

Santals worried about job in sugarcane farm

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Santals in Gobindaganj are worried about getting jobs again in Shahebganj sugarcane farm, where they had been working almost regularly prior to beginning a movement for return of what they said was their forefathers' lands acquired by the government.

"Earlier, when the sugar mill ran full-swing, nearly a thousand Santal labourers worked there," said Rafayel Hasda, a leader of the Santal community.

"We have to search for alternative jobs or even migrate to other places as a bitter relation has developed with the mills' authorities," he added.

"At present, the farm is facing acute labourer shortage since the Santals refused to work there. They can work in the farm at any time as we don't have any restrictions," said Abdul Awal, managing director of the mill.

Meanwhile, normalcy is prevailing in the Santal villages at Madarpur and Joypurpara, and students are attending their classes.

Protesting the attack on the Santal community and the killing, looting and arson on November 6 and 7, the Gaibandha and Gobindaganj units of Puja Uddjapon Parishad and Hindu, Bouddha, Christian Oikya Parishad, arranged a press conference at Gobindaganj Press Club yesterday.

Speakers at the conference said those who helped and instigated the Santal community to capture government's acquired lands of Shahebganj cane farm are responsible for evicting, killing and looting Santal families. They demanded judicial investigation of the incident to find out the perpetrators.

They also demanded withdrawal of the case filed against lawmaker Principal Abul Kalam Azad.



Encroachers construct illegal structures on both sides of the river Khakdan flowing through Barguna town. The photo was taken from the DC Ghat area a few days ago.

14 teenagers return from India after serving jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Fourteen Bangladeshi teenage girls returned home yesterday through Benapole check-post after serving three years in an Indian prison.

Indian Border Security Force handed them over to Benapole check-post BGB Camp. Later, BGB handed them over to Benapole Port Police Station.

Officer-in-Charge of the police station Iqbal Hossain said the 14 girls had entered India illegally over three years ago.

Indian police arrested them from Mumbai and a court there sentenced them to three years' imprisonment each.

Sub-Inspector Motiur Rahman said they handed the returnees over to their families through Rights Jessore and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association.

PHOTO: ARIFUR RAHMAN

Grabbers' eyes on river Khakdan in Barguna

Over 2,000 illegal structures built on banks

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The Khakdan river flowing through Barguna town is being filled up by local influential people who are constructing illegal structures on both sides of the river.

As a result, the river is becoming narrower and launches on different routes, including Dhaka-Barguna, are facing great difficulties in plying it, though Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) often re-excavates the river.

Over 2,000 illegal structures have been built on both sides of the river.

Deputy Commissioner of Barguna Bashirul Alam said they held several meetings with the land office over the matter and a list of occupiers is being prepared, adding that they will take steps to remove all illegal structures after finalising the list.

Port Officer Mamun-ur-Rashid said it is the only waterway for communicating

with the district headquarters, but it is becoming narrower due to the illegal structures on the banks, adding that launches do not ply the route now although it is one of the profitable naval routes in the country.

BIWTA re-excavated the river three times between 2010 and 2015 to maintain its navigability, but most of the river has been filled up with sand as water flow has become very slow.

Md Eunus Ali, master of double-decker launch MV Juboraj of Dhaka-Barguna route, said launches often get stuck, especially during low tide, as the river has become so narrow.

Barguna district administration handed over 15,478 acres of land to BIWTA on October 8 in 2006 as per instruction from the land ministry by setting up pillars, but most of foreshore land has been grabbed by occupiers.

Two get life for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Rangpur court on Monday sentenced two people to death for killing a man in Pargachha upazila in 2001.

Special Judge's Court Judge Naresh Chandra Sarker delivered the verdict against Manik Mia and Hasan Ali of Dilalpara village, in absentia.

The court also acquitted wives of the two accused as charges brought against them could not be proved.

According to the prosecution, Manik and Hasan stabbed Mahtab Hossain to death on July 30, over a financial feud.

Mahtab's brother Abu Bakkar filed a case with Pargachha Police Station on August 1.

6 to die for killing co-worker

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A court here yesterday sentenced six people to death for murdering one of their co-workers in Narsingdi municipal area in 2008.

Additional District and Sessions Judge in Narsingdi Mohammad Shahin Uddin handed down the verdict against the six in absentia.

The convicts are Sohag, son of Shital Chandra, Saddam, son of Abdur Razzak, Samir, son of Sudhir Chandra, and Bimal, son of Kalachand of Narsingdi town, Sujon, son of Lal Uddin of Gouripur upazila in Mymensingh, and Arshad, son of Sadek Mia of Matlob upazila in Chandpur.

According to the prosecution, the convicts, all workers of an ice factory, called one of their co-workers Mohammad Ayub out of his house on August 29 in 2008 and killed him allegedly over a previous enmity.

On September 1, police recovered Ayub's beheaded body from Meghna river, after two days of the incident.

Later, Ayub's father Abdul Hakim filed a murder case against the six with Sadar Model Police Station.

After securing bail in the case, the convicts went into hiding, said Sub-inspector Imam Uddin of Sadar Model Police Station.

Madrasa teacher held on theft charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Police on Monday night detained a madrasa teacher and a night guard suspecting their involvement in stealing 17 laptops of the institution on Sunday.

The arrestees are Abdul Jalal, an Arabic teacher, and Mohiuddin of Durgapur Chungapasha Nesaria Alim Madrasa in Sadar upazila.

Chan Mia, president of the madrasa managing committee, filed a case against some unidentified people with Sadar Police Station on charge of stealing the laptops from the computer lab of the madrasa.

Police detained the duo the same night and produced them before a court yesterday that sent them to jail.



PHOTO: FARHANA MIRZA

The heritage of Munshiganj

Construction of the houses started in British period

FARHANA MIRZA with JOHURA AKTER and ANDREW EAGLE

In Munshiganj is a longstanding tradition of constructing houses uniquely of tin and wood. Such houses which are to be found across the district but are in especially high concentration in Louhajang are most often decorated with intricate designs. In constructing such houses, the carpenter takes on the role of artist.

The history of tin-and-wood houses may well be lost to time, though locals have various ideas about how the signature architecture style came about. Some say that during the British period there was a scarcity of bricks and iron which encouraged the use of tin and wood in building homes. Others believe the construction materials were favoured due to the prevalence of river erosion, with tin and wood homes more easily moved out of harm's way.

While these days cheaper concrete construction is favoured by

many householders, the wood and tin tradition of Munshiganj retains nostalgic popularity. "I lived in Japan for 16 years," says Mizanur Rahman Jhilu from Kanokshar area. "When I returned I decided to build my two-storey home of tin and

People, especially in river erosion-prone Louhajang, prefer tin-and-wood houses as these can be easily moved out of harm's way.

wood rather than concrete, to honour our local traditions."

These days however, Mizanur is concerned he may not be able to protect his home from Padma River erosion, which in the past several years has been severe, especially last

year in Garia village of Kumarbhog union. "I think the river should be widened at Mawa Point to protect our area from being lost to the river," Mizanur says.

"After last year we are particularly worried about erosion in coming years," says Gopal Master, an inhabitant of Garia. "As the government is busy constructing the Padma Bridge it will be helpful for our village if the river's course is simultaneously widened and well-managed," he says.

According to the local Member of Parliament Prof. Sagufta Yasmin Emily, there have been government discussions about the issue. Sources say a 13-kilometre stretch from Zajira Point is earmarked for anti-erosion works, but only 2-kilometres from Mawa Point.

While these works were supposed to have been completed by December 2016 only 15% of the project has thus far been achieved. In the meantime many of the unique tin and wood houses of Munshiganj remain at risk.

COAL EXTRACTION IN BARAPUKURIA MINE

Fresh cracks in many houses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Fresh cracks have developed in several hundred houses of eight villages near the mine of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd (BCMCL) in Parbatipur upazila of the district due to the tremors and subsidence during extraction of coal, villagers said.

The villages are Bashpukur, Boidyanathpur, Shivkrishnapur, Patigram, Boigram, Kashiadanga, Kalupara and Panchgharia in Hamidpur union of the upazila.

The mine authorities had detected land subsidence in 2006 following development of cracks in hundreds of houses and educational institutions in 11 villages near the coalmine, one year after it started production.

Following a wave of protests by residents of those villages, the government agreed to acquire 646 acres of land and paid Tk 191 crore to 2,600 families as compensation between 2010 and 2012, villagers and mine officials said.

Hamidpur union Chairman Sadequul Islam said cracks have developed in

houses situated outside the acquired land zone. "It's a concern for the villagers, who fear they might have to leave their homes," he said, adding that the villagers were also facing a water crisis as the tubewells have dried up due to pumping of underground water.

Aminul Islam of Patigram said he spent Tk 20,000 for repairing his house, but cracks continue to develop in other places. He said around 50 houses in his village have developed cracks, adding that they were also facing a crisis of drinking water.

The people of affected villages formed a committee called Jibon, Poribesh O Sampad Rakkha Committee to organise protest against the new threat. Convener M Moshir Rahman Bulbul said over telephone that they are yet to count the number of affected houses, but it will not be less than 1,000.

"The situation aggravated when the household tubewells dried up with the start of dry spell," Aminul said, adding that the villagers are not against the coalmine. He criticised the mining officials for not taking care of the villagers.

Affected villagers formed a human

chain on both sides of Barapukuria mine on Monday, urging the authorities to keep the vibration and water crisis to a tolerable level.

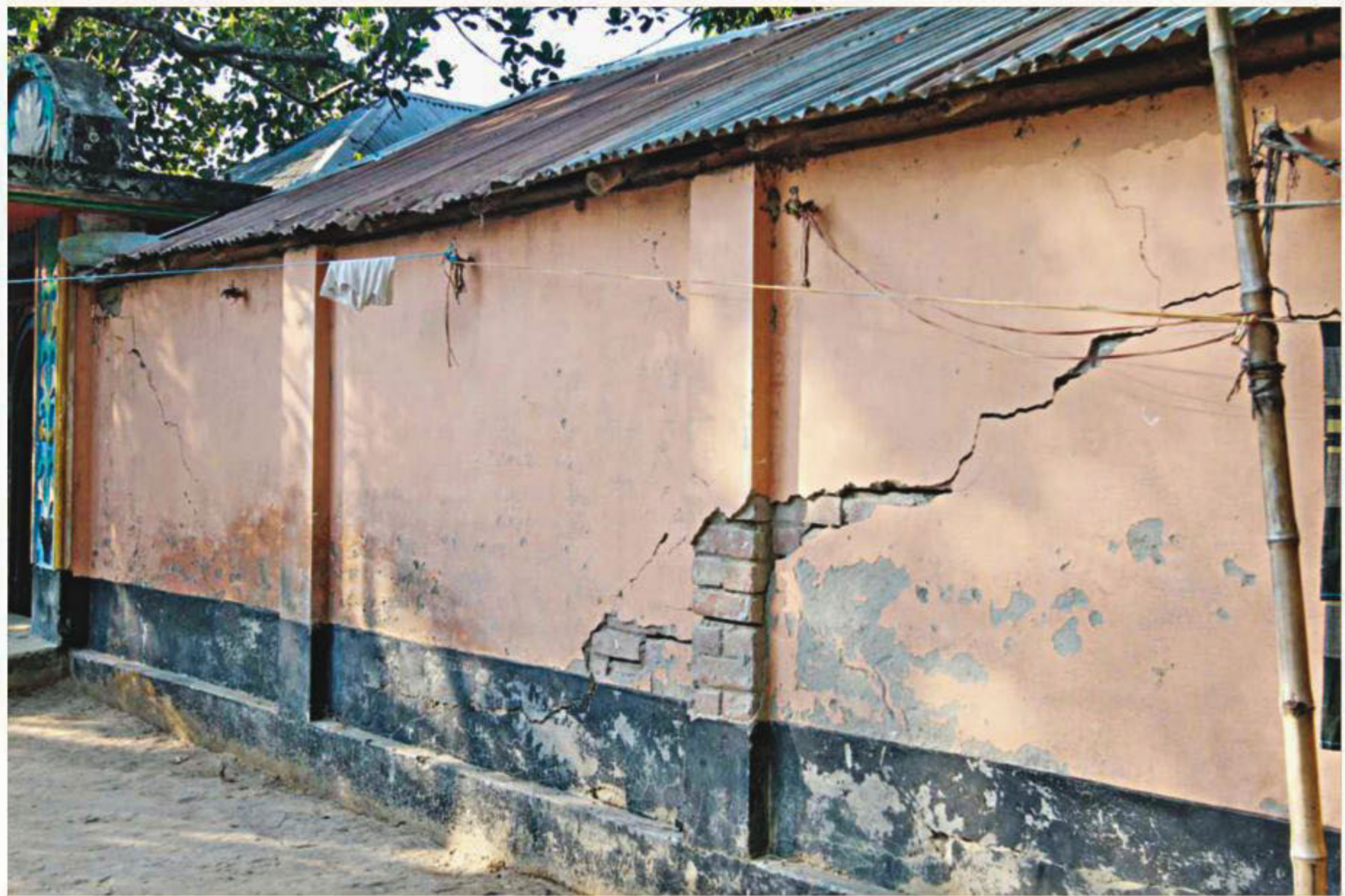
"We need to run out of the house when it starts shaking," said Mojibul Mondal of Bashpukur village. Ponds of the area have also started drying up as winter approaches, he added.

A high official of BCMCL, seeking anonymity, told this correspondent that they saw fresh cracks in houses out of the zone of influence of the mine in recent times. The affected area covered around four acres, he said.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Parbatipur Tarafdar Mahmudur Rahman said he received a letter from the villagers in this regard.

Managing Director of BCMCL SMN Aurangajeb said he received a letter about the issue on Monday. They will investigate the matter and take effective measures to solve the problem.

Local lawmaker, also Minister of Primary and Mass Education Ministry Mostafizur Rahman told the mine authorities to investigate the matter.



Fresh cracks have developed in several hundred houses of eight villages near the coal mine of Barapukuria in Parbatipur upazila of Dinajpur. The photo was taken at Bashpukur village recently.

PHOTO: STAR