



Historic Munshibari, a Nawab Sirajuddaula era administrative house in Ulipur upazila of Kurigram, is losing its grandeur due to lack of maintenance.

PHOTO: STAR

Ulipur's historic Munshibari in desperate need of maintenance

ABDUL WAHED with ANDREW EAGLE

Founded during the reign of Nawab Sirajuddaula, the attractive administrator's house, the Munshibari in Dharnibari union of Kurigram's Ulipur upazila is a draw card for anyone wishing to explore the area's rich historical heritage. But due to a lack of maintenance the future of the 250-year-old iconic building is uncertain.

The property, which features domed architecture and includes a playhouse, barnyard, Durga and Biswanu temples along with a dining room and kitchen, all of which are extensively damaged, has a colourful history.

It was established by Bonwari Munshi, a surveyor employed by the nawab who first arrived in the area on a hunting expedition along the now dry Bamnee River. Bonwari liked the lay of the land, it is said, and legend has it he was impressed to see a frog eating a snake there. Upon his return to the nawab Bonwari successfully requested a land allocation for himself.

Bonwari was childless so inheritance first passed to his adopted son Binod Lal who served under Laxmi Narayan. Binod too was childless;

the munshibari passed for a second time to an adopted son, Brojendra Lal, who had two daughters. When the elder daughter was married and moved to Kolkata, with the younger daughter having died at a young age, Brojendra's wife Asharatha Munshi followed tradition and adopted a son Bihari Lal Munshi to take responsibility for the munshibari.

After the Liberation War in 1971, Bihari Lal also moved to Kolkata, and the property came under the care of, at first, an NGO activist, Saifur Mia and later, one Arif Mia. Arif Mia's claim to the property caused controversy. There was a heated dispute that infamously ended when Arif Mia drew his gun and fired, killing two local students.

It was in 1987 that the union revenue office took over the main building, where it is still housed.

"Our Munshibari is an historical asset for the whole Kurigram district," says local Lutfar Rahman, 65. "People from many places visit this site. It should be restored and maintained for future generations."

"Two original flowering trees, a shada chapa and a gandhoraj tree are still here," says Panko

Chandra Mohanto, 72, the Munshibari temple priest. "But many of the structures are either damaged or going to be damaged. The metal stairs leading to the second floor and the metal veranda railings have already been stolen. I have spoken with the Dharnibari union council chairman and Ulipur's upazila nirbahi officer about the importance of protecting the property, but no maintenance has been undertaken."

"The Munshibari is an historical site in the district and it needs preservation," comments Ulipur's upzila nirbahi officer Shafiqul Islam. "We will try to ensure none of its structures deteriorate further." He says he hopes some preservation work can be embarked upon this year under the auspices of initiatives such as the Food for Work programme.

Such restoration work cannot start a moment too soon: moss has colonised several parts of the building and the ceilings leak when it rains. Yet the Munshibari remains important to the area's community life. The Gobinda temple is active daily, the pond is used by locals and during Durga Puja a fair is traditionally held on the munshibari's grounds.

Child brutally beaten on pumpkin theft charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

An eight-year-old boy was severely tortured on suspicion of stealing a pumpkin at Halderkhali village of Rajapur upazila under the district on Sunday.

The victim, Md Sagir, 8, son of Abdus Sobahan of Halderkhali village, is a Class III student.

"Our neighbour Habib was collecting pumpkins from his garden on Sunday when I was going to school beside the garden. Habib and his two companions caught me in the evening that day as I was returning home from a playground," said Sagir, now undergoing treatment at Rajapur Health Complex.

"They started beating me and asked me about the pumpkin. As I said I did not know about the pumpkin, they took me on a bridge and tried to throw me into the canal.

"I strongly held a pillar of the bridge and cried for help. Then some people came to rescue me," said Sagir.

Sagir is out of danger although his



Torture victim Sagir at Rajapur Upazila Health Complex in Jhalakathi.

PHOTO: STAR

hands are badly affected, said Md Abul Khayer Rassel, resident medical officer of the health complex.

A sister-in-law of Habib said, "Sagir earlier stole some goods from our house and he stole pumpkin on Sunday. But he was not tortured much. He was only slapped a little.

The allegation of torture on the boy is under investigation and a case will be filed after completing the probe, said Sheikh Munirul Ghash, officer in charge of Rajapur Police Station.

Body found floating in Akhaura canal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

The body of an unidentified youth, aged around 28, was found floating in a canal in Akhaura upazila of the district yesterday.

Officer-in-Charge of Akhaura Police Station Mossarrof Hossain Tarafder said locals informed police about the body in the canal near Kharampur Kolla Shaheed Majar Sharif. Police recovered the body and sent to it Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy, he added.

Police suspect that miscreants killed him two or three days ago. The deceased could not be identified as the body was decomposed.

Even a little rain leaves campuses swamped

Two schools in Dinajpur's Birganj upazila are prone to frequent inundation during monsoon

KONGKON KARMAKER with ANDREW EAGLE

All it takes in Birganj upazila of Dinajpur is a little rain, a few millimetres of precipitation are sufficient, to submerge education. Two campuses, of a primary and a secondary school, are prone to inundation, especially during the monsoon months. On rainy days, the more than one thousand students of Jharbari High School and Jharbari Government Primary School have to manage as they can, waiting for waters to subside.

"Our school uniforms get wet from the stagnant water," says class-four student Sampa Akter. "We often catch coughs and colds. Sometimes our textbooks and notebooks get wet too."

"The stagnant water at our school is really polluted and smelly," says Md Nasim, who

studies in class ten at the high school.

It's a recurring problem. "For the last four years we have suffered from this nuisance, even with just a small amount of rain," says Jharbari Government Primary School headmaster Zahid Hossain, who urged the local administration to take action. "It's very discouraging for the children's education."

After The Daily Star published a report on the same problem last year, the then upazila nirbahi officer of Birganj initiated the construction of a drain to deal with the excess water around the two schools. But the new drain hasn't helped much, school authorities say.

The local chairman of Sotogram union council meanwhile says the issue will be discussed at the upcoming upazila-level monthly meeting in July.



Students waded through the flooded ground of Jharbari High School and Jharbari Government Primary School in Birganj upazila of Dinajpur as the area sees waterlogging even after a moderate rain.

PHOTO: STAR



Fishermen in Hatempur village under Pathorghata upazila of Barguna repair fishing nets before heading for the Bay to catch hilsa fish. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

Hilsa scarcity worries fishers in Patuakhali, Barguna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Scarcity of hilsa fish is worrying fishermen of the coastal areas in Patuakhali and Barguna this season.

Over 500 fishing boats from the two districts sailed for the deep sea after the end of the ban on hilsa catching on June 30. The period July to October is considered as the peak time for hilsa fishing, but this year the amount of fish is not up to their expectation.

Ponu Majhee, 45, of fishing trawler FB Bhai-bone of Hatempur village under Pathorghata upazila of Barguna, said they sailed to the Bay for fishing three times after June 30, but did not get enough fish.

"In the last trip we got fish worth only Tk 70,000, but over Tk 1.25 lakh

expenditure is needed per trip, so we have to face loss," he added.

Abdul Jabbar Mia, 40, a fisherman of Mohipur under Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali, said, "We went to the sea with 14 fishermen two weeks ago and came back to the shore after 12 days. We got only Tk 54,000 by selling the two maunds of hilsa fish we caught, but we had to spend around Tk 80,000 for the trip."

"During the same period last year, we caught 25 to 30 maunds of hilsa fish per trip," Jabbar added.

Abu Hanif, a fisherman of Galachipa upazila, said, "We have been catching hilsa for about 25 years, but have never seen such a crisis of the popular fish as in this season. We are not paying back the loan which we

took from our mohajon due to the scarcity of hilsa fish this season."

Khan Md Habib, a wholesaler of hilsa fish, also a mohajon (moneylender) of Pathorghata fish landing station, said, "We had hoped that a good quantity of hilsa fish would be netted this season as the weather is very favourable for hilsa catching, but in vain."

A fish weighing 650 grams to 950 grams is selling at Tk 35,000 to Tk 36,500 per maund, and fish weighing one kg is selling at Tk 50,000 to Tk 55,000 per maund, he added.

Ansar Uddin Mollah of the fish traders' association in Alipur, a fish landing station under Kalapara upazila, said fishermen are coming back with nearly empty trawlers as the catch of hilsa is very poor this season.

PUST FACTIONAL CLASH

BCL expels five

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) yesterday expelled five of its Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) unit leaders for their involvement in Monday's factional clash on the campus.

The BCL central committee decided to expel them on Sunday following the internal clash.

Those expelled are PUST unit BCL vice presidents Yeasir Arafat, Mahmud Chowdhury Ashif and Abdullah Al Maruf, joint secretary Mahmud Kamal Tuhin and organising secretary Sirajul Islam. They were given 48 hours to explain why they should not be expelled permanently from the party.

Earlier, two BCL factions of PUST fought pitched battles on the campus for around five hours from 8:00am on Monday over control of Bangabandhu Residential Hall. The rowdy BCL men also vandalised two rooms of the dormitory.

The campus turned into a battlefield and academic activities were disrupted during the clash.

"After publishing of a report in the media, BCL central unit president and secretary general expelled the five leaders for their involvement in Monday's incident. They were asked to explain why they should not be expelled from the party within 48 hours," Shahed Siddique Shanto, president of PUST unit BCL, told this correspondent.

The BCL official website uploaded the expulsion order on Tuesday and also informed the PUST BCL unit officially, he added.

Meanwhile, the expelled BCL leaders told journalists that they were victims of a conspiracy.

"I was not involved in Monday's incident. I was expelled as the central leaders were misled," Sirajul Islam said.

A tense situation is prevailing in PUST since the clash, but academic activities are running normally, said Assistant Director (Public Relations) of PUST Faruq Hussain Choudhury.