

Informal schools, beacon for remote Teesta char kids

S DILIP ROY with ANDREW EAGLE

For reasons of hardship, be they personal or purely economic, not everybody has the chance to finish school. It's an unfortunate circumstance that can lead to lifelong regret. But in the remote char (landmass emerging from riverbed areas) of the Teesta River where completing an education comes with added geographical challenge, 740 students from struggling families in 31 villages across two unions have found opportunity where there was none. Recently they have passed their Primary Terminal Examinations after attending NGO-established informal schools.

Attracting former dropout students from struggling families, the 31 locally-called 'Shikhon' schools are run by a local NGO, RDRS Bangladesh, with technical assistance from international NGO Save the Children and funding from the European Union. The schools were first established in the Teesta char

lands in 2013 and have proved popular. "Within the approximately thirty square kilometres of Teesta River char lands there are only three government primary schools," says local resident Nazrul Islam, 48, from Char Harin Chawra village in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila. "These three schools can't cater to all the education needs of our children. Many students had to drop out before finishing their study. But now, at the NGO-run informal schools, they were finally able to complete their primary education."

"I was enrolled up to Class II in a government primary school," says student Sahanur Islam, 13, from Char Khalaighat village. "I couldn't continue because the school was four kilometres from our home. Luckily I got the chance to study in the informal school."

"The school runs for four or five hours every day," says Rina Begum, 35, the sole teacher responsible for the informal school at Char

Banshdah village. "I make sure all the students are present. They shouldn't miss a single class." About 30 students study at Rina's school. "I started teaching them from Class II," she says.

"The informal schools have been good at providing education for the children in our community," says Mostaque Ali, 48, a school parent from Char Khalaighat. "We hope the project will continue."

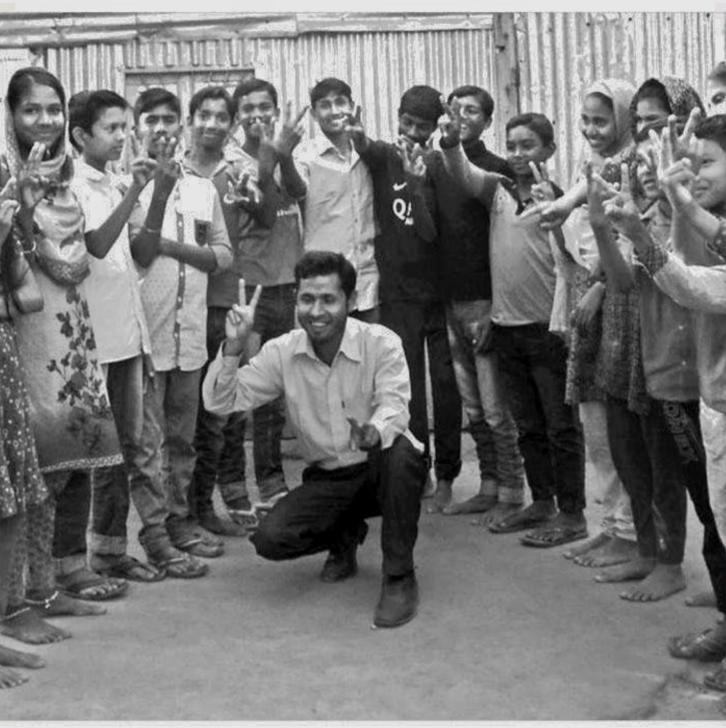
Shariful Islam, a field coordinator of the project says that after meeting with local communities to raise initial awareness, enthusiasm for education local children was evident. "The char-dwellers are very much interested that their children should have an informal school option available," he says.

Programme manager of RDRS Bangladesh, Maidul Islam, notes that the first phase of the project is now complete. "We needed to manage an exam centre in the char areas too as the students face difficulty if

they have to travel the around ten kilometres to the mainland to attend their exams," he suggests. He hopes RDRS Bangladesh will be able to implement the second phase of the project, dependent on funding availability.

Lalmonirhat district's primary education officer, Nabez Uddin Sarker, agrees that exam centres should optimally be available on the shoals. "I will try to manage this after discussing the issue with our local administration," he says. "The RDRS Bangladesh informal schools have played a vital role to educate char-dwelling children. Their efforts should be supported."

In the meantime, the first batch of Primary School Certificate graduates from the informal schools has something new to look forward to: high school. RDRS Bangladesh is currently assisting in securing their enrolments.



Students accompanied by an official flash V-sign on the premises of 'Shikhon' school, run by local NGO RDRS Bangladesh with the technical assistance from international NGO Save the Children, in backward Harin Chawra area of Lalmonirhat sadar upazila.

Jamalpur gets digital land record system

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is optimistic that no one will remain homeless or landless anymore in the country, said Land Minister Shamsur Rahman Sharif while introducing the Integrated Digital Land Records System (IDRLS) in Jamalpur yesterday.

About 50 thousand families would come under government's housing schemes within a short time, he added.

The automated system, a pilot project under the Access to Information (a2i) Programme of Prime Minister's Office, will help people to get land-related information online without hassles.

Speakers said successful completion of IDRLS will also reduce dispute over land related issues as well.

Later, land record-copies of 13 moujas were distributed among a number of people in Sadar upazila.



Prothom Alo Bandhusava distributes blankets among the mentally challenged children at a school meant for the disadvantaged kids in Patuakhali town on Wednesday.

Sharif 'best edn officer'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Former Kulaura primary education officer Md Sharif-ul-Islam in the district has won the national Best Upazila Education Officer award this year for his contribution to the development of primary education.

A government board selected Sharif for this prestigious award as the official, with his motivation style and charisma, has been a "role model" for the teaching community in the upazila, said Tahmina Khatun, deputy director of primary education depart-

ment in Sylhet.

The Daily Star published under headlines "A man with a mission for the school children" on him on October 3 last year.

Md Sharif-ul-Islam is working as an education officer (innovation) in Directorate of Primary Education Office in Dhaka.

In 2013, Sharif was first posted in the upazila.

Sharif yesterday said the prime minister will hand over the award in the capital on January 29.

He also thanked The Daily Star for publishing the story on him.

FUEL THEFT 2 railway staff suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two employees of Bangladesh Railway in Parbatipur upazila were suspended yesterday on charge of stealing fuel from train engines, railway officials said.

They are Abdul Kader Zilani, a locomotive master, and his assistant Mizanur Rahman.

OC of Parbatipur Government Railway Police Abdul Motin said police seized 240 litres of diesel when the locomotive master and his assistant were siphoning the fuel from a rail engine at Rahmatnagar on Saturday.

Later, the authorities of Western Railway Zone suspended them with effect from Tuesday. A one-member probe committee was formed.

Fishing nets seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Members of the coastguard seized over 2 lakh metres of illegal fishing nets from Nesarabad and Kawkhali upazilas of the district yesterday.

The nets include current net, char gara (a kind of fishing net used for catching small size fish in the river or canal bank) and bendi net.

Upazila Fisheries Officer Debashis Basar said a team of coastguards conducted raids at different spots in the Sandha and Kaliganga rivers from early morning to 2:00pm, and recovered over 2 lakh metres of illegal fishing nets from there. The fishermen fled from the spots sensing the presence of the coastguards.

The nets worth around Tk 50 lakh were burnt at the ferry terminal area in Nesarabad.

SUBSTANDARD, EXPIRED MEDICINES Clinics, pharmacies fined in two districts

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Mobile courts fined some private clinics and pharmacies in Chapainawabganj and Panchagarh towns on Wednesday, while another mobile court fined three clinics and a diagnostic centre in Natore yesterday.

A court, led by Executive Magistrate of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Sarwar Alam and Assistant Superintendent of Police AKM Enamul Karim of Rab-5 from Chapainawabganj camp, fined Sheba Clinic Tk 3 lakh, Lab One Medical Service Tk 1.5 lakh and Padma Clinic and Diagnostic Centre Tk 2.5 lakh for using date expired medicines.

The court also fined Lab One Medical Service Pharmacy and Mia Pharmacy Tk 50,000 each, and Lal Pharmacy and Jahan Pharmacy Tk 1 lakh each for selling substandard medicines made by unlicensed medicine factories.

They seized medicines worth Tk 10.5 lakh from the clinics and pharmacies.

A mobile court on Wednesday fined four pharmacies in Panchagarh town for selling date expired and contraband medicines.

The court, led by Executive Magistrate Anisur Rahman, fined the owners of Saju Drug House Tk 2 lakh, in default to suffer three months in jail; Sahera Pharmacy Tk 50,000, in default to suffer three months imprisonment; Saju Pharmacy Tk 50,000, in default to suffer three months imprisonment; and Islam Pharmacy Tk 10,000, in default to suffer two months in jail.

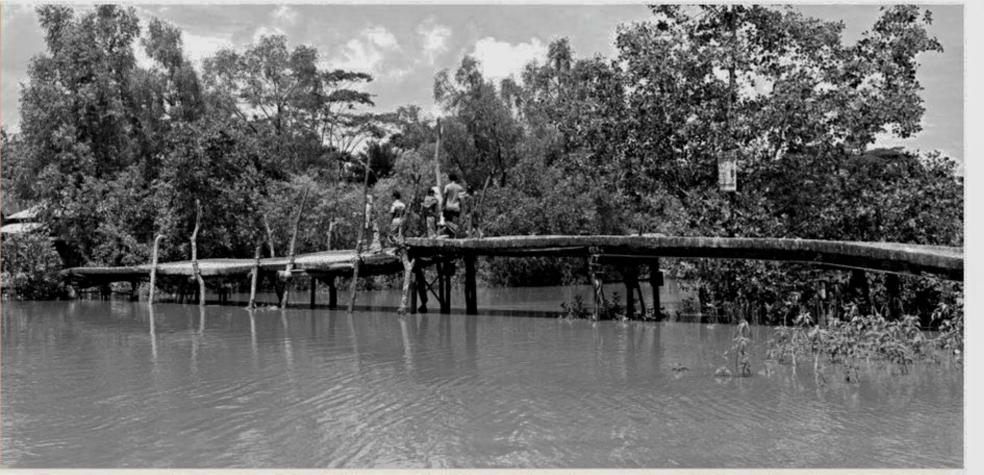
The court also seized date expired medicines from several medicine shops in Panchagarh Bazar.

Camp Commander of Rab-26 in Nilphamary Maj Khurshid Anwar was present during the drive.

A mobile court in Natore fined three clinics and a diagnostic centre yesterday.

Al-Sun Hospital, Ekota Clinic and Bismillah Clinic and Diagnostic Centre in Natore town were fined Tk 5 lakh, Tk 75,000 and Tk 1 lakh, respectively, for using date-expired medicines and chemical reagents.

Executive Magistrate of Rab Sarwar Alam led the court. Commander of Rab-5 in Natore Major Ashraf Islam and representatives from the offices of the Natore civil surgeon and the drug administration were present.



This awfully dilapidated bridge in Rangabali upazila of Patuakhali remains the lone means for locals to cross Gohinkhali canal as the authorities concerned failed to reconstruct the bridge, even after declaring the structure abandoned five years ago.

No alternative to ramshackle bridge for five years

Patuakhali LGED declared it unfit for movement in 2012

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A bridge declared abandoned by Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) five years ago poses risk to hundreds of people in Rangabali upazila as the authorities are yet to arrange any alternative for the commuters' safe movement.

Locals, finding no alternative, set wooden pillars over the damaged iron structure to use the 65-metre long and 2-metre wide Rangabali Bridge on Gohinkhali canal in the upazila.

LGED built the bridge to ease road communications between Chotobaishdia and Rangabalis unions in 1990 and since then no renovation work was done. In 2012, the authorities declared the bridge unfit for movement but finding no alternative, local people have to use it with risk of life.

Around 3000 people, especially students and traders, face trouble to go to schools and colleges and the upazila headquarters crossing the bridge, said ABM Abdul Mannan, chairman of Chotobaishdia Union Parishad (UP).

"We are incurring losses as people do not want to cross the bridge to come to Baherchar bazar that sits on Monday and Thursday every week," said Abbas Hawlader, a trader.

Abdul Maleq, headmaster of Rangabali Model High School, said at least 150 students have to come to the school by crossing the bridge with risk.

Rangabali UP Chairman Saiduzzaman Mamun said no renovation work on the bridge was done although LGED declared it unusable five years ago.

They informed the authorities concerned about the matter several times, but no steps have yet been taken, said Anamul Kabir, engineer of the upazila parishad.

Patuakhali LGED Executive Engineer Abu Saleh Md Hanif said immediate steps will be taken to renovate the bridge.

Sramik League leader killed in accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Sramik League leader in Cox's Bazar was killed when a dumper hit his motorcycle at Kolatoli bypass in the district town yesterday.

Victim Khorshed Alam, 48, was labour affairs secretary of the district Sramik League.

The accident occurred at around 9:00am on Cox's Bazar-Chittagong highway.

Quoting witnesses, district Sramik League General Secretary Shafullah Ansari said the dumper hit Khorshed's motorcycle from behind in the bypass area when he was going to the district town. He fell on the road and the dumper ran over him. The driver of the dumper fled the spot.

After the accident, agitated leaders and workers of Sramik League put up a barricade on the highway, demanding arrest of the owner and the driver of the dumper.

Superintendent of Police in Cox's Bazar Iqbal Hossain and leaders of local political parties went to the spot and tried to bring the situation under control. The mob lifted the barricade after the police officer assured the agitated people that the owner and the driver of the dumper would be arrested soon.

Police are patrolling the town to avert any untoward incident.

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Words, Phrases and Conversation (weather, habit, letters or emails, bank, clothing, feelings, purpose, illness, wishes, campus life, major, traveling, exchange rate, occupation, opinion, invitation, preference, complain, confirmation, advice, comment, concern, reservation...)
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