at the district's development coordination meeting presided over by Deputy Commissioner Shahabuddin Khan who directed Jamalpur's mayor to solve the problem by installing a proper drainage system at the school.

Until that occurs, teachers and students at Bogabaid Government Primary School will continue to grapple with how to manage the situation.

## One drowns

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Udjapan Parishad. The accident happened when they were returning after the celebration, he added.

Many passengers managed to swim ashore, reports a correspondent from Madaripur, quoting witnesses.

Police and Madaripur fire service and civil defence were at the spot, said Ratan Kumar Das, a leader of Madaripur Puja Udjapan Parishad.

## Wildlife faces

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Sixty-three-year-old Mandi (Garo) leader Ajay A Mri reminisced about the forest he saw in his childhood, when he used to take his cattle herd into the forest for grazing.

They used to hear deafening cries of langurs and monkeys in the forest, said Ajay, leader of Jayenshahi Adibashi Unnayan Parishad.

He and his friends even sighted many deer, wild boars, rabbits, hedgehogs and wild fowls in the forests.

"While the cattle grazed, we would gather wild fruits and edible leaves and plants from the forest," he said, describing the existence of plenty of wild fruit trees and medicinal herbs and shrubs, including Bohera, Haritaki, Amloki, Dumur, Anai Gota, Joia Gota and Tithi Jam in the forest.

Lintus Miah of Cacchabari village said, "The local Mandi people consider the fruits, eaten by monkeys, edible and they collect fruits like Dumur, Anai Gota, and Thithi Jam. Now only a few of these fruit trees remain in the forest."

The fruits and fresh leaves of these plants were the main food sources for the monkeys, langurs, deer and squirrels and different birds, including Horial (green pigeon) and parrots, according to wildlife experts.

Most of these fruit trees have disappeared from the forest due to mindless felling of trees over the last few decades to grab forestland, said Somnath Lahiri, senior research officer of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela).

These wild fruits and

herbal plants are among 36 varieties of trees which have become almost non-existent from Madhupur forest, posing threats to its biodiversity, he added.

Once spread over 45,000 acres of land, Madhupur forest has now shrunk to only 8,000 acres due to indiscriminate cutting down and stealing of trees and encroachment, forest department sources said.

A few hundred monkeys that managed to survive in the forest now forage for food in the pineapple and banana orchards of nearby villages. Apart from a few dozen deer in the forest, there are some 64 deer being kept at a deer breeding centre at Luhuria. But there is a scarcity of food for the animal, said the sources.

Forest officials said they were unable to provide adequate food and other support to the deer at the breeding center due to a lack of funds, logistics and manpower.

Over 40,000 people living in 57 villages, built in and around Madhupur forest areas after 1950, are dependent on the forest resources for their livelihoods, they added.

Besides, numerous brick kilns built around the forest use firewood from the forest to bake bricks, said locals and forest department sources.

Plunderers cut down wild fruit trees and other trees, which have huge demand in brick kilns, they added.

MA Hasan, assistant conservator of forest in Madhupur, said the forest department under a project taken a few years ago planted 19 varieties of trees, including fruit trees, on 20 hectares of land in the forest.



Students of Jadunath Government Primary School in Nagarpur upazila of Tangail attend classes under the open sky as the schoolhouse has turned too risky for use. Inset, Two large chunks of roof-plaster fell down inside a classroom on August 11.

PHOTO: STAR

## RISKY SCHOOLHOUSE

# Classes under open sky

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Students of Jadunath Government Primary School in Nagarpur upazila of the district have been attending their classes under the open sky for the last two weeks as the dilapidated school building has become too risky for them.

Established in 1948, the school building that housed three classrooms and an office room for the teachers was built in 1996-97 fiscal year.

Rafiqul Islam, headmaster of the school, said due to the situation, schooling of nearly 362 students is badly hampered.

In absence of any repair work for years, plasters fell off its roof and cracks developed at many points, the headmaster added.

Rafiqul said a chunk of plaster of the roof of one of the classrooms suddenly fell during class hours on August 11, but luckily, the students and the teacher escaped unhurt.

Meanwhile, cracks have developed on the roof of it's another building that housed three classrooms, he said.

Since then, the school authorities decided to hold classes under the open sky till reconstruction of a new house.

On information, Nagarpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Touhid Elahi and Upazila Project Implementation Officer Jilur Rahman Rashed visited the school.

The UNO said, "We have already informed the higher authorities of the matter for allocation of fund for construction of a new building."

## 8 hurt in BCL attack on JCD rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Eight local activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were injured as Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men attacked a JCD rally at Post Office intersection of the district town yesterday.

The rally was brought in protest against earlier issuance of arrest warrant against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

"As a part of Chhatra Dal central programme, we brought out a procession on KP Bashu Road of the district town around 11:30am. When the rally reached Post Office intersection, police interfered and we stayed there," said Mostak Hossain, joint convener of district unit of Chhatra Dal.

When a speaker was delivering speech there, BCL activists attacked the rally with sticks and brickbats, leaving eight JCD activists including Mostak injured.

Other injured are municipality Chhatra Dal president Abidur Rahman Nayan, vice president Prolay Hossain, College Chhatra Dal president Abdus Samad, upazila Chhatra Dal vice-president Daud Hossain, activists Sohanur Rahman, Rahmat Ali and Sakib Hossain.

Gopinath Kanjilal, assistant superintendent of police of Sadar Circle, said, "I am unaware about the incident. We will see the matter."

## Child marriage foiled: Bride's father jailed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A 14-year-old madrasa girl was saved from underage marriage in Kalai upazila of Joypurhat early yesterday.

Four people were sentenced to different jail terms for arranging marriage of eighth grader Ishita, daughter of Alamgir Hossain of Jhamutpur village by a mobile court, said police.

The convicts are matchmaker Rezaul Karim, bridegroom Jobayer Ali, Alamgir and marriage registrar Md Mozaffar Hossain.

Informed that marriage of Ishita was held, police went to the spot and foiled the marriage.



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