

# Risky railway crossing

## The busy level crossing in Nilphamari unattended, causing fatalities

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With bustling markets on either side, Dhelapir railway crossing near Saidpur station in Nilphamari is predictably busy. Thousands of people and vehicles cross the tracks there each day. Two signs warn people using the crossing that they do so at their own risk; but there are no boom gates and no guard in attendance. It's alarming to have such rudimentary public safety measures at a location with a history of fatalities.

"Dhelapir, on the eastern side of the crossing is the most crowded market in the district," says the chairman of the local Botlagari union parishad, Al-Helal Chowdhury. "On the western side is the age-old Porarhat market. Inevitably the crossing is well-used."

"The trains travel at high speed and pass through in no time at all," says local cattle trader Joinal Abedin, 55. "We become anxious when we have to drive cattle from one side to the other."

A few weeks ago sexagenarian Tayebuddin was

killed while crossing the tracks, by the Khulna-bound Rocket Mail train. It was the latest incident in a pattern of deaths spanning many years. The most serious incident occurred in 2015, when the inter-city Nil Sagor service collided with a police patrol van, killing four police officers and seriously injuring four more.

After that accident, two enquiry committees were formed by the railway and police departments. Recommendations included the installation of a gate and the appointment of a gate man at the crossing. Unfortunately, these measures were never implemented.

According to the Saidpur branch president of the Railway Workers League, Moksedul Momin, insufficient staff numbers are part of the reason no crossing guard was appointed. "Right back in 1985," he says, "the World Bank prescribed a policy, adopted by the then government of Bangladesh, to reduce the number of railway employees. Many were compelled into early retirement, with a golden handshake. Since then,

it is not uncommon for busy railway crossings like Dhelapir to be unattended."

The crossing is not only busy with local traffic. Twelve trains pass through daily. Even an optimist would have to admit that the next fatality is just a matter of time.

Botlagari's former union parishad chairman Saidur Rahman says he wrote to the general manager of the railway's west zone, requesting the construction of a rail gate and the appointment of a crossing guard, but never received a response.

The station master at Saidpur, Alamgir Hossain, meanwhile, says that Dhelapir crossing was constructed by the roads department without the consent of the railway, and is thus an unauthorised crossing point.

Nevertheless according to the railway's divisional engineer in Pakshi, Md Asaduzzaman, steps will be taken to improve public safety. "We've detected Dhelapir railway crossing as a place that is susceptible to accidents. Accordingly we plan to install a gate, signal lights and appoint a gate man by June 2018," he says.



A train moves with the headlight on amid dense fog as it nears Dhelapir point, a busy level crossing left without any boom gate and guard, near Saidpur Railway Station in Nilphamari. The authorities concerned seem content just by setting signboard, warning people to cross it at their own risk.

PHOTO: STAR

## Three get life for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A court here on Monday sentenced three youths to life imprisonment for killing a college girl in 2011.

The lifers are Selim Mia, 32, son of Siraj Mia of Baganbari area of Akhaura municipality, Titu Mia, 30, son of Sattar Mia and Sheikh Faysal, 28, son of Sheikh Mubarak of the same area.

Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court-2 Judge Moazzem Hossain also acquitted Abdul Alim, 55, caretaker of the victim's house, as the charge brought against him could not be proved. He had been in prison for around seven years.

## SUGARCANE FARMING IN LALMONIRHAT

# Govt price discourages growers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Farmers in the district are losing interest in sugarcane farming due to low prices and increased production cost.

The farmers said they will say goodbye to sugarcane farming forever if the price fixed by the government for sugarcane remains the same.

Cane Development Assistant of Shyampur Sugar Mill Noor Alam Siddiquee said sugarcane has been cultivated on 410 acres of land this year while it was 790 acres last year.

Shyampur Sugar Mill started purchasing sugarcane from 850 farmers at purchasing centres in Char Kulaghat, Barabari, Mahendranagar and Ambari villages in Sadar upazila, said Noor Alam, also in-charge of Char Kulaghat purchase centre.

Farmers are getting government fixed rate of Tk 122 per maund (40 kgs) of sugarcane while it was Tk 107 last year.

Farmer Ismail Hossain, 63, of Char Kulaghat village, said he has been farming sugarcane for the last 30 years, but has been freeing his lands of the crop for the last four years due to low price and increase in production cost. "Production cost of sugarcane has increased due to wage hike of farm labourers and high prices of fertilisers, pesticides and transport," he said, adding that he has cultivated sugarcane on 16 bighas of land this year while it was 50 bighas earlier.

"We spend Tk 15,000 to Tk 18,000 for farming sugarcane on each bigha of land and get 150 maunds to 300 maunds production," said farmer Nizam Uddin, 58, of Char Shiberkuti village. Land is used for 15 to 16 months for farming sugarcane," he said, adding that he cultivated sugarcane on one acre of land while it was two acres last year.

"It is not profitable as sugarcane takes a long time to ripen," said farmer Sumar Ali, 65, of the village, demanding Tk 200 per maund of sugarcane. "If the sugar mill authorities do not increase the price, we will free our lands from sugarcane farming next year," he added.

"Sugarcane farming is our tradition, but we are saying goodbye to it due to low price. The government should encourage us to farm this crop on more land by giving expected rate," said Sobhan Miah, 50, of Mahendranagar village.

Noor Alam said farmers are given loan facility, seed and fertilisers for sugarcane farming.

"The government has increased the price of sugarcane by Tk 15 per maund this year and we hope it will take steps to meet the farmers' demand," he said, adding that sugarcane farming is profitable as it is cultivated in sandy and abandoned lands.

## Six stone crushers destroyed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A joint taskforce of district administration and Department of Environment (DoE) destroyed six illegal stone crushing machines near Burimari land port area in Patgram upazila of the district yesterday.

During the drive, the court led by Executive Magistrate Noor Qutubul Alam also fined four owners of the illegal machines, Tk 75 thousand after filing separate cases against them.

Inspector Kazi Saifuddin of DoE in Rangpur said six stone crushers were destroyed on the spot as the owners of the machines fled the scene sensing the presence of the law enforcers.

## 40-DAY GOVT JOB SCHEME

# Workers used for approach road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Labourers of the government's 40-day job scheme were used to build approach roads of a newly-built bridge in Aditmari upazila.

Forty-two labourers worked from January 7 to January 11 for earth filling to build the approach road at Chawratari village of Bhadai union, locals said.

Labourer Dilbar Hossain, 46, said the local UP chairman asked them to work for building the approach roads. "Normally, we work on roads, mosques, temples and graveyards under the scheme," he added.

"We were used for earth filling to build the approach roads for the first time under the scheme," said labourer Amena Begum, 44," she added.

Shamsul Islam, 55, said the bridge was constructed over a canal, but the approach roads were not built. "We could not use the bridge without the approach roads," he said.

Shamsul said the contractor and disaster management officials told them they could not complete the approach roads due to flood.

Bhadai UP Chairman Rokon Uzzaman said he used the labourers to build the approach road for the greater interest of the people.



Akbar Hossain shows the potato plants that died in his field at Teesta char in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur due to late blight attack. Inset, potato growers spray anti-fungal medicine to protect their crop from late blight disease at Alambiditar village in the upazila.

PHOTO: STAR



# Late blight dashes hope

## Dense fog, absence of sunlight cause the disease; farmers are not getting result of anti-fungal doses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Potato growers in Dinajpur and Rangpur are very worried as the deadly fungal disease late blight has started spreading rapidly in their potato fields because of dense fog and absence of sufficient sunlight.

Potato plants die fast if infected with late blight, said Agriculture Officer of Dinajpur Abu Shams Md Badruddoza and Badarganj Upazila Agriculture Officer Mahbubur Rahman. Growers say the disease might affect potato production target this year.

Many growers told this correspondent that they are not getting any result despite spraying anti-fungal medicines as per advice of officials of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) to prevent the spread of the disease.

Farmer Mokhesur Rahman of Kalupara village under Badarganj

upazila of Rangpur said he cultivated potato on 18 decimals of land this year. He sprayed anti-fungal medicine five times since he noticed the late blight infection in his field 15 days ago, but to no avail. "Sixty percent of the plants in my field have died so far due to the infection," the elderly farmer said.

Afzal Hossain, another farmer of the same area, said he has already spent Tk 5,000 for saving his potato plants, but they are still dying of late blight disease.

Abdul Jabbar of Mominpur village in Rangpur Sadar upazila said around 60 percent of the potatoes in his one acre field have already died. "Potato production might fall this year if the disease is not controlled," he apprehended.

Abdur Rahman of Polashbari village in Biral upazila said his entire potato crop has been damaged due to late blight infection. "I was expecting a

bumper potato production this year as everything had been alright a couple of weeks ago, but I have no chance to get back my invested money now," he added.

Mahbubur Rahman said 2,720 hectares of land have been brought under potato cultivation in the upazila this year. He said late blight is spreading fast due to the adverse weather, adding that officials and staff are working to solve the problem.

The DAE officials said around 1.20 lakh hectares have been brought under potato farming in the two districts this season, of which 52,000 hectares are in Rangpur.

Additional Director of DAE in Rangpur Shah Alam said potatoes on around 2,500 hectares have been damaged by late blight infection, adding that field level workers are in touch with the farmers to cope with the situation.

## 8 cattle burnt alive over 'land dispute'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Eight cattle were burnt to death allegedly over a land dispute between two villagers in Madhukhali upazila of the district yesterday.

It happened in Sunil Biswas's house at Baspur village in Korokdi union.

Sunil said he saw his cowshed on fire early yesterday, adding that neighbours helped douse the fire but could not save the cattle.

He said he had a long-standing conflict over land with Rahman Munshi of Char Baspur village.

"We have a conflict with Sunil over land, but we did not set fire to his cowshed," Rahman said.

"A few months ago, Rahman and his brothers set fire to their own house and filed a case against Sunil and his son," said Korokdi Union Parishad Chairman Md Mokbul Hossain.

# Treasure of honey

## Lack of proper knowledge deprives mustard growers of expected profit in northern districts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Lack of proper knowledge about artificial method of honey collection is depriving farmers of additional profit in five northern districts of Rangpur agriculture region.

Mustard plants become covered with innumerable yellow flowers when they attain flowering stage, and swarms of bees come to the fields to collect honey. This stage continues for around one month.

To collect the honey, the agriculture department made artificial honeycombs in small wooden boxes and set them beside mustard fields. The bees take shelter in those boxes as they are as safe as natural hives and very near the mustard fields.

This method also helps to increase mustard seed production by causing pollination, said agriculture experts.

Rafiqul Islam, sub-assistant agriculture officer in Rangpur regional office of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), said farmers in Rangpur Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari cultivated mustard in order to make up the loss they suffered in agriculture during the prolonged flood last year.

Mustard was cultivated on 40,500 hectares of land this year, which is 600 hectares higher than last year, and production target was 52.7 tonnes of mustard seed.

Farmers collected 20,500 kg of honey from 4,286 hectares by using artificial method, he added.

"If the whole area could be brought under artificial process of honey collection, the total output would have been around two lakh kg of honey having market price of around Tk 6 crore, as of honey is selling in the wholesale market for about Tk 300 per kg," Rafiq added.

Mosharrif Hossain, a farmer in Kalyani village of Sadar upazila, who cultivated mustard on one hectare of land, said he can collect five kg to six kg of honey in a month by setting boxes in his field, adding that he can also get three maunds (1 maund=40 kg) of mustard seed.

"To popularise artificial honey collection procedure, we provided training to around 20 thousand farmers in the last couple of years in all upazilas of five N-districts along with holding motivational meetings, and the process is continuing," said horticulture specialist of regional DAE Mesbahur Rahman.



Nolini Bala, a farmer of Goda village in Kishoreganj upazila of Nilphamari, cannot use artificial method of collecting honey, and it deprives her of additional income.

PHOTO: STAR