

Risky level crossing

Railway authorities removed two barriers one year ago

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinajpur*

A level crossing on the busy Dinajpur-Dhaka road is left wide open, posing a risk of accident since the Bangladesh Railway authorities removed both the barriers a year ago.

The level crossing is located at Biskini village under Birampur upazila in the district. Thousands of light and heavy vehicles ply this highway every day, said Roads and Highways Department officials, adding that number of vehicles usually doubles or triples before the Eid due to rush of home-bound people.

Some railway men took away both the barriers of the gate a year ago at the instruction of high officials, said Shahidul Islam, one of the three gateman at the level crossing in Birampur upazila.

Trains cross the level crossing at least eight times every day, said Shahidul.

During a visit to the spot on Wednesday, the correspondent found gateman Dukhu Mia standing in the middle of two tracks of the level crossing. He was closely monitoring the traffic on the highway and also trying to guess how far the train was.

"The train was scheduled to cross the level crossing at 2:45pm, but it is yet to arrive although it is 3:10pm," said Shahidul, adding that he has to somehow manage the

traffic on the highway during passing of the trains.

It is difficult to manage traffic at night, said the gateman.

Besides, the Bangladesh Railway telephone at the gate is out of order for the last two years. With that phone I could know the position of the train," said Shahidul.

Locals alleged that they are yet to know why the authorities of Pakshey Railway took away the barriers of this busy highway a year ago.

"I do not know why they took away those barriers. It's a busy road and if anything goes wrong here, the BR officials will be responsible," said Md Kuddus, a resident of the area.

Situation might become worse due to reckless driving while passing the busy spot during the rush of homebound people for celebrating Eid, said the locals.

Drivers of vehicles prefer to take the highway as it shorter route to go to Bogra, Gaibandha, Joypurhat and Dhaka as well. But the level crossing is left open without barriers, said Rafiqul Islam, a bus driver of Dinajpur-Dhaka route.

Divisional Transportation Officer in Pakshey of Western Railway Zone Md Shakhawat Zamil Mohosin said the barriers would be set up, but it would not be possible before Eid.



This busy level crossing on Dinajpur-Dhaka highway at Biskini village in Birampur upazila of Dinajpur remains highly vulnerable to accidents as the Bangladesh Railway authorities removed the barriers on its both sides one year ago. PHOTO: STAR

Ban on brokers at Pirganj UHC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *back from Rangpur*

The authorities of Pirganj Upazila Health Complex in Rangpur have imposed a restriction on brokers and employees of different private clinics and diagnostic centres in the upazila from entering the health complex.

The move was made as brokers of those private clinics and centres move freely inside the health complex and lure patients to their hospitals.

Upazila Family Planning Officer Dr Mokhlesur Rahman issued the order through a letter on Monday.

Dulal Mia, 45, who had a stomach pain, said he fell prey to a broker and spent Tk 1,000 for diagnosis at a private clinic, but did not get any better. "I then got admitted to the UHC and recovered in a week," he said.

A broker said they get Tk 150 for each patient.

Middlemen, staff and laboratory assistants of the private clinics often lock in altercation among themselves at the UHC compound, which hampers treatment and services.

Father seeks to know son's whereabouts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kushtia*

Plain-clothes men picked up a schoolboy on Friday night, 30 minutes after he got release from Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) office in the district town, Kazi Santu, father of victim Kazi Shahed, told a press conference at Kushtia Press Club on Tuesday night.

"I want to know who picked up my son and his whereabouts," Santu of Bheramara told the journalists.

"A team of Rab-12 in Kushtia picked up my son on June 15 to interrogate him about the murder of another schoolboy Sabbir that took place in Bheramara on April 13. The Rab officials handed my son to me about 8:00pm on June 16, he said.

Santu alleged that as they boarded a CNG-run auto-rickshaw at Mazampur in

the town about 8:30pm to go home in Bheramara, two plain-clothes men in a microbus asked him to hand over his son to them. The plain-clothes men carrying arms forced his son to the vehicle and left immediately, he added. When asked they refused to give their identity, he said.

Santu instantly rushed to the Rab office and informed them of the matter.

The Rab men advised him to file a general diary (GD) with police.

Accordingly, he went to Kushtia Model Police Station on the night, police, however, asked him to come in the morning, he said. Police recorded a GD on the matter on June 17.

Superintendent of Police SM Mehedi Hasan said Kushtia Model police have been asked to investigate the matter immediately.

Two cousins drown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Tangail*

Two minor girls drowned in a pond in Mirzapur upazila yesterday.

The deceased are Morium Akter, 10, daughter of Yasin Mia, and her cousin Fatema Akter, 7, daughter of Jamal Mia, of Baniara village.

Family members said the two drowned while they were taking bath in a pond adjacent to their houses yesterday noon.

Local people rescued the duo and sent them to Kumudini Hospital where the doctors declared them dead.

2 kids saved from abduction bid

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Two kids were saved from abduction attempt in Jhenidah and Meherpur yesterday and the day before.

Locals caught Shafiquddin, 46, son of late Imdad Mondol of Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia, while he was kidnapping a kid at Chandpara village under Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah on Wednesday noon, reports our correspondent.

The rescued is Sajani Khatun, 5, daughter of Jahangir Hossain of the village.

Locals beat Shafiquddin and handed him over to police, said Aminul Islam, OC of Kaliganj Police Station.

Our Kushtia Correspondent reports: A woman abducted Sadia Khatun, 7, daughter of Yeasin Ali of Nawapara village in Gangni upazila of Meherpur about 6:45pm on Tuesday.

Hearing announcement, locals became watchful and the abductor left the girl at Bahatpara DC Eco Park. The girl was rescued at 7:30pm," said Anwar Hossain, OC of Gangni Police Station.

Afterwards, police launched a drive in the district and arrested three women allegedly involved in abductions.



Border Guard Bangladesh with smuggled Indian cattle that they seized in Tanguar Haor area of Tahirpur upazila under Sunamganj on June 2. PHOTO: STAR

Smuggling on the rise in Sunamganj haors

MINTU DESHWARA with ANDREW EAGLE

Smuggling is on the rise on the wake of the flash floods that wrought havoc in the Sunamganj haor region. Border Guard Bangladesh reports regular cattle smuggling, with locals who have failed to avail themselves of post-flood relief or employment now engaged with syndicates in the illicit cross-border trade.

"After the flood I didn't find a job," says a farmer from Anandanagar village in the Tanguar Haor area of Tahirpur upazila, who doesn't wish to give his name. "Labour is now very cheap in this area and it's really difficult to maintain my seven-member family even when labouring work is available. Income from smuggling is very good. I thought a lot about it before I decided to engage in smuggling; ultimately it's a question of food for my family."

According to the farmer the border areas of Sunamganj are particularly suitable for smuggling due to the several cross-border rivers. Other locals

and border guards likewise identify the border areas of Taherpur and Sunamganj sadar upazilas as relatively 'safe zones' for smugglers, who are taking advantage of the disruption caused by the floods.

On 2 June 2017 alone Border Guard Bangladesh seized five smuggled cattle worth around Tk 1.5 lakhs from the Lawergor frontier while 15 cattle valued at around Tk 4.5 lakhs were seized in the Ambari borderlands.

"We have seized smuggled goods, especially cattle, worth around half a crore taka in the last month," says BGB commanding officer Lt Col Nasir Uddin Ahmed. "We are doing our best to prevent smuggling and have been conducting special raids in recent days; but because of paddy losses in the recent floods smuggling has added appeal for many locals."

"Flood victims have not received proper relief assistance," says Bindu Talukdar, member secretary of a local community association. "They've lost faith in that process. They see smuggling as a way to survive. Irregularities

in the distribution of relief assistance should be addressed to reduce the smuggling."

Tahirpur upazila's chairman Kamruzzaman Kamrul similarly points to the unprecedented crop losses as a driver of increased smuggling. "Most farmers depend on their Boro harvest as the single biggest annual harvest," he says. "For many families, Boro paddy proceeds cover their living expenses for the whole year. With that crop destroyed by natural calamity this year, many families are in economic crisis." He also notes relief distribution anomalies arising from corruption and nepotism are exacerbating the smuggling problem.

According to the district administration, Boro paddy was planted on more than 2 lakh hectares of land across the district's 154 haor areas, with over 1.66 lakh hectares damaged in the floods, affecting around 3.25 lakh families. But the government VGF relief programme allots Tk 500 and 30 kilograms of rice per month to only 1.68 lakh affected families.

Newlywed woman found hanging

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinajpur*

A newlywed woman was found hanging in Birganj upazila of the district yesterday.

Mahub Alam, husband of the victim, went into hiding soon after the incident.

Deceased Jyotsna Akter, 25, married Mahub of Rangpur's Gangachara upazila three months ago.

Locals said the couple had been living at a rented home at Bijoypur village in Birganj upazila of the district. Villagers found Jyotsna hanging from the ceiling of her room around 3:00pm.

Her husband went out of the house around 9:00am, they said.

Being informed, police recovered the body and sent it to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Mosle Ul Gani, inspector of Birganj Police Station, said they are suspecting the incident as murder.

Villagers said the couple often locked in altercations over dowry.

Under-construction bridge collapses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Manikganj*

A portion of a 60-foot-long bridge collapsed on Sunday after being cast at Panjan-Khara village in Sadar upazila of the district.

The bridge is being built on the Dhaleshwari river at the village adjacent to Garpara Bangladesh Hat in Garpara union.

Project Implementation Office of the upazila is implementing the construction under the disaster management project at a cost of Tk 57 lakh.

Two contractors -- district Jubo League leader, also local Union Parishad Chairman, Abu Zafar, and upazila Awami League General Secretary Afsar Uddin Sarkar -- are working jointly under the construction firm M/S JJ Engineering and Construction.

Locals said the bridge broke suddenly around 12:30pm after completion of its casting. It collapsed due to use of poor quality bamboos and other materials in the cast, they alleged.

Afsar said the bridge is still under construction, adding that it collapsed because of the rain and slipperiness of the supporting bamboo pillars. No poor quality material was used, he said, adding that the loss could be around Tk 3 lakh.

Project Implementation Officer of the upazila Ambia Begum Shilpi said the accident happened due to the use of weak bamboos as support pillars in the cast.

A 5-member investigation committee headed by the upazila engineer has been formed, she added.



A portion of the 60-foot-long bridge on Dhaleshwari river at Panjan-Khara village in Manikganj Sadar upazila collapsed due to heavy rain and slipperiness of the supporting bamboo-made pillars. PHOTO: STAR