

# Whip opens bridge work though tender process incomplete

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Construction work of a bridge on the Manu river at Rajapur in the district has been inaugurated although the land acquisition and tender process for the work is yet to be complete.

Lawmaker from Moulvibazar-1 (Barlekha and Juri) Shahab Uddin, also whip of parliament, and Abdul Matin, lawmaker from Moulvibazar-2 (Kulaura), jointly inaugurated the work on November 1.

The tender process for the bridge is going on, said local Roads and Highways Department (RHD) officials.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) recently approved a Tk 99.17 crore project to construct a girder bridge on the Manu river along with a 7.5km road connecting Kulaura-Prithimpasha-Hajipur-Sharifpur.

"Tenders have been called and the RHD will issue work order after selecting the contractor. Then the construction work can begin which may take more than two months," said Md Rashedul Haque, sub-divisional engineer of RHD in Kulaura.

Asked why the construction work was inaugurated before completion of the tender process, Rashedul said he was unable to comment on the matter.

Despite repeated attempts, lawmaker Abdul Matin could not be reached over phone for comments.

About 50,000 people in Hajipur and Sharifpur unions had been demanding the bridge at Rajapur as locals including a large number of school-goers have to cross the river by boats during monsoon and walk on a bamboo-made bridge across the river during the dry season, amid risk, said RHD officials.



Lawmaker Shahab Uddin, also whip of parliament, and Abdul Matin, lawmaker from Moulvibazar-2 constituency, pray with others after jointly inaugurating the construction work of a bridge on the Manu river at Rajapur in the district on November 1.

# SCHEME FOR TEA WORKERS Extortion by AL men, union leaders alleged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Workers of Shilua Tea garden in Juri upazila under the district yesterday filed a complaint to the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), alleging extortion by some tea workers' leaders from the beneficiaries under a government scheme for development of ultra poor tea workers' life.

Stakeholders alleged that a group of ruling Awami League men with the help of some tea workers' leaders have been collecting money illegally from the ultra poor tea workers.

A total of 1,957 ultra poor tea workers in Juri upazila got Tk 5,000 each under the project titled "Cha Sramikder Jibonman Unnayan Kormosuchi", said officials of upazila social service department.

Under the project, 172 workers of Shilua tea garden were included in the list of beneficiaries prepared by local union parishad (UP) chairman, members and leaders of tea workers union but the ultra poor tea workers had to meet the demand of extortionists after drawing the money from bank.

"When tea workers collected the money from a bank in Juri upazila town, some workers' leaders realised Tk 500 to Tk 800 from each beneficiary, saying that it was taken as per the government's instruction," said Purno Bhar, a tea worker.

Talking with this correspondent, general tea workers expressed their grievance over the illegal money collection.

"I was forced to pay Tk 800 out of Tk 5,000 that I received. I faced harassment when I refused to give the money at first," said a tea worker seeking anonymity.

"We the tea workers protested against the illegal money collection, but the extortionists didn't care as they belong to the ruling party," said one Joitun Bibi.

Shahab Uddin, chairman of Gualbari UP said, "After some tea workers told me of the illegal money collection, I told them to submit written complaint to Juri UNO."

The list of beneficiaries is prepared by Upananda Bauri, president of Shilua Tea garden unit of Bangladesh Tea Labour Union, also adviser of Goalbari union unit of Awami League, and Subash Karmakar, cashier of the same unit.

This correspondent tried to contact Upananda but he did not receive the phone calls.

Contacted, Subash Karmakar said, "Upananda Bauri and I made the list properly. The allegations are false and those were brought in an evil attempt to malign our image."

Rakesh Paul, social service department officer in Juri upazila, said he does not know about the incident.

Ashim Chandra Bonik, UNO of Juri, said, "I got a written complaint. After investigation I will take stern action against illegal money collection."

# Man gets life for killing wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Joypurhat court on Wednesday jailed a man for life for killing his wife in Khetlal upazila in 2015.

The convict is Mosharrar Hossain, 42, of Kanaipukur village.

Joypurhat District and Sessions Judge Momotaz Parvin delivered the verdict and also fined the convict Tk 20,000. In default, he is to suffer three months more in jail.

According to the case statement, Mosharrar suffocated his wife Tahera Begum, 36, daughter of Mobarak Sakhidar of Fofra village, to death on the night of August 6 in 2015 and later hanged the body from the ceiling of their room to make the murder look like it was suicide.

# Substandard materials used in Lalmonirhat road work

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The contractor of the under-construction Sreekhata Sonamari-Khodorpara road in Kaliganj upazila has not yet removed the substandard materials from the site although he was sent letters by Lalmonirhat Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), asking him to remove those by November 4.

Senior Assistant Engineer of Lalmonirhat Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), also acting Kaliganj Upazila Engineer, Md Masuduzzaman sent three letters to the contractor, asking him to use standard materials according to the schedule after removing the substandard materials by November 4. However, the contractor did not respond to the letters, he said.

Masuduzzaman told this correspondent that contractor Abdul Hakim got the work order for constructing the 1,872-metre-long road at an estimate cost of Tk 93.99 lakh during the current fiscal year, and sub-contractor Aatur Rahman Majhi started construction in July this year.

Construction was stopped as the locals strongly protested against the use of substandard materials, which violated the terms of the schedule, he said. "LGED authorities will take necessary steps against the contractor as he disobeyed our order," he said.

Golam Mostafa of Sonamari village alleged that the sub-contractor used rejected bricks on the road instead of first-class bricks. The sub-contractor is owner of a brick kiln in the village and rejected bricks from the kiln are being used for constructing the road during the night, he added.

LGED authorities ordered the contractor to remove the substandard materials by November 4, but those had not been removed as of yesterday noon due to unknown reason, said Azizar Rahman of the village.

If the rejected bricks get slightly wet during rainfall, they will get damaged and the newly constructed road will become unfit for vehicular movement, he said, demanding construction of the road according to the schedule.

"If the rejected bricks are not removed from

the site, we villagers will not allow the contractor or LGED officials to restart the construction work as we are united," said Parshuram Chandra, 48, of Sreekhata village.

Contractor Abdul Hakim said he is not aware of the matter as the sub-contractor Aatur Rahman Majhi took the work using his (Hakim's) licence, so the sub-contractor is responsible for this situation.

Sub-contractor Aatur Rahman Majhi told this correspondent that he used some substandard bricks as first-class bricks are not available at this time in the area. "I will complete construction of the road according to the schedule," he said, adding that he did not disobey the LGED authorities' order.

Lalmonirhat LGED Executive Engineer AKM Amiruzzaman said the sub-contractor was not given any payment and he will not get any payment if he does not do the construction work according to schedule after removing the substandard materials.

"We are preparing to invalidate the contractor's licence," he added.

# Bamboo bridge the only means for thousands

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Around 20,000 people of seven villages in two unions under Madarganj upazila have been suffering much for want of a concrete bridge for years, thanks to indifference of the authorities concerned.

A 300-foot-long and 3-foot-wide bamboo bridge over the Koyra river is only the means of road communication for those villagers.

Villagers rebuild the bridge, connecting Charkoyra village and Mudibari Chat of Birkoyra village under Adarvita union, with their own money every year after the rainy season as it collapses during floods, villagers said.

Kukurumari, Kaladah, Char Kukurumari, Hatmaghali and Atamari villages under Jorkhali union and Charkoyra village are located on the western side of the river while Birkoyra village is on the eastern side.

People of the western villages have to cross the bamboo bridge to reach their respective destinations while farmers of Birkoyra pass over the bridge to work on their lands on the western side, villagers said.

As even rickshaw-vans cannot ply the narrow bridge, the farmers have to carry agro-products across the bridge on their shoulders or heads to

reach local markets, farmers of the western villages said.

"When we need to sell a large amount of agro-products, we have to carry the sacks one by one and cross the narrow bridge risking our lives," said farmers Genda Miah and Shahjahan Akanda of Kukurumari village.

"We have been facing this situation for 20 years. Public representatives never came forward to solve the problem even after giving us assurance repeatedly," they alleged.

Around 1,000 students, including 400 girls, from western villages face difficulties when they cross the bridge on way to their schools at Koyra Bazar, said a number of students.

Hospital-bound patients, especially pregnant women, fall in great trouble as the narrow bamboo-bridge is unfit for vehicular movement, said 82-year-old Kasir Uddin of Kukurumari village.

"Flood water overflows the low bridge and it remains under water from July to September. As a result, we have to cross the river by boat and face difficulties during those months," said the elderly man, adding that the bridge collapses during flood.

"The villagers erect another bamboo bridge at their initiative and with their own money, which is

around Tk one lakh. We do it in October every year," he said.

"How long will the suffering continue?" he asked.

Around 100 kids studying at Char Koyra Government Primary School, opposite to Birkoyra village, have to take risk while crossing the bridge on their way to and from the school, said Monwara Begum, assistant teacher of the institution.

Moreover, most of the kids hardly attend the school during the rainy season as the bridge remains under water, which hampers education of the kids, she added.

Considering the suffering of the commuters, the authorities concerned should immediately take steps for the construction of a concrete bridge over the river, said Jorkhali Union Parishad Chairman Faridul Islam.

Madarganj Upazila Local Government Engineering Department Engineer Md Muniruzzaman said they conducted a topographical survey and got the soil of the site tested several months ago.

"On the basis of the survey and the soil test, we will prepare a proposal for the construction of a concrete bridge over the river and send it to the higher authorities within a short time," the engineer added.



Retired ASP Rezaul Karim stands at the bamboo cluster beside his homestead in Kurigram Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: ABDUL WAHED

# Retired cop all smiles on bamboo farming

ABDUL WAHED, Kurigram

A retired police official, who has been cultivating long and thick bamboos of Muli variety, widely known as Makhla Bash, at his homestead in Kurigram town for the last ten years, has a desire to spread the cultivation among local people.

Former Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Rezaul Karim, 70, son of late Panir Uddin Ahmed of Kaley village in Sadar upazila, collected three bamboo plants while he was serving as officer-in-charge (OC) of Panchagarh's Boda Police Station in 2003 and planted those at his Kurigram house premises.

The length of each bamboo is 80 feet to 90 feet and its circumference is up to two feet and six inches while the length of other local varieties is 45 feet to 60 feet and their circumference is up to 12 inches, Rezaul said.

Rezaul said, "One of my former higher officials in Panchagarh asked me to collect the bamboo variety from a farmer at Shariyal village in Tentulia upazila in 2002."

"After my retirement from government service in 2007, when I returned home I found that two of the three plants had died," he said, adding that he then started to take care of the only plant alive and was able to grow three new plants from the tree the same year.

From then, new plants started growing every year and it has turned into a large bamboo cluster now, Rezaul said.

"During nursing of the plants at the beginning I noticed that the new plants taste sweet and are vulnerable to ant attack," he said, adding that he informed two agriculture officials of the matter, who suggested him to spray pesticides on the affected

plants and it worked.

He use the bamboos for various household purposes and often gives some of those to his poor neighbours, he said, adding that he sold 20 bamboos at Tk 400 each this year.

Moreover, Rezaul also gave a few bamboo plants to two of his relatives who planted those as per his instruction.

Farmer Abdul Latif, 38, of Shibram village, said he bought 14 bamboos from Rezaul's cluster and the trees are more sustainable than the local variety.

Kurigram Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Sasty Chandra Roy said the long and thick bamboo of Muli variety is usually found in Panchagarh and Thakurgaon.

Compared to the other local varieties, Muli variety is good in quality and its cultivation should spread among other farmers, he said.

# Orphan 'raped, confined'

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talking to the other children about what happened.

Her grandmother visited the orphanage on Wednesday, like every week, to meet her. "I come frequently and always meet her. However, staff members of the orphanage barred me from meeting her this time. This made me suspect that something was wrong."

"After requesting the authorities, they finally let me meet her and I found her not only suffering from a fever, but also bleeding severely."

When the girl's grandmother asked the superintendent of the orphanage Sharmin Akhter about what happened, she was told that the girl "fell off a tree and injured herself."

"They also told me they had taken her to hospital and brought her back after treatment," said the grandmother, adding that she requested to

take her granddaughter to hospital herself to check if she was alright. She was, however, barred by orphanage authorities from this as well.

She then filed a written complaint with the deputy commissioner (DC) of Patuakhali yesterday, after which district administration and police at 2:00pm rescued the victim and sent her to Patuakhali General Hospital. They also arrested Motaleb from the district's Shabujbagh area around 3:00pm.

Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Nurul Hafiz said he went to the orphanage with two police officials. "We spoke to the victim's grandmother, the other orphans living there and the authorities concerned." He added that journalists at the spot were told that the girl was raped and police would take necessary actions against Motaleb.

Upon the arrival of law enforcers,

over 100 children of the same orphanage brought out a procession demanding justice for the girl. ADM Hafiz assured them that lawful actions would be taken in this regard.

Md Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Patuakhali Police Station, said steps would be taken after investigation, adding that they will also investigate the allegations against the orphanage of confining the victim after she was raped. "If the claims are true, necessary steps will be taken against them."

However, orphanage authorities denied the allegation, saying she was kept in the room "due to her injury from the fall".

The nine-year-old had been living at the orphanage for about three years after her mother married another man following her father's death, her grandmother said.