



The dilapidated building of the Bangladesh Railway dispensary at Mymensingh Railway Station.

PHOTO: STAR

Service at railway dispensaries continues to deteriorate

MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Mymensingh Railway Station dispensary building has been in an awful state for over five years, and only one doctor attends six dispensaries in different districts every day due to shortage of doctors.

During a visit there recently, this correspondent saw the shabby condition of the two-storey building of the dispensary.

Quite a few cracks have developed in the century-old building and rainwater seeps through the damaged roof, disrupting the activities of the dispensary. In the rainy season, stored medicines often get damaged due to dampness.

In the absence of any boundary wall, unwanted people, including drug addicts, can easily enter the premises at night, making the activities of the dispensary. In the rainy season, stored medicines often get damaged due to dampness.

Only one doctor has been attending six Bangladesh Railway (BR) dispensaries in Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Kishoreganj and Habiganj districts for the last five years.

"I have to perform duty in Dhaka. I attend Mymensingh Railway Station dispensary on

Monday, Kewatkhali dispensary in Mymensingh on Tuesday, Jamalpur Railway Station dispensary on Wednesday and Dewanganj Railway Station dispensary in Jamalpur on Thursday. I also have to visit dispensaries at Bhairab in Kishoreganj and Shaestaganj in Habiganj occasionally. I return to Dhaka the same day from all the dispensaries," said Assistant Surgeon Dr Ayubur Rahman Khan, who is assigned for the dispensaries.

On average, 40 patients come to the BR dispensary at Mymensingh station daily, and the number rises every Monday, the day scheduled for the lone doctor's attendance there. The logistic support is also too scanty for the number of treatment seekers, said Ahsan Ullah, a pharmacist of the dispensary.

Dr Khan said doctors are not interested in joining railway dispensaries as they have to continue as non-gazetted officers almost throughout the service period, and they hardly have any opportunities for higher studies.

"I have been serving in the medical department for 27 years in the same post," lamented Dr Khan.

He said the medical department is badly

neglected and young doctors are reluctant to join there. "In the British and Pakistan periods and soon after independence, the service at the dispensaries was much better, but it has been very poor in the last two decades," he added.

Ten doctors have been recruited and they will join the dispensaries after completion of their four-month training, said Divisional Medical Officer (DMO) of BR Dr Lutfunnahar Begum.

"We sent proposals to the authorities several times for renovation of the dilapidated dispensaries, but no initiative has been taken yet," the DMO said.

The dispensaries also need recruitment of more doctors and other staff, including pharmacists, and supply of sufficient medicines, she said.

Rafiqul Islam, a member of the security staff of Mymensingh station, said the number of patients at the dispensaries is very thin due to lack of doctors and medicines.

"Railway is one of the most important sectors of the country but its healthcare facilities are very poor," he said.

Maize farming boon for poor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Maize farming is a blessing for the Teesta river basin char people of five upazilas as it helps them overcome their poverty.

Five years ago, Sahedul Islam, 43, of char Dawabari in Hatibandha upazila, was fighting with poverty.

"I learnt about maize farming five years ago, and it has been a blessing as I am getting unexpected profit," he said. "I grow maize on 11 bighas of my land and vegetables and spices on one bigha," he said.

"Now, I can save money after fulfilling my family's needs," he said, adding that many families in char areas are now well-off.

Nasirul Islam, 48, of char Sindurna, said they spend Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 for farming maize on one bigha of land and get 25 to 32 maunds. Each maund is sold at Tk 450 to Tk 550. "We also earn around Tk 5,000 from selling maize sticks and cone (mocha) of maize from each bigha," he said.

"We do not need to use much chemical fertiliser and pesticide on a maize field," said Delowar Hossain, 55, of Bhotmari in Kaliganj upazila. "Maize farming has changed our lifestyle," he added.

Lalmonirhat Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Head Assistant Khurshid Alam said maize was cultivated on 26,350 hectares of land last year, of which one third was on Teesta char areas, adding that more lands have been targeted this year.

Hatibandha Agriculture Officer Anowar Hossain said farmers are farming maize since the first week of November and it will continue till the first week of December.

"DAE officials provide technical input for farming maize on char lands," he said.

Train hits bus at level crossing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A train hit a bus after it got stuck at an unmanned level crossing at Amutra village in Akkelpur upazila of Joypurhat when its engine stopped functioning on Saturday evening.

There was no casualty as all the passengers had got down before the bus was hit, said police.

The bus carrying passengers was returning to Raninagar upazila of Naogaon from a picnic at Swapnapuri amusement park in Dinajpur.

As the bus got on the level crossing around 7:00pm, its engine suddenly stopped, said witnesses.

The bus driver made failed attempts to restart and all the passengers got down.

Later, Rajshahi-bound Titumir Express hit the bus there, making a loud sound.

The incident caused the train to delay its journey by 20 minutes, said Kiron Chandra Roy, Akkelpur Police Station OC.

Rash Mela begins Nov 21

Only chicken meat allowed, playing sound box, carrying firearms prohibited

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

The authorities concerned have taken special security measures at Alorkol in Dublar Char near the Sundarbans ahead of the Rash Mela (Rash Festival), which will begin on November 21.

The three-day traditional festival will end on November 23.

Alongside taking other measures, the authorities have imposed a ban on carrying all kinds of meat, except chicken.

People concerned said deer hunting spree sees a sharp rise during the festival every year as hundreds of boats carrying thousands devotees throng the venue at Alorkol in Dublar Char, close to the coast of Bay of Bengal, under Sharankhola Range of the mangrove forest.

"We had a meeting with the district administration to stop poaching of deer at any cost during the festival period," Divisional Forest Officer (East Division) of the Sundarbans Mahamudul Hasan said, adding that the pilgrims will have to travel from eight selected points dur-

ing day time.

Use of loudspeakers and carrying firearms and ammunition are completely restricted, he said, adding that no public movement will be allowed at night.

He said the committee for celebrating the Rash Mela has already completed all the arrangements and also taken special monitoring measure to stop deer hunting during the festival.

"Alongside Rapid Action Battalion, Coast Guard and Bangladesh Navy, sixteen patrol teams of the forest department will work for the protection of the pilgrims in Pashur, Salah, Bhola and Shibsa rivers from November 20," the forest official said.

"The forest department has fixed eight river routes from Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira and adjacent Barguna for the pilgrims to travel to the venue, he said, adding that visitors will have to finish all their activities and leave the forest area before sunset on November 23.

Rubber garden workers on strike for over a month

Production suspended, offices shut in Madhupur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The piecemeal tapping workers of five rubber gardens under Madhupur Zone of Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation have been continuing strike for over one month for realising their four-point demand.

Production at the gardens has remained suspended and the offices have remained closed during the period.

The demands are designating workers in the tapping and rubber processing factories as permanent employees, introducing monthly wage system for the workers based on muster roll, paying monthly salary of Tk 15,000 to factory workers based on muster roll, and paving the roads of the gardens with bricks.

Around 1,600 workers of Pargachha, Chandpur and Kamlapur rubber gardens at Madhupur upazila of Tangail, Santoshpur rubber garden at Fulbaria upazila of Mymensingh and Kamajhara rubber garden at Shreebordi upazila of Sherpur under Madhupur Zone have been on strike since October 13.

The agitating workers have been holding programmes, including processions and rallies, everyday.

They demonstrated at a playground

adjacent to Pargachha rubber garden on Saturday and held a rally there.

Pargachha Piecemeal Tapping Workers Union Vice President Mokhesur Rahman, General Secretary Mizanur Rahman, Joint Secretary Billal Hossain and Organising Secretary Hafizur Rahman, spoke at the rally, with union President Saiful Islam Sanu in the chair.

Narrating the inhuman lives of the rubber garden workers, speakers urged the authorities concerned to meet their demands immediately. They also threatened to continue their movement until the demands are met.

Madhupur Upazila Parishad Chairman Sarwar Alam Khan Abu, Vice-Chairman Helal Uddin, Madhupur Municipality Mayor Masud Parvez, Mirzabari Union Parishad Chairman Shajahan Ali Talukder and Aronkhola Union Parishad Chairman Abdur Rahim also spoke at the rally, expressing their solidarity with the demands of the agitating rubber garden workers.

General Manager of Madhupur Zone Waliur Rahman said that they do not have authority to meet the demands. "I have already informed the higher authorities about the situation," he added.



Workers of rubber gardens demonstrate near Pargachha rubber garden in Madhupur upazila of Tangail on Saturday, urging acceptance of their four-point demand.

PHOTO: STAR



Local union parishad conducts a village court in Barguna's Amtali upazila. Inset, a yard meeting at Kalmegha village in Pathorghata upazila to increase awareness on the activities of village court.

PHOTO: STAR

People-friendly court

1,436 cases out of 1,545 disposed through Barguna Gram Adalats in 20 months

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

After the demise of her landless husband, domestic help Runu Begum, 45, with her only child Surma, took shelter at her father's house at Sakhipur village in Barguna's Bamna upazila several years ago. Surma is now an HSC first year student of a local college.

Runu often faces inhuman behaviour from her brothers. On June 4 this year, Runu and her daughter were physically tortured by one of her brothers and nephews over a trivial matter.

After the incident, Runu started heading for the local police station, but on the way Eusuf Ali, a member of village police, advised her to file a case with local Gram Adalat (village court) instead of police station after hearing her sorry tale.

Following a case filed by Runu at a cost of only Tk 10 as fee, the village court, led by the local union parishad (UP) chairman, issued a summon notice to the accused to appear before the court.

After hearing both sides, the court asked the accused for pardon for their bad deeds and fined them Tk 1,000 as treatment cost of

Runu and Surma. The accused also made commitment not to torture the woman and her daughter further.

"I am very grateful to the court as they heard me and gave their judgment in a very short time," said Runu.

There was a longstanding dispute between auto-rickshaw driver Motiar Rahman of Karuna village in Betagi upazila and his neighbour Shahin Khan over borrowing Tk 50,000.

On January 20 this year, Motiar filed a case with the village court at Mokamia UP office by paying fee of only Tk 20. After examining witnesses and evidence, the court in its judgment on March 5 asked Shahin to repay the money to Motiar. The latter got the amount following the verdict.

Like Runu and Motiar, many got justice through the village court in different union parishads of the coastal district.

The government enacted a law named 'Gram Adalat Ain-2006 (Amendment 2013)' to resolve the petty matters at a low cost. Local UP conducts the court, but due to lack of technical knowledge, the court failed to play its role properly.

Later, the LGRD ministry, with the help of

European Union (EU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), implemented a project titled 'Activating Village Court'. The second phase of the project started in January last year, which will end in December 2019 in order to improve access to justice for disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

Twenty-five unions of Amtali, Bamna, Betagi and Pathorghata upazilas have been brought under the project and total 1,436 cases out of 1,545 were disposed in the courts till August 30 this year, said Kamol Banerjee, Barguna district facilitator of UNDP under the project.

The courts also realised a total of Tk 1.17 crore and gave it to the victims in the cases during the time, he said.

Any plaintiff can file a case with the village court by paying only Tk 10 in criminal and Tk 20 in civil nature matters, valued up to Tk 75,000, said Kamol Banerjee.

As many as 1,080 unions of 128 upazilas in 27 districts have been brought under the coverage of the project, said Banerjee.

Advocate Shahjahan, a lawyer of Barguna District and Sessions Judge's Court, said village court is getting popularity among the locals as it promptly resolves petty matters at a token cost.