

ASHRAYAN PROJECT

Many struggle with unemployment

MIRZA SHAKIL with ANDREW EAGLE

When the ashraayan public housing project was developed on four acres in Shaikuria village in Laohati union of Tangail's Delduar upazila between 2000 and 2006, many homeless families in the area breathed a sigh of relief. Eventually around 100 families were allocated barrack-style tin homes in the project, and they thought the future looked bright. Eleven years on, many are unemployed and struggling to survive.

"I earn a little by repairing old locks and umbrellas in several markets," says Gendu Sandar, 76, the general secretary of the project's residents' committee. "At the project we just got sheds to live in, but there wasn't any other help provided: no pension cards for the disabled, elderly or widows, no other benefits."

He states that many of the homes are now in a dilapidated condition thanks to a lack of maintenance. "Water leaks through many roofs," he says. "One of the homes was damaged by fire about two years ago. So far it hasn't been repaired."

Gendu is one of the lucky ones, since he has some work. "I got used to hardship," says another project resident, Korom Uddin, 70. "I have no assistance from any-

body; I know what it is to live without work, without food."

The original four of the ten housing blocks were constructed by the 25 Air Defence Artillery Regiment, under the upazila administration's supervision. Six more blocks were later built by the 11 RE Battalion.

While the residents are grateful, for most the only employment opportunity available is day labour, which is unpredictable, especially during periods of inclement weather when their income falls to zero. Several visually impaired residents meanwhile live by begging.

To add to their hardship, the connecting Laohati to Pakulla Road is also in very poor condition. During the rainy season a boat is required to cross a river to reach many job opportunities, while in the dry months a bamboo bridge serves the purpose.

Sanitary latrines and tube wells are also required at the project.

"At times of elections local representatives visit us in search of votes," says the residents' committee president Anis Miah, "but later we are forgotten."

The newly-joined upazila nirbahi officer in Delduar, Sabina Yasmin, told local journalists that she will look into the matter soon and arrange the necessary support for residents.



Barrack-like tin houses, meant for underprivileged people, at Shaikuria village under Laohati union of Tangail's Delduar upazila, remains in awful conditions, as the residents, struggling to meet both ends meet, can hardly afford maintenance of the homes.

PHOTO: STAR

KILLING OF MITHUN CHAKMA

Pall of gloom prevails in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

The murder of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) leader Mithun Chakma has sparked widespread criticism among the townspeople as well as in the social media.

On Wednesday noon, some masked men on two motorcycles and a battery-run rickshaw abducted Mithun Chakma, a member of the media wing of UPDF and former president of Greater Chittagong Hill Tracts Pahari Chhatra Parishad, from near his house at Aparna Chowdhury Para in Khagrachhari.

They later shot him in Sluice Gate area of the district town. Mithun's body was brought to his home from hospital in the evening and political fellows, well-wishers, relatives and neighbours thronged there to console the bereaved family.

Visiting Mithun's home yesterday morning, this correspondent found a pall of gloom prevailing there.

He lived in an old shabby house comprising three rooms. "Mithun was murdered on Wednesday, the birthday of his two-year-old son," said the slain leader's aunt Swapna Chakma.

"Those who want to continue oppression in Chittagong Hill Tracts have committed the well-planned murder," said Michael Chakma, an UPDF organizer and former president of Democratic Youth Forum.

"Some people who formed 'Mukhosh Bahini' (UPDF-democratic) were expelled from the UPDF for breaking party discipline a year ago," he said, implying their possible involvement in the murder.

Seeking anonymity, a development activist, also a former classmate of Mithun, said, "Mithun never did politics of fighting and murder. He was a follower of idealism and never compromised with any wrongdoing."

Mithun passed the Higher Secondary Examinations from Notre Dame College in Dhaka and studied linguistics at Dhaka University, he said. His funeral will be done at Golabari crematorium today.

Indian found dead in Ichhamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) recovered a body from Ichhamati river at Polianpur village in Moheshpur upazila of the district in the early hours yesterday.

The deceased was Bikash Kabiraj, 55, of Kalibauni village under Dhantala Police Station in Uttar 24-Parganas district.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and locals said they found a body floating on the Ichhamati river in the Bangladesh-India border area. BGB informed the BSF personnel. Members of BSF Habashpur camp recovered the body and took it away.

Assistant Commander of BGB 58 Battalion in Khalishpur Major Jashim Uddin said the body of an Indian national was recovered. He was involved in cattle lifting, he added.

2 BCL COMMITTEES AT SAADAT COLLEGE

Situation tense as students fear clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Tension mounted between two factions of district unit Bangladesh Chhatra League over formation of two committees of BCL at Saadat Government College here.

District BCL sources said a 21-member committee of the college unit was formed on December 31 with Milon Mahmud as convener. District unit convener Mostafizur Rahman Soheli and joint conveners Tanvirul Islam and Shafiul Alam approved the committee.

On the other hand, another 49-member committee of the college unit was formed on January 2 with Ratan Miah as convener. District unit joint conveners Roni Ahmed and Rashedul Hasan approved the committee.

A group led by Ratan Miah was controlling the college campus while another group led by Milon Mahmud was trying to enter the campus, creating tension among the students of the college, fearing clash

between the two rivals.

A cocktail was blasted in front of the administrative building of the college on Wednesday when the group led by Ratan was making preparation to bring out a procession on the campus.

An outsider, Sajib, was arrested in connection with the cocktail blast.

Mostafizur Rahman Soheli, convener of district unit of BCL, said as per constitution, the joint conveners cannot approve any committee without approval of the convener. So, the college committee that was formed with Ratan Miah is illegal, he added.

Meanwhile, Rashedul Hasan, joint convener of district unit BCL, said as per constitution, the central committee and the district leaders must be informed about formation of any organisational unit.

The college committee formed with Ratan Miah is legal as the central and district leaders were informed about it while the college committee formed with Milon Mahmud is illegal, he said.

Factory making coal from wood sealed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A mobile court sealed off a factory in Rajakanda area of Joypurhat's Akkelpur upazila on Wednesday for manufacturing coal from wood by burning logs illegally.

Acting on a tip-off, the court led by Executive Magistrate BM Tarikh Uz-Zaman along with a team comprising of BGB, police and fire fighters, raided the factory in the evening, doused some burning logs instantly and sealed it off.

The court also detained factory owner Nur Islam, 48, from the spot and later released him.

Local people alleged that Nur Islam had been running the wooden coal (obtained by burning wood) factory for quite some times.

He supplied the wooden coal to different hotels and restaurants as it is generally used in preparing kabab.

Executive Magistrate Tarikh Uz-Zaman said he sealed the factory as its owner failed to show any supporting documents. Besides, burning of logs, which is used as raw material, is totally illegal, he said.



A tractor carries sand lifted from the Teesta river bed at Dakkhin Sindura village in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat. The picture was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Illegal sand lifting from Teesta bed unabated

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Illegal sand lifting from the beds of Teesta, Dharla, Ratnai and Saniyazan rivers continues unabated at 50 points in five upazilas of the district as the local administration is not taking any legal action against the lifters.

Moslem Uddin, 55, of Teesta river basin Dakkhin Sindurna village in Hatibandha upazila said around 80 truckloads of sand are lifted from Teesta river bed every day, and it has been going on from morning to evening for the last two months. "We strongly protested against illegal sand lifting from the river bed, but the lifters did not listen to us," he said, adding that the upazila administration did not take any action to stop illegal sand lifting.

"Our main road is getting damaged as sand-laden trucks move on it from morning to evening every day," said Nur Islam, 48, of the village.

Truck driver Ashraf Ali, 38, said he gets Tk 400 for carrying one truck of sand and he can make 20 trips from morning to evening every day. "One truck of sand is sold for Tk 800," he said.

"A local sand lifters' syndicate has been lifting sand from Dharla river bed with shallow-river dredgers every day for the last four months. They even do it during the night," said Shahidul Islam, 42, of Badaitari village in Sadar upazila. "We complained several times to the upazila administration but no action has been taken yet," he added.

Alleged sand lifter Sahed Ali, 48, of the village, refused to talk with journal-

ists in this regard.

District Sub Divisional Engineer of Water Development Board (WDB) Mohammad Al-Mamun told this correspondent that it is good to remove sand from the river bed, but it should be done in a planned way. The sand lifters lift sand in a way that creates deep holes in the river bed.

"Such holes cause erosion during the rainy season," he said, adding that WDB officials have sent letters several times to the local administration, requesting them to take legal action against the lifters.

Deputy Commissioner Shafiul Arif said the administration will take stern action against illegal sand lifting immediately, and the administration will always be active against this malpractice.

Cop missing in trawler capsized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A policeman remained missing as a trawler of river police sank when a bulk-head carrying sand collided with it in the Meghna river adjacent to Char Abdullah village in Sadar upazila yesterday.

Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, additional superintendent of police (ASP)-2 of River Police Dhaka Zone, said a patrol river police sank in the river when it collided with a sand laden bulk-head.

The missing constable is Ibrahim, said the ASP. Two other members of the river police managed to swim ashore.

After-effect of flood

The approach road of a bridge in Tangail's Delduar yet to be repaired

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The approach road of a local bridge in Delduar upazila is yet to be repaired even six months after the collapse, causing sufferings to thousands of people.

The approach road connecting the bridge over a ditch on Deluder-Silimpur regional road in Gorasin area was washed away during the devastating flood in July last year. The road communication between the upazila headquarters and Deolee and Atia unions has been disrupted following collapse of the road, locals said.

Earth was dumped on the damaged section to protect the road which was also washed away by the flood, they said. Later, a bamboo platform and some bamboos were set up on the damaged portion of the approach road to ease movement of pedestrians, they added.

Atia Union Parishad Chairman Sirajul Islam Mallik said he set up the

bamboo platform on his own to ease sufferings of the local people for damage to the approach road.

He blamed negligence of the upazila Local Government Engineering Department for delaying the repair work of the damaged road, causing suffering to the people.

The people as well as the passengers have been suffering a lot as no vehicle can pass over the bridge, said rights activist Masud Rama.

They have to spend more money as they need to change battery-run auto-rickshaws or CNG-run three-wheelers at both ends of the bridge to go to their destinations, he added.

The authorities should repair the damaged approach road immediately to ease suffering of the local people, Masud said.

Delduar Upazila Engineer Mir Ali Sakir yesterday claimed that they already started the repair work of the damaged approach road.

Sakir said the LGED constructed the bridge at a cost of Tk 48 lakh in 2004.



People cross the gap caused by collapse of the approach road to the bridge in Gorasin area under Delduar upazila of Tangail, using a bamboo platform.

PHOTO: STAR