

Study at risk of their lives

Disability school classroom has electricity pole in its midst

EAM ASADUZZAMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Established in 2001 on 33 decimals of land at Kalikpur village in Nilphamari's Kishoreganj upazila, the Kalikapur Buddhi Protobindhi School is the only education facility in the area that caters to the needs of children with mental impairment and intellectual disability. The school has a lot to offer; but it suffers from a unique problem. Inside one classroom the Rural Electrification Board has a risky electricity pole, leaving students who are among the most vulnerable children in the community, at great risk.

"We have to remain vigilant all the time," says the school's headmaster Mukul Hossen, "to keep students away from the electricity pole. A few days ago, on a rainy day, one boy was electrocuted, but luckily we were able to save him."

The headmaster says that due to a shortage of land for the school, there is currently no viable alternative to using the classroom built in 2013, with the electricity pole in its midst. It's a situation exacerbated by the fact that some school land is occupied by influential locals.

"A few months ago, I requested the Rural Electrification Board to remove the pole in the interests of protecting our children while they learn, but no step has yet been taken," he says.

The school currently has 102 students enrolled in four study categories: play, pre-primary, primary and self-help skill devel-

opment training. It was recognised by the social welfare department in 2008, and its approximately ten teachers are paid from National Disabled People Development Foundation funds.

Naturally the presence of the electricity pole has parents worried. "Our son studies in pre-school there," says Sujon Mia. "We are always anxious to send him to school because that electricity pole carries live wires and it's in the middle of the classroom!"

The president of the school management committee who is also the upazila nirbahi officer in Kishoreganj, Mehdi Hasan, says he has asked the rural electricity board to remove the pole without delay. "They agreed," he says. "I also intend to take steps to recover all of the school's land."

The assistant general manager of the Rural Electrification Board's sub-zonal office in Kishoreganj, Kamal Hossain, says he is aware of the issue. "I have received an application from the school authority to move the pole, and now we are trying to find a way to do so, in consultation with our higher authorities."

In the meantime teachers do their best to keep students away from the pole. The Daily Star observed children holding and touching the pole while at play, until a teacher ran over to direct them to a safer place. But it's hardly possible for teachers to guard the pole all the time. When they are busy with teaching or otherwise distracted, one thing that's for sure is that children will be children.

A teacher moves a boy to safety after the latter was about to touch an electric pole inside Kalikapur Buddhi Pratibandhi Bidyalaya in Nilphamari as it sometimes gets electrified during rain. Inset, the learners at the school meant for children with mental impairment on the school premises.

PHOTO: EAM ASADUZZAMAN



Madrasa guard stabbed dead in Naogaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Unidentified criminals stabbed a night guard of a madrasa in Manda upazila of Naogaon on Monday night, police said.

The victim Monsur Sardar, 35, was a night guard of Bhalain Islamia Darul Ulum Kaumi Hafizia Madrasa in the upazila and son of Abdul Malek of Bhalain village, said Anisur Rahman, Officer-in-Charge of Manda Police Station.

Police said the madrasa is situated near Monsur's house. Some unidentified criminals attacked him at around 11:30pm on Monday and stabbed him with sharp weapons.

Hearing Monsur's cry for help, locals took him to Manda Upazila Health Complex. Later, he was referred to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. He succumbed to his injuries on the way to the hospital yesterday.

Mozidur Rahman, younger brother of the deceased, filed a murder case with Manda Police Station yesterday.

Police suspect that personal enmity was the reason for the murder, the OC said.



A brick kiln burns firewood and tyres, polluting the environment. The photo was taken at ZMB Bricks at Barunagaon village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila recently. PHOTO: STAR

Brick kilns defy law

Only 15, out of 67, brick kilns have set up environment-friendly 'zig-zag' technology in Thakurgaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Many brick kiln owners in the district are illegally burning wood and tyres instead of coal for making bricks, violating the Burning of Bricks (Control) Act.

Besides, most brick fields in the district are being operated without no-objection certificate and clearance certificate, taking advantage of lax monitoring by the authorities concerned.

A total of 67 brick kilns are in operation in all five upazilas of the district. Of them, 52 are in operation with permanent chimneys while only fifteen have been set up with environment-friendly 'zig-zag' technology, President of Thakurgaon Brick-Kiln Owners' Association Murad Hossain said.

The poisonous smoke emitted by the chimneys is harmful not only for people but also for crops and fruit-bearing trees, villagers said.

During a recent visit to different brick kilns in the district, this correspondent saw wood and tyres being burnt, emitting black smoke and polluting the environment in those areas. Huge quantities of wood and tyres were piled up on the premises of the kilns or near them.

Radha-Usha brick field and MB Bricks have also set up sawmills near their brick fields for cutting the logs into convenient sizes for burning, locals said.

Tonnes of woods are burnt in the kilns daily, workers said.

Abdul Jalil, a worker of a sawmill near Radha-Usha brick field, said one Dulal of

the area is the owner only in name and it is run by Ram Babu, owner of Radha-Usha brick field.

Ram Babu said, "I am not involved in operating a sawmill and wood is not burnt in my brick field."

Owner of KMB brick field Mosharul Islam said firewood has to be burnt along with coal to operate a brick kiln.

Jiten Chandra of Barunagaon village in Sadar upazila said several branches of three mango trees in his orchard died due to smoke emitted by JSB Bricks. The owner has promised to give compensation and made a fence on the eastern side of the orchard to protect the trees.

Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Extension Maududul Islam said the smoke will harm the crops and trees if the chimneys are less than the required height for burning bricks.

Nejarat Deputy Collector and also Executive Magistrate Abdul Momen told this correspondent that they were discussing the matter to find a solution.

Assistant Director of Rangpur Department of Environment Md Akhtaruzzaman said it is strictly prohibited to burn wood and tyres in the brick fields. They will take action against those who violate the rules, he added.

Inspector Kazi Saifuddin of the same department, who supervises the environmental issues of the district, could not say how many brick field owners have been given no-objection certificate and clearance certificate.

3 journo sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Three journalists in the district have been sued on charge of extortion.

The accused are Jobayer Hossain, Rangabali upazila correspondent of the daily Manab Zamin, Taimun Islam of Dainik Sangbad and Md Jabir Hossain of daily Naya Diganta.

Abdul Maleq Pada of Dakkhin Panpattee village in Galachipa upazila filed the case with Galachipa Judicial Court on Monday.

The court later asked Patuakhali DB police to submit a report within July 29 after proper investigation.

According to the case statement, the plaintiff and some other people run a country boat (locally called kheyas) between Dakkhin Panpattee in Galachipa upazila and Koralia under Rangabali upazila to cross the Agunmukha river.

All three accused along with six other men boarded two kheyas M L Asik and M L Halim-2 on June 26 and demanded Tk 2 lakh from the kheyas owners.

The accused snatched Tk 3,000 from both kheyas. They also threatened to stop plying of the kheyas if the owners did not pay the extortion money.

Refuting the allegation, Taimun Islam said Abdul Malek filed the case after a report titled 'Extra fare to cross river, passenger harass' was published in Sangbad on June 29.

Several thousand fish poisoned to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Unidentified people poisoned several thousand fish to death in a pond in Kishoreganj upazila of the district on Monday night.

Sohrab Ali, 55, owner of the fish farm Adarsha Matsya Khamar in Keshba village, said he has been cultivating fish in the one-acre pond for a long time. The loss will be about Tk 8 lakh, he added.

"This year, I released 10 maunds of fish fry of different kinds of fish like rui, katol, mrigel and carp. I was expecting to get a good output within a few months as I took good care and used good quality fish feed," he said.

Sohrab said yesterday that he went to the pond as usual after the Fazr prayers to feed the fish.

"To my horror, I noticed that several thousand dead fish were floating in the pond. When I went closer, I got the odour of poison," he added.

Noor Md Sona Mia, 23, eldest son of Sohrab, also an honours student of Nilphamari Government College said, "My father took Tk 3 lakh as loan from commercial banks and NGOs, and he was expecting to get a good profit this year, but all our hopes were shattered."

Sohrab said in a choked voice, "Now I don't know how I will repay the loan with interest and bear the educational expense of my children."

He, however, could not say who might have killed the fish as he does not have any enemy in the area.

Upazila Fisheries Officer Altab Hossain said, "Sohrab is a government enlisted fish farmer and I visited his farm a number of times to provide him with suggestions."

Sohrab filed a case with Kishoreganj Police Station regarding the matter, accusing unknown people.

Officer-in-Charge of the police station Bazlur Rashid said they suspected that thieves poured poison in the pond and took the big fish, leaving behind the small ones, before escaping.

"We shall take strong action against the culprits," the OC added.

Fruit cultivation sees rapid growth in Pirojpur

Mango, litchi, malta, jujube orchards replace traditional crops

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Only a few years ago, people in the district would depend on other areas of the country for different high quality tasty varieties of fruits including mango, litchi and malta.

But the situation sees much change now, thanks to the initiative of a good number of people in different upazilas of the southern district.

Seven years ago, Amolesh Roy from Durgapur village under Pirojpur Sadar upazila began cultivating sweet malta of Bari-1 variety. Now there are 29 hectares of malta orchards in the district, mostly in Pirojpur Sadar upazila.

"Malta cultivation is very profitable. Following me, people in different areas have started growing the fruit," said Amolesh.

Now different varieties of high quality mangoes including amropali, lengra and fazli grow aplenty in Pirojpur. There are mango orchards on 691 hectares of land. Most of these are in Mathbaria, Nazirpur and Nesarabad upazilas.

"In 2010, I began mango cultivation on a land that was earlier used for paddy farming. I was inspired after seeing a mango orchard in Jessore," said Sikandar Ali, a fruit grower of Baniary village in Nazirpur. He has 400 mango trees of different varieties. Although local variety of jujube, locally



known as kul, would grow here, for around ten years different high yielding varieties of jujube like Bari-1, Apple Kul, Narikel Kul, Baokul are now grown commercially.

Now locally grown jujube fulfils the demand of the area.

"Jujube cultivation is more profitable than paddy. People of this upazila are getting involved with cultivation of different

fruits," said Harolal Boral of Tarabunia village in Nazirpur.

Now there are jujube orchards on 258 hectares of land in the district. Most of the jujube orchards are in Nazirpur upazila.

The locally grown fruits have special demand as no harmful chemical is used to grow these, fruit growers said.

The district bears bright prospect for

fruit cultivation as the fertile loamy soil is suitable for the purpose, said Md Abul Hossain Talukder, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Pirojpur.

"Besides, sweet water is available here. We inspire people to grow fruits instead of planting wood producing trees," he said.