

DAHAGRAM-ANGARPOTA 10-BED HOSPITAL

A health centre without regular health service

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Dahagram-Angarpota 10-bed Hospital on two acres of land has everything—a one-storied hospital building, staff quarters, garden, signboards and even patients.

What it lacks are medical and administrative staffs to provide regular healthcare services to the inhabitants of Dahagram union, an enclave of Bangladesh located in Indian Territory and connected to the main land through Tin Bigha Corridor in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila.

In only one out of three visits to the health facility in October, this correspondent saw a sub-assistant community medical officer and a ward boy attending to the patients. Even then, the hospital collapsible gate was not opened on time at eight o'clock in the morning on that day.

Aynal Shaikh, a resident of Dahagram claimed that he came to the hospital six times in the last two months but did not see any medical officer.

"Only once, I met a sub-assistant medical officer, who prescribed some medicine. The hospital's cook gave me the medicine from the facility's store," he alleged, adding that he has



An exterior view of Dahagram-Angarpota 10-bed Hospital in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila. Inset, a few patients wait for doctors at the hospital's outdoor department. The photos were taken recently.



PHOTO: STAR

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been suffering from bronchitis and stomach pain.

The hospital is the only health facility in Dahagram and the octogenarian cannot afford to go to a private clinic or the government-run upazila health complex 16 kilometres away, he said.

Unlike Aynal, Fazar Ali, 48, could not wait for a doctor to show up

when he brought his ailing wife to the hospital on October 22 morning.

"I waited for an hour but did not find any doctor or nurse, so I hired a rickshaw van and took her to Patgram Upazila Health Complex," he said.

Dahagram Hospital was built at a cost of Tk 12.84 between 1988 and 1992.

Equipped with an operation theatre and a high-powered generator for uninterrupted power supply, the hospital started operation in 1995 with funding from Asian Development Bank and ran full-swing with ultrasound, X-ray and ambulance facility till 2000.

From 2001, the decline of the hospital began after it came under full government control and from

March 2012 the hospital stopped admitting patients.

It now only runs outdoor services seven-days of the week from 8:00am to 2:00pm, informed Dr Kashem Ali, civil surgeon in Lalmonirhat.

According to the Directorate General Health Services' registry, only 13 out of the 25 sanctioned posts, which includes four medical officers, four senior and four assistant nurse, one pharmacist, one medical technologist, two ayaas and two ward boys, are filled up.

Dr Kashem said, "Of the four physicians, two have been unauthorised absent for the last five years. I have informed higher authorities about it."

He said one of the remaining medical officers, Dr Nur Arefin

Kallol, has been deputed to the Patgram Upazila Health Complex and the other, Dr Abu Bakkar Siddique, visits the hospital, when not on leave.

Hospital sources said Dr Abu Bakkar Siddique practices in a private clinic in Rangpur.

Attempts to contact him several times on October 23 and October 24, failed as he didn't answer his mobile phone.

Other than the medical officers, currently two sub-assistant community medical officer, two nurses, one pharmacist, one pharmacist-cum-compounder, two ward boys, two cooks, two cleaners, a night guard and two office assistants are posted at the hospital, said Zillur Rahman, sub-assistant community

medical officer.

A local inhabitant was temporary recruited for a monthly salary of Tk 3,000 to work in the hospital garden, he added.

This correspondent saw the temporary recruit opening the hospital gate, cleaning the corridors, helping the patients get medicine and also guarding the hospital at night.

The only permanent staff, who lives in the hospital quarters with his family, is Mizanur Rahman, one of the ward boys.

All the four-room quarters meant for the medical officers remain vacant throughout the year, he said.

Senior Nurse Rehana Khatun, who lives in the upazila headquarters, said she does not prefer living in the

hospital quarter as it is in a remote area.

"I try to come to my workplace regularly but get delayed due to the distance," she said.

Dahagram Union Parishad Chairman Kamal Hossain alleged that the doctors and other staffs of the hospital are seen only when high government officials come to visit the area, otherwise they mostly remain absent.

"I have complained about it to the upazila health officer and civil surgeon several times but nothing happened," he claimed.

Civil Surgeon Dr Kashem Ali told The Daily Star that he has sent show cause notice to the hospital staffs who remain absent and steps will be taken against them.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

A worker prepares a date palm tree for extraction of its delicious sap at Haibatpur in Jashore.

Jashore date palm sap collectors active as winter approaches

MOHSIN MILON, Benapole

Date palm sap collectors, locally known as gachhis, are passing busy time for preparing the date trees for the purpose in different areas of Jashore district as the time for getting the winter delicacy is likely to start a bit earlier this year.

The potters are busy making clay-made jars that are used for holding juice extracted from the date trees while cleavers used for barking tree trunks and large flat cauldrons used for boiling juice are in high demand.

Jashore is famous for date juice and high quality solid molasses prepared by boiling the juice.

Rural areas of the district see a festive mood in winter as gachhis move from tree to tree for collecting juice and solid molasses, locally called patali gur, is prepared in large

scale.

The best quality of molasses is known as 'Nalini Patali'.

Pure date juice, taken as a tasty drink, is very nutritious.

Five kg of juice can be made into one and a half kg of solid molasses and it sells for good prices, said Bablur Rahman of Mathpukuria village in Jashore Sadar upazila.

Last year, 2,000 tonnes of molasses was produced in the district while this year's target is about 2,359 tonnes as sap will be collected from about one lakh date trees, said Hirak Kumar Mondol, Manirampur upazila agriculture officer, who also deals with date trees under the Department Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Jashore.

Abdul Jalil, a gachhi of Khajura Mathpara village in Jashore Sadar, said, "This season, I am tending 39

date trees. If the juice can be taken early in the season, the item and molasses produced from it will bring good price."

He lamented that date trees are less available now and many gachhis are changing their ancestral profession.

In winter, a variety of home-made cakes made with date juice and molasses add spices to rural life.

Emdad Hossain, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Jashore, said, date trees grow abundantly in the district due to favourable climate.

Jashore's traditional date tree cultivation and juice and molasses production is on decline as many rural people of the present generation are not much interested about it. Steps have been taken to plant date trees in different areas," he said.

UP chairman suspended over 'corruption'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Chairman of Askarpur Union Parishad (UP) in Dinajpur Sadar upazila was suspended from his post on Monday for alleged misappropriation of money that he received from felling of roadside trees in the union.

UP chairman Ziaur Rahman Zia is also secretary of Askarpur union unit of the Awami League (AL).

However, Zia said he was yet to receive any letter in this regard.

In a 'show cause' notice signed by Deputy Secretary Md Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury of local government department under Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, Zia was also asked why he should not be suspended from his post permanently as several probe bodies found evidence of corruption against him.

The letter mentioned that different committees during investigation found that Zia received money from sale of roadside trees that he had chopped down in the union and that he did not deposit the money with the government exchequer.

Meanwhile, the same day, around 600 villagers and AL leaders from Askarpur union along with a number of Sadar upazila AL leaders brought out a procession in Dinajpur town, demanding action against Zia for his alleged corruption and illicit drug business.

The protesters later formed a human chain, organised a press conference at Dinajpur Press Club and submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner (DC) of Dinajpur.

The villagers and local AL leaders at the press conference sought the prime minister's intervention in removing Zia from the UP chairman post as well from the post he holds with AL as the accused allegedly turned a billionaire within a few of years through contraband drug trade and corruption.

They also demanded a proper investigation into the allegations brought against Zia.

Speaking at the press conference, former chairman of Askarpur Union Parishad Mosharraf Hossain said Zia indulged in a frenzy of corruption and became involved in number of illicit businesses including the trade of contraband drugs through abuse of his chairman post and the post with the local AL.

"He made a huge amount of assets illegally" and he embezzled Tk 41,16,637 in government funds, Mosharraf said.

In 2018-19 fiscal year, Zia misappropriated Tk 11 lakh and in 2017-18 fiscal year, he misappropriated Tk 2 lakhs from different government projects meant for the poor.

In Askarpur union, Zia is known as the drug lord, Mosharraf said, adding that without obtaining travel permission from the government, he visits India twice a month to hold

meetings with masterminds of drug business in the country.

The UP chairman chopped down 36 trees beside roads in the union and made a huge amount of money by using substandard materials in construction work of a road in the union.

The villagers on various occasions informed the Dinajpur DC of Zia's corruption and illicit businesses and so far, they submitted a total of five formal complaints with the DC's office. But no action was taken against Zia, Mosharraf also alleged.

"The prime minister pledged that no corrupt will be spared. We are respectful to her pledge and we urge Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the AL president, to take stern action against Ziaur Rahman Zia through a fair investigation," he said.

Mahmudul Alam, the DC of Dinajpur, said that the memorandum received on Monday from the villagers will be sent to the Prime Minister's Office and necessary action will be taken upon receiving directives from the departments concerned.

Yesterday, Ziaur Rahman Zia at a press conference held at Dinajpur Press Club claimed that the people who brought allegations against him had infiltrated into the AL from Jamaat, Shibir and the BNP.

He also said all the allegations brought against him were baseless, false and fabricated.



The tin structure of Gulishakhal Salehia Senior Madrasa in Mathbaria upazila of Pirojpur is among 163 educational institutions that were razed to the ground by Cyclone Bulbul on Sunday. The partial assessment of damage caused by the tropical storm was released by Pirojpur deputy commissioner's office yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED