

Challenged people cry for allowance

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Abdur Rob Sikder lost his eyesight about 29 years ago. The 63-year-old of Nachnapara village in Kalapara upazila lost his eyesight from a severe attack of typhoid and since then he became a burden for his family.

Four years after losing his vision, his first wife, son and two daughters left him as he could not feed them. He now begs for a living as he does not get disability allowance, said Rob.

Later he married Sahida Begum in 2002 and they have a sixth-grader son. Sahida is helping him to run the family by making cake (bhapa pitha) and working as domestic help.

During a recent visit to Nachnapara intersection, this correspondent found Sahida making bhapa pitha while Rob was sitting beside her.

"Besides making bhapa pitha, I have to serve as domestic help so that my son can continue study as we want to give him higher education," said Sahida.

Like Rob, many physically and mentally challenged people here don't get any government support as about 60 percent of them are out of allowance coverage, said Patuakhali social welfare office sources.

There are 18,860 identified physically and mentally challenged people in all eight upazilas of the district but Jatiya Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (National Disabled Development Foundation) under Social Welfare Ministry, which provides treatment through mobile van as a part of the step taken by the ministry, claimed there are as many as 22,653 identified physically and mentally challenged people in the district. Of them 13,640 are male and 9,013 are female, said Nayan Moni Biswas, disabled affairs officer of the foundation.

Of them, over 13,000 are not getting disability allowance. A physically and mentally challenged person gets Tk 600 a month, said the office sources.

Masudur Rahman Shimu, chairman of Tiakhali Union Parishad, said they will include Rob when they update list of physically challenged people for allowance.

Contacted, Kalapara upazila social welfare officer Muntasir Billah said he did not know about the matter as he recently joined here.

But he will try to include Rob in the list of physically challenged people, said the officer.

Shila Rani Das, deputy director of social welfare department, said they can't give allowance to all physically and mentally challenged persons due to shortage of fund.

As per allocation, they prepare the list to bring them under the social safety coverage programme, she said.

Out of 22,653 physically and mentally challenged people in Patuakhali, over 13,000 are not getting disability allowance.



Small boats used to ply this canal in Rajapur upazila of Jhalakathi only a decade ago. Inset, this photo taken from Sattarkanda area in Sadar upazila shows a farmer carrying paddy straw on a three-wheeler, locally known as nasimon, amid risk of accidents on the highway.

PHOTO: STAR



Dead canals put farmers in trouble

Growers now carry their harvest on nasimon instead of boats

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, Jhalakathi

Thousands of farmers in five upazilas of the district now face serious trouble in transporting their produce as most of the canals, flowing beside their croplands, are dried up due to lack of re-excavation for years.

As a result, growers nowadays cannot transport their harvest on small boats, which they used to do only a decade ago.

A few years ago, the canal routes were used to transport their agricultural product from fields to home all the year round, even in the dry season, many farmers said.

They said earlier farmers could

easily carry their crops using small boats, without any cost and hard labour, but now they have to depend on different alternative ways and using different illegal vehicles like nasimon, karimon and other three-wheelers.

"Now we have to carry paddy and paddy straw first on the head and then walk a long way towards the highway to load those on nasimon (three-wheelers)," said Rafiqul Islam, a farmer of Bashtola in Rajapur upazila.

Earlier, he and his son carried the crops to his home on boat, Rafiqul said, adding that now he has to hire three labourers and a three-wheeler to carry those, which increases the production cost.

"This season, I had to pay Tk 12,000 as labourer wages and fare of three-wheelers," he added.

Farmer Jatin Halder of Sattarkanda in Jhalakathi Sadar upazila said earlier he used to go to his farmlands on a small boat even in the dry season, but now he has the boat but no canal routes to ply on.

"Carrying paddy on nasimon or three-wheelers is very risky on the highways and roads as the drivers of these vehicles do not have driving licence or training," said farmer Mojibur Rahman of Shatpokia in Nalcity upazila.

"Once, the canal routes were the key way of easy communication for local farmers, but now the water-

ways remain dried up due to lack of regular re-excavation," said Sheikh Abu Bakar Siddik, deputy director (DD) of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Jhalakathi.

Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) and Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) are authorised to carry out re-excavation work to keep canals and waterways free flowing, the DD added.

"To re-excavate any canal, local union parishad chairman has to submit a project proposal to be approved by the higher authority of our department," said Ruhul Amin, executive engineer of LGED, Jhalakathi.



This Bailey bridge on Guthia canal in Barisal's Babuganj upazila has become awfully risky for its users as some of its steel decks are badly damaged and displaced.

PHOTO: STAR

Babuganj bridge turns risky

The iron bridge is in awful condition

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The iron bridge on Guthia canal on Barisal-Swarupkathi regional highway in Babuganj upazila of the district has turned too risky due to its awful condition.

Because of the situation, thousands of people who use the bridge every day have to cross it amid risk of accident.

Local people said the steel structure of the bridge that connects Pirojpur and Swarupkathi, Banaripara, Ujirpur and Babuganj upazilas with the divisional headquarters, is in such a dilapidated condition that it may collapse anytime due to lack of renovation for long.

The bridge on Guthia canal, which has been in use for nearly three decades, has not been renovated for a long time, said Aftab Hossain, president of Barisal Bus Owner's Association.

"We have to run the vehicles over the dilapidated bridge amid risk of accident as there is no alternative road connection between Pirojpur and Barisal," said Belal Hossain, a truck driver.

Rubel Hossain, a contractor, said the bridge has become too risky for users due to lack of proper maintenance and renovation work.

Roads and Highways Department (RHD) officials said the bridge turned very risky in recent times as most of the trucks crossing it are overloaded.

RHD officials said the bridge on Guthia canal has turned risky as it has been in use for the last thirty years without any renovation work.

RHD executive engineer in Barisal said they have sent a proposal for constructing a concrete bridge there as soon as possible.

Bowlers rule day

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Bangladesh reached in a forlorn state as they lost four wickets for 56 runs in reply to Sri Lanka's 222.

In contrasting fashion, Bangladesh's bowlers earned their wickets through fine bowling whereas the home batsmen gifted their wickets to the opposition. Tamim Iqbal's half-forward drive in the very third ball of the innings immediately after a magnificent boundary offered a return catch to Suranga Lakmal. First-Test hero Mominul Haque ran himself out in unacceptable fashion as the left-hander simply forgot about the need to ground his bat after a run when a throw was fired at his end. Mushfiqur Rahim was bowled shouldering arms despite Lakmal warning him twice in the over in the form of sharp inswingers in the previous deliveries.

Finally, Imrul Kayes lost yet another review for his side as the left-hander was trapped in front of middle and leg by off-spinner Dilruwan Perera after playing for the turn.

With his colleagues' inept batting as the backdrop, Liton Das's measured batting kept home hopes alive as the right-hander remained unbeaten on 24. It was also a good decision from captain Mahmudullah

Riyad to not come out to bat at the fall of Imrul's wicket late in the day and sending in Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who was batting on five. Still trailing by 166 runs, Bangladesh will need to show real character to take a first-innings lead to have a shot at winning the match on a difficult wicket.

Earlier, it was Razzak's morning and afternoon as the veteran left-armed made good use of the surface to scalp four wickets. He got good support from another left-arm spinner in Taijul Islam, who also claimed four wickets, and pacer Mustafizur Rahman who bowled brilliantly to put huge pressure on the Lankan batsmen on way to capturing two wickets.

"It wasn't an unplayable wicket. This type of turn is evident in a lot of places. It wasn't stopping or keeping low," said Razzak after the day's play. Instead of the pitch, the veteran spinner deserved credit for his craftiness while initiating the early damage in the morning session, especially the way he angled the delivery to bring Dimuth Karunaratne out of the crease to be stumped down the leg side, pushed Danushka Gunathilaka onto the back foot to draw a mistake, before bowling a

Widow beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A widow was beaten to death during a quarrel over irrigation of cropland in Saghata upazila on Wednesday night.

The victim was Feroja Bewa, 55, of Tepa Padumshaher village.

The quarrel began when one Ajiron Begum and her men of the village started irrigation with an electricity-driven pump set up by Feroja's son Rashidul Islam at his home.

Locals said Ajiron along with her men started the pump to irrigate her cropland.

Feroja and Rashidul's wife Shahina Begum asked them to switch off the machine, locals said, adding that an altercation took place over the issue.

At one stage, Ajiron's men beat up Shahina and Feroja, leaving them injured seriously. Feroja succumbed to her injuries on the way to Saghata Health Complex.

Man killed by brother

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A man was stabbed to death allegedly by his younger brother in Sadar upazila yesterday over land dispute.

The deceased was Sanwar Hossain Fakir, son of late Malek Fakir of Rangachira village in Kakua union.

There was a dispute between Sanwar and his younger brother Khalek over a piece of land for the last few years, said Swapan Mahmud, former member of Kakua Union Parishad.

Khalek stabbed Sanwar in the chest with a knife when Sanwar went to the disputed land, leaving him dead on the spot, Swapan added.

Khalek went into hiding after the incident, Tangail Model Police Station Sub-Inspector Abul Bashar said.

Maize replaces tobacco farming

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Many tobacco growers in the district have switched to maize farming instead of tobacco this year, thanks to the awareness building campaigns by an anti-tobacco organisation and the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

District DAE Deputy Director (DD) Bidhubhushon Roy said tobacco has been cultivated on 8,300 hectares of land this year, while it was 14,500 hectares last year, and maize has been cultivated on 29,700 hectares this year, while it was 25,200 hectares last year.

"I cultivated tobacco on my 15 bighas of land for the last 15 years, but from this year I started farming maize as I have understood tobacco farming is harmful for the soil and the environment," said Nur Islam, 55, of Karnopur village in Sadar upazila. "I will never

use my land for farming tobacco in future," he added.

Aynal Haque, 48, a farmer of Durarkuti village in Aditmari upazila, said he used to grow tobacco on his 12 bighas of land before, but he has cultivated maize this year. "I have said goodbye to tobacco farming forever from this year as I am aware of its bad effects," he said, adding that tobacco farming destroyed the fertility of his land.

"I got more profit from maize farming than from tobacco farming last year, so I have cultivated maize on my eight bighas instead of tobacco this year. I also understood that tobacco farming is harmful for our health," said Mantazu Islam, 55, of Bhelabari village in the upazila.

"It has been decided that farmers in our village will bid goodbye to tobacco farming forever from next year," said

Sheher Ali, 58, of Dighaltari village in the upazila. "It is true that tobacco farming brings profit, but it is harmful for soil fertility, environment and our health," he added.

A member of district Anti Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) Khorshed Alam told this correspondent that ATMA works for building awareness against tobacco farming among the farmers in the district, and their campaign is bringing good result every day.

DD of DAE said agriculture officials and ATMA conduct campaigns jointly to motivate farmers to avoid tobacco farming. "Farmers now understand the harmfulness of tobacco farming and are saying goodbye to it," he said, adding that many tobacco growers have started farming other crops instead of tobacco.

HRW urges govt

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demonstrations, it added.

Khaleda landed in the city's old central jail yesterday afternoon after she was handed five-year imprisonment by a Dhaka court for misappropriating a donation fund.

BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman and four others were jailed for 10 years with a fine of Tk 2.10 crore each in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

"The Bangladesh government is violating the rights to free expression and peaceful assembly by preventing opposition supporters from demonstrating," said Brad Adams, HRW's Asia director.

"While all political party

leaders should warn their supporters against engaging in violence, it's crucial for the government security forces to act with restraint at all times.

Anticipating protests by BNP supporters, the police deployed additional forces, banned gatherings and protests, and arrested several senior BNP leaders, said HRW.

The security forces have previously used excessive and indiscriminate force to contain political protests.

According to the statement, the security forces have arrested, tortured, killed, and forcibly disappeared hundreds in response to opposition supporters who have caused injuries and deaths

and committed arson during demonstrations.

At a press conference in Dhaka on Wednesday, Khaleda accused the government of "false allegations to harass" her and her family, but called on her supporters to be peaceful. "The ruling party [Awami League] has curbed the rights to protest, banned processions, in an administrative order as it is more frightened than we are over the verdict," she said.

Rights group Ain o Salish Kendra said a total of 1,786 people have been rounded up in the last eight days. An opposition spokesman told HRW that thousands had been detained including members of BNP, Jamaat-e-

Islami, and others not linked to any party.

Concerns have also been raised that AL and BNP supporters might provoke violence and target each other's supporters, HRW said.

The rights group urged the government to publicly order the security forces to abide by the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms.

"The Bangladesh government's claims to be open and democratic ring hollow as it cracks down on political dissent," Adams said. "The government has a responsibility to prevent and minimize violence, but it needs to do so in a way that respects basic rights, not flouts them."