



Villagers of Sonakhuli Sarkarpara in Saidpur upazila weaving baskets with bamboo strips. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: EAM ASADUZZAMAN

Nilphamari's wicker basket village abuzz before Ramadan

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Like every year, ahead of the holy month of Ramadan, villagers of Sonakhuli Sarkarpara in Saidpur upazila have become busy again.

Almost all of them are now engaged in making bamboo wicker baskets (locally known as tukri) to be delivered to vermicelli and lachchha semai factories in and around Nilphamari.

The factories will use the wicker baskets as packaging containers for the delicately crispy vermicelli and lachchha semai, high in demand during the Ramadan and on the Eid day.

Akhtar Siddiquee Pappu, president of Vermicelli and Lachchha Semai Producers Association in Nilphamari, said, "Fasting devotees during Ramadan like to have vermicelli or lachchha semai for their iftar [breaking of fast]. Many like the items on the day of Eid too."

Catering to that demand, at least 80 to 90 factories, some authorised and some not authorised, produce several hundred tonnes of the food items in Ramadan, he said. "Because the item is crispy, we need a specific type of light basket made of bamboo. And the artisans at Sonakhuli Sarkarpara fulfil that exact requirement every year."

During a visiting to the village of five thousand residents recently, this correspondent found people of all ages weaving wicker baskets using bamboo strips and small knives.

Nur Ali, a senior citizen of the village, said, "One might think it's trivial work. But in fact, the craft is a blessing for us, because the profit in it is many times higher than that in agriculture or other businesses."

Explaining the advantages of the craft another elderly villager Jabelul Islam said, "It's a type of cottage industry. After finishing up household chores, women can do it. Even children can join after school."

At least 15 baskets can be made out of a matured bamboo stalk, costing Tk 150 and an astounding profit of Tk 375 is possible by selling each basket at a wholesale rate of Tk 35, the villagers said.

Rustom Ali, a wholesale wicker basket trader, said he sells bamboo baskets in different districts after purchasing around 6,000 to 8,000 baskets from Sonakhuli Sarkarpara daily.

The bamboo wicker baskets are very much in demand from February through June because those are also used for transporting different fruits and vegetables including mango, lychee or tomato, said Ali Hossain, a fruit vendor in Nilphamari town.

Man to die for killing wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A court here yesterday sentenced a man to death in connection with a case for killing his wife in Harinakundo upazila in 2003.

Jhenidah District and Sessions Judge Chand Mohammad Abdul Alim Al-Razi handed down the verdict in presence of the convict Suruj Ali, 42, son of Barkat Ali of Raghunathpur village in the upazila, around 3:00pm yesterday.

According to the case statement, the body of Suruj's wife Champa Khatun was found in a nearby orchard at the village on December 29, 2003.

After getting the autopsy report, Champa's brother Idrish Ali filed a murder case with the police station accusing four people, including Suruj on March 21, 2004.

Cancel headmaster's suspension

Teachers, students of Borodol High School demand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Protesting suspension of the headmaster, teachers and students of Borodol High School formed a human chain in Borodol bazar area of Netrakona's Kalmakanda upazila yesterday.

They alleged that Shah Md Fakrul Islam Firoz, president of the school managing committee, has suspended headmaster Md Abdul Helim illegally.

Firoz, also the former chairman of Kalmakanda Upazila Parishad, has also not been signing the bills of teachers and employees for the last three months, keeping them in serious misery.

The protesters also

demanded cancellation of suspension order of the headmaster, considering the interest of education of the students. Established in 1972, the school has now 700 students.

Teachers Md Abdul Latif, Monoranjan Saha, Amol Chandra Dev and Anjuman Ara Begum, among others, spoke.

Headmaster Helim alleged that school managing committee president Firoz first suspended him in March last year bringing various allegations of corruption against him.

"The suspension order was also sent to the 'Arbitration Board' in Dhaka but the board passed a verdict for my

reinstallation and I joined the school in December last year," said Helim.

"There was no meeting of the managing committee with me before issuing the suspension order though I am the member secretary of the body," he said.

Investigations conducted by anti-corruption commission found nothing with the allegations, he claimed.

"But Firoz did not stop his ill motive and suspend me permanently on April 3 this year which is beyond law," said the headmaster.

As Firoz did not sign the bill, 12 teachers and four staffers could not draw their salaries for the last three months, he said.



Teachers and students of Borodol High School in Netrakona's Kalmakanda upazila yesterday form a human chain in the upazila, demanding cancellation of headmaster's suspension order.

PHOTO: STAR

A nuisance at school ground

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A sub-contractor has kept construction materials on school ground, hampering academic activities of students at Jamla Gabtoli Government Primary School in Dumki upazila of the district.

Headmaster of the school filed a written complaint to the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) in this regard.

Sources at Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Dumki upazila said repair of carpeting work of 7 km road stretching from Dumki Thana Bridge to Mowkaron bazar via Jamla Gabtoli has been started recently at a cost of Tk 3.46 crore. Contractor Ananta Bikash Tripura of Khagrachhari go\ the work.

But sub-contractor Nizamul Islam of Barishal is doing the work. He has kept construction materials there, said Headmaster Mahinur Begum.

On a recent visit to the area, this correspondent saw the school ground has been filled with construction materials, including stone, sand, mixture machine, gas cylinders and bitumen.

Around 20 labourers were engaged in mixing materials with mixture machine that made an unbearable sound and black smoke. Due to the situation, the school authorities have run their academic activities by closing all doors and windows. The students also cannot play games during leisure time.

Some students are facing respiratory problem for inhaling smoke coming out of the machine, said Headmaster Mahinur, adding that some guardians have already stopped sending their children to school.

She has already filed a complaint to the UNO but no step is yet to be taken in this regard, said Mahinur.

Md Naser Uddin, a student of Class V, said they feel breathing problem due to smoke being emerged from the mixture machine.

Upazila Primary Education Officer Monilal Shikder said he learnt about the matter and informed the UNO for taking proper steps in this regard.

Contacted, sub-contractor Nizamul declined to make any comment over the issue but his supervisor Md Maidul Islam said they kept construction materials on the school ground as there is no free space to keep those.

Patuakhali LGED Executive Engineer Chittojit Roy said he will take immediate steps in this regard.

UNO Sankar Kumar Biswas said he asked Ananta Bikash Tripura to remove the mixture machine from the school ground.



The school ground in Patuakhali's Dumki upazila has been filled with construction materials, including stone, sand, mixture machine, gas cylinders and bitumen.

PHOTO: STAR

RANGPUR-KURIGRAM HIGHWAY

RHD demolishes 300 illegal structures

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

At least 300 illegal structures on Rangpur-Kurigram highway in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila were demolished in a drive by Roads and Highways Department (RHD) yesterday.

The structures included Gokunda union unit offices of Awami League in Teesta area and BNP in Mostofi area.

Mahbubur Rahman Faruque, deputy secretary of road transport and bridges ministry, said five mosques and two schools, built on RHD land, were served with removal notices yesterday.

Those will be dismantled after the month of Ramadan, he said, adding that in order to turn the highway safer by expanding it to six lanes, the RHD is removing the illegal structures from its land.

RHD will take stern action if anyone rebuilds structures on its land, he also said.

Ali Noorayen, executive engineer of RHD in Lalmonirhat, said 50 of the 300 structures they dismantled yesterday were complete buildings.

RHD was following a survey report that identified and demarcated the illegal structures on its land, he also said.

A magistrate from the district administration and personnel from police, fire service and Power Development Board took part in the drive.

Cemetery for all

Muslims, Hindus and Christians share same cemetery, promoting religious harmony

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

In death, religious harmony is found alive at the cemetery in Patrokhola Tea Garden in Moulvibazar's Kamalganj upazila.

The bodies of Muslims, Hindus and Christians are buried side by side, with no visible divisions.

The cemetery is surrounded by a temple, a church and a mosque. In the distance is a large playground where waz mahfils, kirtans and church ceremonies are held, exemplifying its non-communal side.

Such events are attended by priests of all religions.

Parul Corraya, 65, the local union parishad member, told this correspondent that the cemetery was developed on around 50 acres of land in Madhabpur union.

"My grandfather told me he had seen the cemetery since his childhood. Initially, only Hindus and Christians were buried here but after independence, it was decided that Muslims

too could be buried. "There is no divider wall in the cemetery."

Ashabul Islam Shaon, a local, told this correspondent that sometimes different funerals of different religions take place at the same time.

"Most of the locals are invited to the programmes regardless of their religions," he said.

Gourab Urang, another resident of the area, said, "The dead bodies of my father, uncle, my Christian friend and my Muslim neighbour all rest peacefully next to each other in their final beds."

Locals agreed that the cemetery had played a vital role in strengthening relations between people of different religions.

Rajesh Pandit, Hindu priest of the Patrokhola Tea Garden public temple, said, "The people of Patrokhola people have a non-communal spirit... That's why we can all independently perform the rituals of our

respective religions." He hoped the future generations would continue to pursue a society free of religious violence.

Patrokhola Tea Garden Jamee Mosque Imam Md Abdul Aziz said, "I participate in any festival [Hindu, Muslims and Christians]. I want this spirit to be upheld in the future."

Setu Rema, pastor of the Baptist Church in the tea garden, said the cemetery was a rare example that the rest of the world could follow.

Regarding the history of the cemetery, Selim Chowdhury, manager of the tea garden, said the cemetery was not made this way for a shortage of land but was rather designed to promote and teach religious harmony. He said the people here had been imbued with this spirit for decades.

In such a languorous setting, what rings true is that while religion is for individuals, the inevitable resting place is for all.

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