



**PICTURE TELLS THE TALE:** The Louhajang river in Tangail heads towards virtual death, thanks to mindless encroachment and waste dumping and the authorities' failure to take action. The photo was taken near Eidgaon area of the district town last week.

PHOTO: STAR

# River getting lost to encroachment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Tangail*

The Louhajang river, a lifeline for Tangail townspeople, is dying fast due to non-stop dumping of wastes into the river and mindless grabbing of its shorelines.

The indiscriminate grabbing is also causing drainage problem and waterlogging in many areas of the town, environmentalists said.

Release of sewage and toxic chemical wastes through drains and pipes from homesteads and industrial units are also polluting its water, they said.

The 76-kilometre-long river, originating from Dhaleswari river in Baisnabbari of Tangail Sadar upazila, flows through the district town and falls into the Bangshai river in Jamurki under Mirzapur upazila of the district.

Responding to the repeated demands of the local people and environmentalists, the district administration last year took an initiative to free one and a half kilometres area of the river stretching from Beradoma to Hazraghat under Sadar municipality area.

However, allegations of irregularities and corruption over identifying the actual grabbers were raised from different quarters of the society, they said, adding the drive was later stopped on the plea of different problems, including shortage of funds.

Once profusely flowing, the river has turned into a narrow canal in recent times and heading towards a virtual death due to the mindless encroachment by local influential people, local green activist Masum Ferdous said.

Masum, who has been campaigning to save the river through his write-ups for over a decade, said the district administration launched the drive to free only one kilometre area from the grabbers, which is not enough really.

Somnath Lahiri, senior research officer at Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA), said during the drive some makeshift houses belonging to some poor families were removed, but concrete structures owned by the influential grabbers remained untouched.

Besides, they don't know why the

authorities concerned decided to free only a little over one kilometre out of 76 kilometres of the river area, he said, adding that initially their demand is to free at least eight kilometres area under Sadar municipality.

"As questions were raised over not demolishing the structures of influential people out of the drive, authorities decided to resume the drive after a fresh demarcation of the river," said advocate Ataur Rahman Azad, general secretary of Manobadhika Bastobayon Sangstha Tangail unit.

Tangail Deputy Commissioner Khan Mohammad Nurul Amin said as far he knows the local government ministry is about to take a Tk 330 crore beautification project along the river bank while water resources ministry is taking another project to dredge the river.

"No illegal structures will remain on the river banks as soon the two projects get going," he said.

A number of local environmentalists said the authorities concerned should recover the grabbed lands first before allocating funds for its beautification, dredging or other purposes.

## 2 youths held with Yaba in Barguna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

Police arrested two youths with 1,100 Yaba tablets from Natunbazaar area in Barguna's Amtali upazila yesterday.

The arrestees are Rahmat Ali, 20, and Abu Hanif, 21, of Tulatali village in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila.

On information, a police team raided the area and arrested the duo with the Yaba, said Md Shahid Ullah, officer-in-charge of Amtali Police Station.

A case was filed with the police station in this connection, the OC said.

The arrestees were later produced before the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court in Amtali that sent them to jail, said the police official.

## Unknown disease at Galachipa Upazila Health Complex

Around 150 patients sent to different hospitals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

An unknown disease has been attacking patients at Galachipa Upazila Health Complex in the district over the last one-and-a-half months, creating panic among the people.

Around 150 patients of the health complex were attacked by the disease and were referred to different hospitals, including Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (BSMCH) for treatment.

The district health administration asked the health complex authorities to shift the emergency department to another place and also requested them to solve the problem.

Saiful Islam, 18, a first-year degree student at Galachipa College, was injured in a motorbike accident and took primary treatment from Patuakhali General Hospital. He went to Galachipa Upazila Health

Complex the next day to take fresh treatment, but his wound turned septic two days later.

Kulsum Begum, 45, a housewife in Gupterhawla village, went to the health complex to receive treatment as she was suffering from skin disease. Resident Medical Officer (RMO) Dr Imam Sikder treated her in the emergency department. But her wounds went septic in two weeks and the pain increased. The RMO then referred her to BSMCH for treatment as the disease was unknown to the physicians.

Like Saiful and Kulsum, many patients who come to the emergency department of the health complex are attacked by the unknown disease.

RMO Dr Imam said they are afraid that the health complex employees could also be attacked. "We informed the higher authorities about the matter and requested them to take steps to solve the problem," he added.

More than 200 patients used to come to the complex, but now only around 50 patients come here due to fear of the unknown disease, he added.

Galachipa Municipality Mayor Anisul Haque Tuhin said he heard about the matter and fear is spreading among the local people. He urged the authorities concerned to solve the matter soon considering the people's interest.

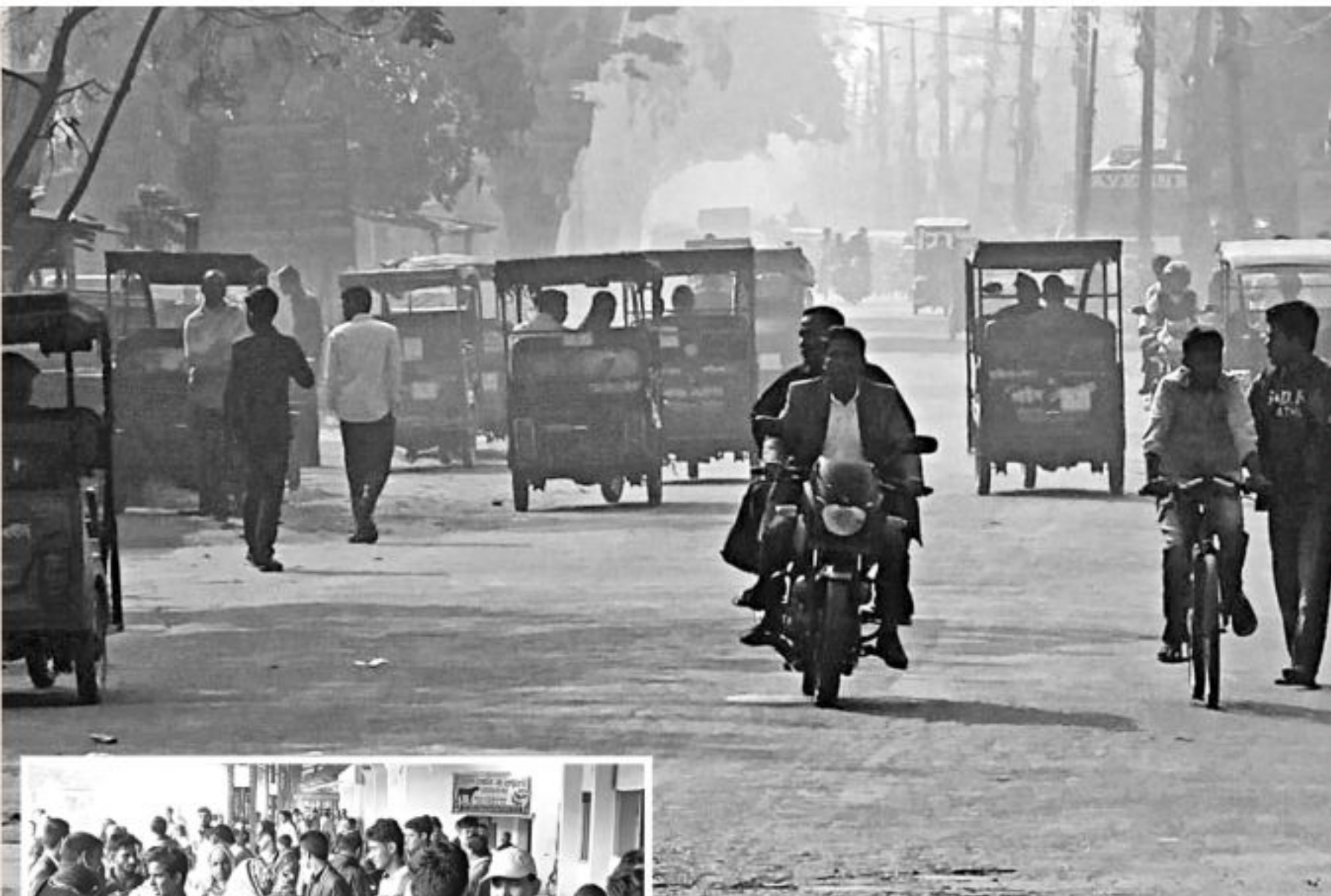
Civil Surgeon of Patuakhali Dr Shah Mojahidul Islam visited the health complex on November 18 after hearing about the matter.

"I informed the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) about the matter and they advised us to clean the emergency department and all the instruments properly," he said, adding that a team from IEDCR will visit the health complex soon to identify the disease.



A woman affected by unknown disease at Galachipa Upazila Health Complex in Patuakhali.

PHOTO: STAR



Three-wheelers dominate a highway of Dinajpur as buses remained off the roads due to an indefinite strike enforced by transport workers in the district. Inset, Dinajpur Railway Station sees unusual crowding of passengers due to the situation.

PHOTO: STAR

## Traders worried as Dinajpur transport strike continues

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinajpur*

Traders expressed serious concern as the indefinite strike by Dinajpur transport workers entered its third day yesterday.

Normal life remained halted completely in the district due to the strike, said local people.

All over the district, commuters suffered immensely as cars, minibuses and autorickshaws are not plying as the agitating workers tightened their strike from yesterday morning.

On Wednesday night, Transport Workers' Union and Road Transport Owners' Group in Dinajpur called the strike after students of Hajee Danesh Science and Technology University (HSTU) torched two buses in front of their university following a clash with transport workers that left 10 people injured.

Road transport in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh also remained paralysed as the Dinajpur-bound buses of the two districts were not allowed to ply.

Risking life, hundreds of people gathered at Dinajpur Government College intersection and Phulbari Bus Stand area travelling on shallow-run three-wheelers,

battery-run easy-bikes and vans for going to their destination in absence of buses.

"Children and aging people are the worst sufferers due to the strike in this chilling cold," said Kurban Ali of Panchbari area in Dinajpur Sadar.

The 55-year-old man was travelling on an easy-bike for going to Phulbari upazila, around 40km from Dinajpur.

"I pay Tk 40 as bus fare, but the easy-bike drivers are charging double," he said.

Farmers said huge quantity of winter vegetable are sent to other districts every day, but the trucks got stranded in Dinajpur due to the transport strike.

"We are suffering financial losses due to the strike," said Azizul Islam of Ghoraghat upazila.

Meanwhile, a large amount of imported items, including onions and rice, are also stranded inside the Panama Hili Port Link Ltd in Hakimpur upazila of Dinajpur as traders cannot send them to other districts.

Besides, the port is facing problems to accommodate the imported items.

Harun-ur-Rashid, an importer of Hili land port, said import has to be stopped if the indefinite transport strike is not withdrawn immediately.

## Innovative farmer brings peace, prosperity to whole village

AZIBOR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Tranquil days pass. The rural landscape shifts coat with every season. As 72-year-old farmer Mokbul Hossain reflects upon his life, and that of the village around him, he has reason to be content. The villagers of Moheshwarchanda, in Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila, did much to build a community of harmony and prosperity. Mokbul played his part.

The son of a poor farmer, he was born in 1945. He was only able to study to class four. At age fifteen, when his father died, Mokbul started working as a day labourer. Then he plied rickshaw for fifteen years.

But in 1982 a predictable lifeline took a fresh direction. It wasn't only that then 37-year-old Mokbul wanted more. The whole village wanted more. Together they took a firm decision: every effort would be made to develop their village.

At first they dug a well for field irrigation. Collectively they organised the withdrawal of seventy vexatious court cases filed by and against villagers. They pooled land to make larger plots suitable for lucrative agriculture; and by 1993 they had extended mechanised irrigation throughout the

village. In the political arena, the villagers worked towards a playing field free from clash and rivalry.

Mokbul's first major contribution was to the soil. In 2000 an agricultural scientist, Dr Gul Hossain, visited their village from Dhaka, offering training on natural vermicompost fertiliser, produced by earthworms. Mokbul took up the challenge.

Not only did he start to produce vermicompost, he helped others. "I explained to neighbours how to make and use natural fertiliser," he recalls. "It allows us to produce chemical-free, healthy vegetables. It contributed to village development." Today, all 151 families in Moheshwarchanda produce vermicompost.

Mokbul provided training further afield. He helped establish 33 vermicompost farms in 33 districts, he says. He promoted the natural insecticide, balai nashak, too. "I learnt vermicompost production skills from Mokbul Hossain," says one Sukjan Khatun from Dapna village in Kaliganj. "Now I earn a handsome amount from it. I'm really happy."

Mokbul started to grow medicinal plants, of which he currently has 108 species. "Mokbul uses his medicinal

plants to help others," says Alim Uddin, a teacher at Naldanga Bhusan pilot secondary school. "He prepares treatments for free."

From paddy hybridisation meanwhile, Mokbul developed three new strains of paddy, which he calls Mokbul-01, Mokbul-02 and Mokbul-03. "Of the three varieties he has developed," says the agriculture officer in Kaliganj, Jahidul Karim, "Mokbul-03 is the most remarkable. It contains two rice grains in each seedcase, which has impressed many."

"Our village is different from others," Mokbul opines. "All families here have achieved economic self-reliance from vermicompost production. We have improved the quality of our soils. The village has gained a reputation for clean agriculture."

As he approaches his twilight years, farmer Mokbul has reason to feel content. Over the years he has managed to purchase two acres and build a brick home. He helps the sick. He has encouraged a better approach to farming. And he can see, along with his neighbours, a Moheshwarchanda village where families are able to look after themselves. His horizon is, in short, that of a village at peace.



Mokbul Hossain, an innovative farmer and community changemaker, at his medicinal plant garden at Moheshwarchanda village in Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah.

PHOTO: STAR

MASUD MURDER

## BCL leader, aide arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Comilla*

Police on Friday detained two people, including a former Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader, in connection with a case for killing Masudur Rahman Mazumder, an employee of Abul Khayer Group on November 19.

The arrestees are Mainul Hasan Manna, 30, former president of Kaptanbazaar ward no 4 unit BCL and son of Zia Uddin, and Jashim Uddin, 35, son of Taher of Majhigasa area in Sadar upazila.

Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Apple Mahmud of Comilla Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) said, following information provided by detained Jumun, caretaker of Sumon Villa, and other tenants of the rented house, police identified the killers.

Later, PBI launched a day-long drive on Friday and arrested the duo from different area of the town.

During primary interrogation, Manna and Jashim confessed their involvement in the murder, the ASP said, adding that they also disclosed the names of their three to four accomplices.

Police are trying to arrest the other culprits, he said, adding, they also recovered Masud's motorcycle, rope and two knives, used in the murder, from their possession.

On November 19, police recovered throat-slit body of Masudur, 30, son of Shamsul Haque of Hajiganj upazila of Chandpur, from a rented house at Bagichagaon in Sadar upazila.

Deceased's younger brother Mahfuzur Rahman filed a murder case against three to four unnamed people with Kotwali Police Station the same night.