

## Disability not a barrier

MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT,  
Thakurgaon

Defying his severe physical disability a schoolboy, who was born with one hand missing and the other badly deformed, is appearing in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations at Pirganj Government Girls' High School centre in Pirganj upazila headquarters.

The boy, Ekramul Haque, 16, is the youngest among four children of Najib Uddin, 55, a farm labourer at Mallikpur village in the upazila.

"Ekramul was born without the left hand while his right hand is very short and has only two fingers. As he grew up, he showed keen interest in learning and expressed eagerness to go to school. I admitted him to Mallikpur Brac School," said Najib Uddin.

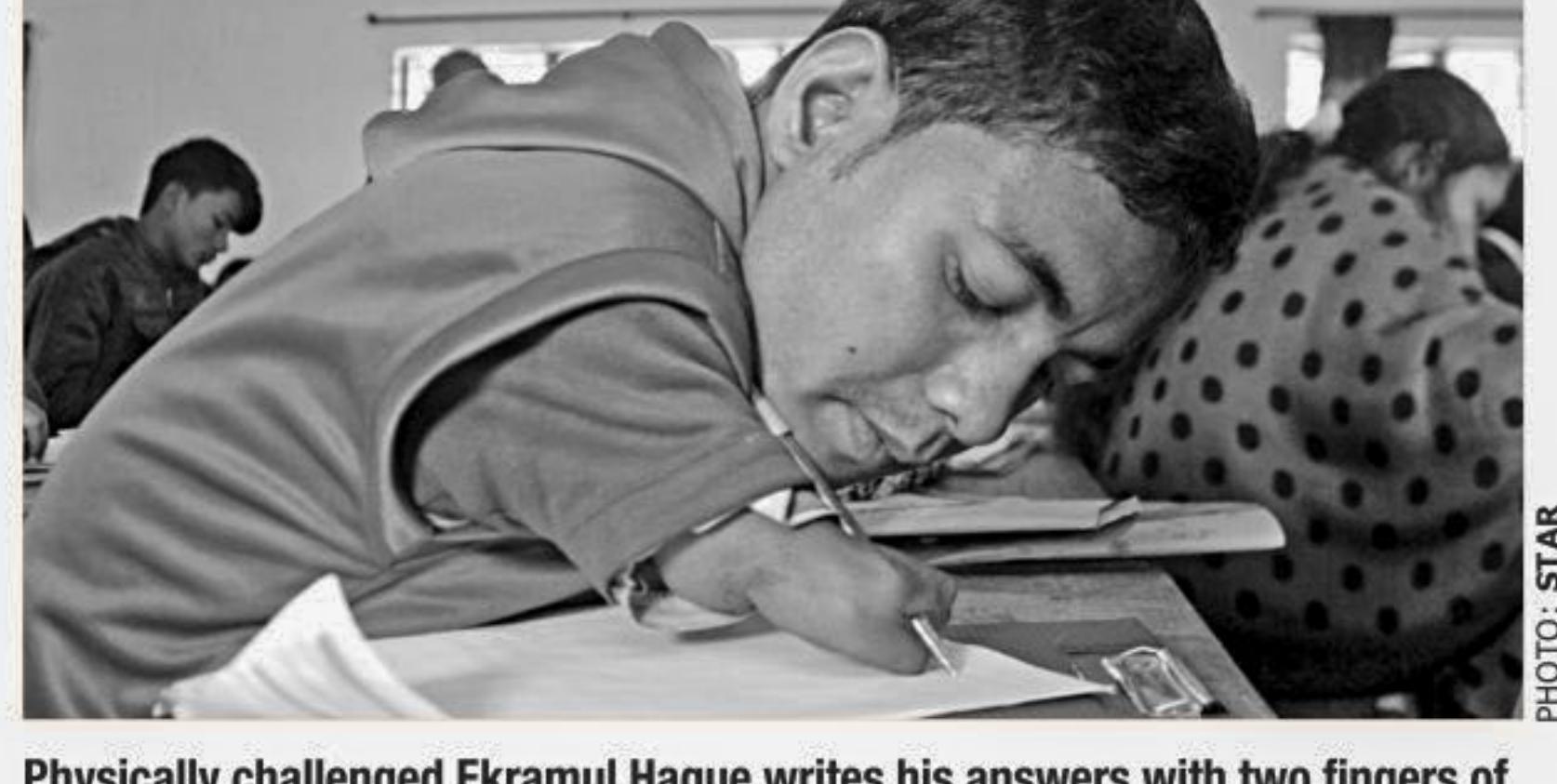
After completing primary education successfully, Ekramul was admitted to Jaborhat Hemchandra High School in the upazila, from where he is appearing in the SSC examinations from humanities group, Najib added.

not cross primary level due to financial constraints, but he is continuing education by earning in various ways.

"As we have no farmland, my father and brother work as farm labourers. Sometimes they give my educational expenditure from their earning," he said. "As I am unable to do hard work, I rear chickens and ducks to manage the expenses for my education. Sometimes, villagers come forward to help me continue my studies," he added.

"My school teachers gave all-out support for continuation of my education. Despite the physical barrier, I want to do higher study in a good educational institution so that I can get a government job, which will help me look after my poor parents. I am thinking about how to manage the education expenditure after the SSC," Ekramul said.

"Ekramul has keen interest to continue education despite his physical disability. He is a well-behaved boy," said Ekramul's classmate Manuel Tudu. Hemchandra High School Headmaster Gopen Kumar

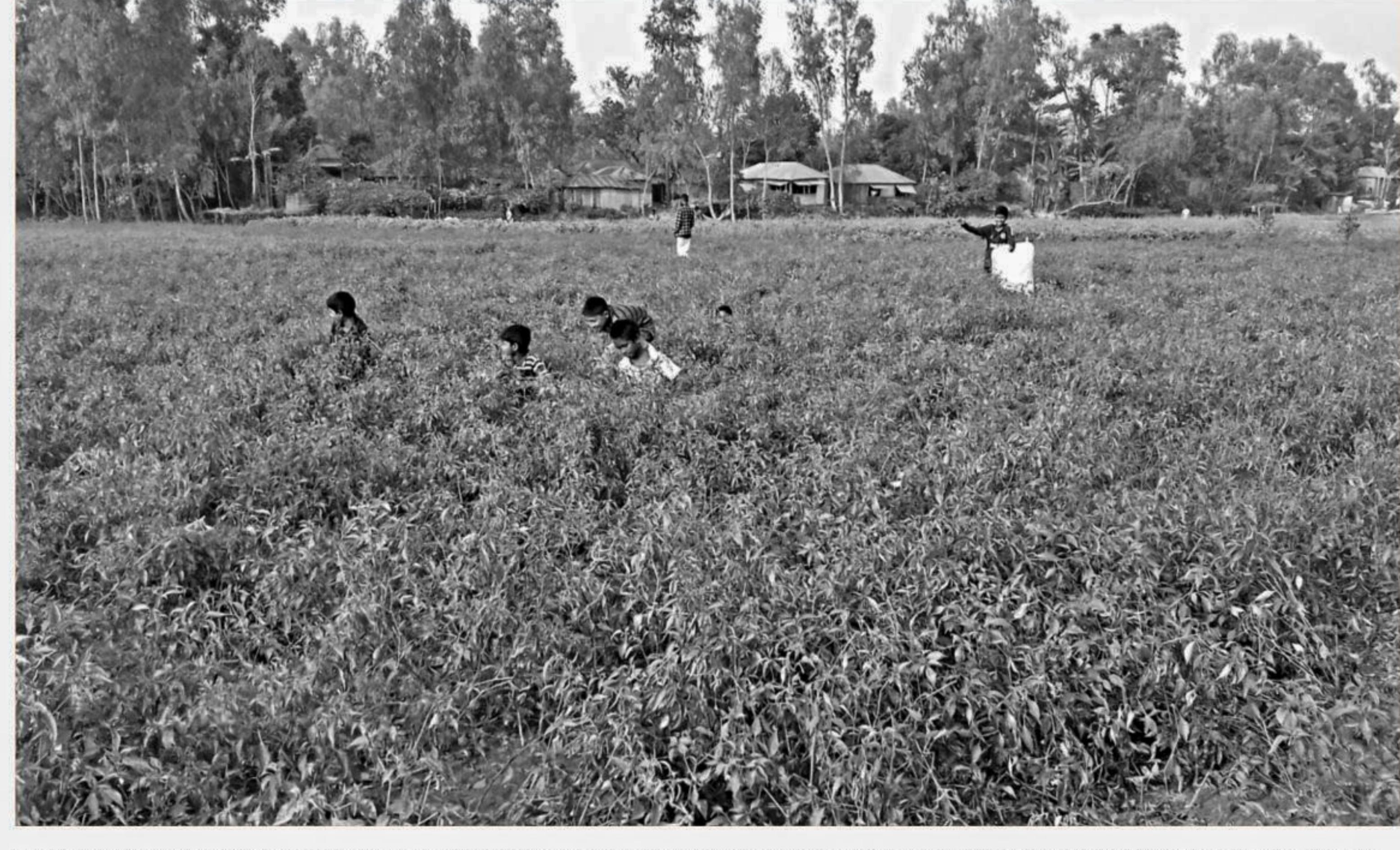


Physically challenged Ekramul Haque writes his answers with two fingers of his deformed right hand at an SSC examination centre in Thakurgaon.

During a visit to the examination centre yesterday, this correspondent saw the boy writing answer scripts with two fingers of the deformed right hand.

Malakar said Ekramul is always attentive to studies and achieved good results in the school examinations, although he has to write with a defective hand. Headmistress, also centre secretary of Pirganj Girls' High School, Shamsun Nahar said the invigilators are careful so that he does not face trouble in the examination room. He is provided additional thirty minutes for each exam paper due to his disability, as per the rule.

Talking to this correspondent, he said his elder brother and two sisters could



Children working at farmlands during their school hours is a not so uncommon scene in char (landmass emerging from riverbed) areas along the Jamuna. The photo was taken from Sariakandi upazila in Bogra a few days ago.

PHOTO: STAR

## School attendance crisis on Bogra's Jamuna chars

MOSTAFA SHABUJ with ANDREW EAGLE

On the Jamuna river shoals (char landmass emerging from riverbed) in Bogra's Sariakandi upazila, all too often school isn't as important as farm work.

A combination of widespread financial hardship and some schools being run by less-qualified para-teachers has resulted in at least a thousand students dropping out in favour of manual labour.

"When students go to school they just play for a few hours and return home," says one guardian, Ayan Uddin from Shanpancha village, on a shoal of the same name in Karnibari union. "There is

no education to be had. The teachers arrive around 11:00am and leave before 2:00pm. That's why many parents have lost interest in sending their children to school."

The acting headmistress of Char Shanpancha Government Primary School says one of the main difficulties faced by teaching staff is transport.

"My home is fifteen kilometres from the school," she explains. "I have to travel three kilometres by rickshaw, four by bus and then another three by boat, to finally walk five kilometres to reach the school grounds. It's very time-consuming."

"As we do inevitably arrive at the school late, we have a local Higher School Certificate graduate to hold

classes as a para-teacher," she continues. "Like me, our two assistant teachers are women. For security considerations it's unreasonable to expect them to stay the night on the shoal. Although we face many difficulties to reach school, we do our best."

Several initiatives have been taken to encourage school attendance in shoal areas. Students receive a scholarship of Tk 100 per month for attendance and midday meals are provided. School infrastructure has been developed. And yet, it seems, such efforts have met with limited success.

If a child harvests chillies instead of going to school, they can earn around Tk 100 per day, which is difficult for

struggling families to resist.

Meanwhile, Sariakandi's assistant thana education officer Rafiqul Alam disagrees that the standard of education in shoal schools is lacking.

"We have sufficient classes and proper education in those areas," he says. "There is no para-teacher in any of the schools. Teaching quality is improving day by day."

He says that of the upazila's 168 primary schools, the 44 schools that are located on shoals cater to the needs of nearly 7,000 students. Rafiqul claims class attendance stands at over ninety percent; but many parents disagree. On the shoals they claim, only a very few students attend class with regularity.

## ATTACK ON CHAKMA QUEEN, RAPE OF MARMA GIRL Impartial probe demanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Speakers at a human chain programme in the hill district town yesterday demanded impartial investigation for the alleged assault on Chakma Rani Yan Yan and female volunteers at Rangamati Sadar Hospital on February 15 and rape and sexual harassment of two Marma sisters on January 22.

The human chain was formed under the banner of Sammilito Nari Somaj in front of Rangamati district Shilpakala Academy beside Rangamati-Chittagong highway.

Nirupa Dewan, convener of Sammilito Nari Somaj and former member of National Human Rights Commission, Tuku Talukder, president of Narir Proti Sahingsata Protirodh Committee's Rangamati unit, and Daw Nai Prue Naly, coordinator of Women Resource Network's Bandarban district unit, addressed the programme, among others.

Where Chakma Queen Yan Yan is not safe, overall security of the indigenous people in Chittagong Hill Tracts region can be imagined, speakers said.

Two Marma sisters, aged 18 and 13,

were admitted to Rangamati Sadar Hospital on January 22 after the elder one was allegedly raped and the other sexually assaulted during a drive by security forces at Orachari village in Baliachari upazila.

Following a writ petition filed by the girls' father, a High Court bench on February 13 ordered the authorities concerned of the government and Rangamati Sadar Hospital to hand over the girls to their parents.

A police team accompanied by the parents of the two sisters went to the hospital on February 15 and handed them over to their parents.

The two sisters refused to go with them, as they were worried about their safety, according to witnesses.

As a group of volunteers, who had been looking after the welfare of the two sisters at the hospital, and Chakma Circle Queen Yan Yan protested the police move, a group of masked men attacked the queen and the volunteers, speakers said at yesterday's human chain.

Later the organisers of the programme submitted a memorandum to the prime minister through the Rangamati deputy commissioner, demanding punishment of the culprits for rape and sexual harassment of two Marma sisters and attack on Chakma Queen and female volunteers.

## Thalassaemia affected kid screams in pain

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Murad Parvez is first boy in his class but Thalassaemia, a hereditary haemolytic disorder, brings setback in his life.

The 10-year-old is a Class IV student at Barabari Government Primary School in Aditmari upazila. Son of Shafiqul Islam of Barabari village, Murad is the youngest among his four siblings.

At present, the loved student of the schoolteachers spends maximum time in the hospital bed for treatment, where he screams in pain.

His poor parents are not able to bear his treatment cost.

Murad's mother Marzina Khatun said their son was detected with Thalassaemia seven months ago and since then he has been given treatment in Rangpur and Lalmonirhat.

"We have already sold our ten decimals of lands for our son's treatment cost, and now we have no other asset to sell," she said in tears.

"We want to save our son, we want to see our son smiling but we don't know how," said Marzina.



Thalassaemia affected Murad Parvez in Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital with his parents.

PHOTO: STAR

people in the society extend their helping hand for our son's treatment, we will see our son smiling," he said.

Contacted, child diseases specialist of Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital Dr Hafizur Rahman said if the disease is in primary stage, it will be cured after getting proper treatment.

"Doctor suggests taking our son to India's Shiliguri Thalassaemia Hospital where he will be cured but we cannot afford it," he said, adding that Tk 3 lakh would be needed for the treatment.

"If the government or kind-hearted

Boy burnt to death in Tangail cotton godown fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A seven-year-old boy was burnt to death in Kalihati upazila yesterday.

The victim was Mohammad Rabbi, son of Nurul Islam of Bangravillage.

Police said a cotton godown caught fire around 5:30pm.

On information, fire fighters rushed to the spot and doused the flame after one hour of frantic efforts. Later, the body of the boy was found inside the godown.

The boy's father is an employee of the cotton godown, police said, adding how the boy was confined inside the godown and the reason behind the fire could not be known immediately.

## EVICTION DRIVE IN THAKURGAON

## 50 illegal structures demolished

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Thakurgaon Roads and Highways Department (RHD) started an eviction drive yesterday to remove the illegal structures along the 4.5 kilometre-long Thakurgaon-Baliadangi road.

The drive started at 9:30am and was continuing as of filing of this report around 4:00pm.

Fifty illegal structures were knocked down from 1.5 kilometre of the 4.5 kilometre-long road stretching from Baliadangi intersection to Munshirhat area in Thakurgaon municipality.

Deputy Secretary Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman Faruki, also executive magistrate and estate and law officer of RHD, Dhaka Zone, led the eviction drive in cooperation with the local administration.

RHD has started the construction work of the four-lane road with two bridges stretching from Thakurgaon intersection to Baliadangi intersection, in the first week of this month.

RHD is implementing the Tk 56 crore development work under 'Upgrading Important Regional Highways Properly (Rangpur Zone) Project'.

The road widening work is a long-awaited demand of the locals as it is the only link road between the district headquarters and four upazilas of the district.

The construction work is scheduled to be completed within the next one and a half years, RHD officials said.

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