

## MAILBOX

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### Set up a public medical college in Munshiganj

The government is committed to providing healthcare services to people in both rural and urban areas. But it has become difficult as doctors are not willing to serve in the health centres located in rural areas. This problem has been persisting for long. The problem cannot be addressed properly as we are yet to produce a good number of qualified physicians. It is therefore necessary to set up public medical colleges at district levels to address this ever-intensifying problem.

Munshiganj is one of the closest districts to the capital, Dhaka. One can reach Munshiganj town within one and a half hours by road, whereas it takes more than two hours to travel from one end of the Dhaka metropolis to the other end. A good number of industrial units are operating on both sides of the Dhaka-Munshiganj highway. As such, Munshiganj will be a suitable location for a full-fledged Public Medical College to impart undergraduate and graduate

level medical education. It will undoubtedly improve the standard of health services for the people of the district and adjoining areas. Shortage of medical colleges in Bangladesh is one of the main reasons for the dearth of qualified medical practitioners.

As Munshiganj is not too far away from Dhaka, faculty members and experienced doctors and surgeons who have already settled in Dhaka will be encouraged to serve in a Medical College in Munshiganj due to the short distance.

The government should utilise this opportunity and include a medical college at Munshiganj in its list of projects so that more students in the country can get admission to study medicine and surgery. With similar medical colleges set up in districts, the quality of health care services will improve automatically.  
*Md Ashraf Hossain  
Central Bashabo  
Dhaka*

### Stop discrimination against hijras

An article titled "How effective will the anti-discrimination law be?" published in the *Star Weekend* has rightly highlighted the social isolation and discriminations faced by the third gender. The right to equality and the principle of non-discrimination is recognised by the constitution of Bangladesh. While article 27 of the Constitution states that the people of Bangladesh are equal in the eyes of the law, article 28 forbids any discrimination on the basis of race, caste, religion, sex or place of birth. Despite these constitutional assurances, social discrimination is quite widespread in Bangladesh. Hijras are part of one of the most neglected groups of our society. Some of us are afraid of them and others mock or laugh at them; some abuse them and others merely ignore them and none of us really think of them as human beings, who deserve minimum respect. We should give them a society where they can walk freely and no one will look at them in a different way. Due to continuous negligence from family, society and the state, they become aggressive and desperate to do anything



PHOTO: NIBRAS UDDIN AHMED DURLIOV

for their survival. Moreover, society's disapproval forces them to lead a life full of crimes and illegal activities. In the developed countries, people of the third gender get the same facilities as any other citizen and so they become self-dependent and contribute to the national economy. If our government establishes a

special educational institution for the hijra population, they will become self-dependent and will be able to contribute to our society. We must change our mindset and attitude towards the third gender. We should accept them.  
*Zubair Khaled Huq  
Lalmatia  
Dhaka*

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the *Star Weekend*.

### | HUMAN RIGHTS |

Dizen Tudu wasn't always a calculative person. There was a time when he could work in the field under the sweltering heat all day and still have enough energy left in him to play with his three boys at home in the evening.

A little more than a year ago, he was the sole breadwinner of his family. His boys weren't allowed to work. He would cover the extra mile alone, in order to ensure that his children could study and would not have to take any pressure.

The setting of the shanty he lives in today though paints a completely different picture. The 42-year-old Santal, who was hit with a rubber bullet in his eye on November 6 last year, focuses on saving every ounce of his energy to perform the most basic tasks.

"One of my eyes is gone. It does not function. The other one has deteriorated a bit. I can't stay in the sun for more than 30 minutes. My head heats up and I need to rest," laments Dizen, who now lives in a village nearby the mill along with his family.

"Nowadays, I don't even feel like talking. It takes too much energy and I feel tired. This is all because of the bullet that hit me. I think it has affected my brain. Have a look. You can still see the splinters on my forehead and my face," he says while tilting his head.

Dizen's wife, Morses Tudu, has since been compelled to take charge of the family. It hasn't been easy.

"My family eats once a day. Since he can't work, I have to travel far looking for work and then I have to come home and take care of the family as well. It's difficult, but who else will do it?" she asks.

Most of the Santals used to work as day labourers. However, according to them, ever since the attack on November 6, many locals haven't been interested in giving them jobs, which has forced them to travel farther in a bid to earn money. Most of the Santals, as a result, have been depending upon aid that they have been receiving from the NGOs. The government, they allege, haven't done much.

Their dire situation is best described by Morses: "This is a free country and I want my freedom. We are a part of this country. Where will we go? How long will we live on the roadsides? We can't do this for much longer. We want the government to build the houses in the place where we were in. We need to be paid for our loss."

On November 6 last year, these Santal people were killed and several injured in



Santals evicted on a year ago are struggling to recover from the wounds they received during the eviction.

## ONE YEAR AND COUNTING...

*Nothing has changed for the Santal community in Gaibandha since the forced eviction a year ago.*



KONGKON KARMAKAR  
AND  
NAIMUL KARIM

a clash between the police and the Santals at the Shahebganj sugarcane farm of the Rangpur Sugar Mills in Gobindaganj upazila over a land dispute. Dizen is one of those victims and his situation has worsened over the year.

According to the Santals, they owned most of the land before the government acquired it in the 1950s. The deal though was that the land would only be used for sugarcane farming to produce raw materials for the sugar mill.

Leasing it out for any other purpose

would lead to the termination of the contract. Santals claim the agreement was flouted and, as a result, they erected huts on nearly hundred acres of land at the Shahebganj farm on July 1 last year.

In a bid to remove the Santals, they were attacked and their houses were torched. Soon after the attack, a video of the police setting the houses in the area on fire was leaked and it went viral on the social media. Under pressure, a police sub-inspector and a constable, out of the hundreds deployed that day, were suspended and the SP of Gaibandha was subsequently transferred.

As things stand now, the police are investigating the cases filed before and after the incident.

In the meantime, several Santals like Dizen and Morses have been struggling to recover from wounds and are also finding it difficult to make ends meet.

Bimol Kisko was returning home when the gunfire began on November 6. It was around 10 or 11 in the morning, he recalls. He got shot in both legs and has been bedridden ever since. He is afraid that he is becoming too much of a burden on his family.

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## THE COLOSSUS RISES OUT OF THE MIGHTY PADMA