



Centre for Disability and Development (CDD), one of the organisers, set up this makeshift ramp to help people with disability to get inside the auditorium at Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University (HSTU) recently.

PHOTO: STAR

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

User-friendly features a far cry

New building at HSTU in Dinajpur lacks access facilities

KONGRON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Jagannath Chandra Roy was looking forward to attend the programme on dignified equality and prevention of violence against women at the newly renovated auditorium of Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University (HSTU) on Thursday morning.

He arrived at the venue on time on his wheelchair but could not get inside the auditorium.

Lack of a single ramp prevented the 48-year-old man without legs from climbing the three steps that led to the auditorium's gate with dignity and without anyone's help.

Fortunately, staffs of Centre for Disability and Development (CDD), one of the organisers of the programme, quickly set up a makeshift ramp with a plank and Jagannath with help from other people was able to get inside on his wheelchair.

"Had it not for that quick fix, someone would have to carry me or I would have to crawl inside the venue," he said.

Mosaddek Hossain, 45, and Raju Mardi, 20, also faced similar chagrin at the auditorium gate, when they arrived on their wheelchairs as invitees.

Around 50 persons with disabilities along with other students and faculty members of the university were present at the HSTU campus that day to attend the awareness programme, jointly organised by the university and CDD under a project funded by Manusher Jonno Foundation.

CDD officials explained that under that project they raise awareness in educational institutions about gender equality and prevention of violence against women.

Established 20 years ago in Dinajpur Sadar Upazila, HSTU is the only science and technology university in the eight districts of Rangpur division.

Last year in September, the 270-seat auditorium was renovated at a cost of Tk 1.08 crore with all modern facilities except ramps and disable-friendly toilets.

However, the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013, stipulates that all public buildings, both government and private, must be made accessible to persons with disabilities.

Provisions in this regard also exists in the National Education Policy, said Shuvashis Chandra Mahanta, regional coordinator of CDD in Dinajpur.

Yet, CDD staffs often have to make temporary arrangements for accessibility

in venues, where they hold events, as the 2013 law has not been fully implemented by all institutions, he added.

NGO worker Anamika Pandey, who was present at the programme, told The Daily Star that none of the buildings of HSTU are accessible to persons with disabilities.

She works for Dinajpur-based Community Development Association, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), which focuses on disability issues.

"We requested the university authority several times to build disable-friendly structures in the campus and to introduce admission quotas for persons with disabilities," she said.

After the Thursday morning fiasco, Vice Chancellor of HSTU Professor Dr M Abul Kashem in his speech promised to make his institution disability-friendly.

At present, the university has around 10,000 students but none with disabilities as defined in the law, Fazlul Haque, registrar of HSTU told this correspondent over phone.

He said, this year they will admit one person with physical disability but the admission procedure has not been decided yet.

"We are not admitting persons with visual, hearing and speech impairment

because we do not have any facilities to meet their special needs," the registrar said.

He added that some of the buildings in the campus has ramps and they will install ramps where necessary.

Every year, HSTU admits about 2,200 students.

Executive Engineer of HSTU Chand Ali said nobody brought the issue about ramps to his notice before.

Initiative will be taken for building a ramp there, he assured when contacted.

Among the 45 universities of the country only Jahangirnagar University has a five percent admission quota for persons with disabilities. Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chattogram, Sylhet Shahjalal and Barisal universities admits students with disabilities once they pass the written portion of the admission test, informed Mohammad Jahangir Alam, thematic expert in disability and inclusive development, CDD.

He said that most public universities lag behind in ensuring proper infrastructural accessibility for persons with physical disabilities.

Jahangir noted that ramps alone are not; other features including disable-friendly toilet needs to be present in a building to ensure full accessibility.

Youth returns lost Tk 3 lakh to owner

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A man on Saturday evening got back Tk 3 lakh, which he had lost the day before, as it fell to the hand of an honest student in Rangpur city.

"Pranta Adhikari, a fifth semester student of a polytechnic institute in Rangpur, found a bag containing Tk 3 lakh in front of Bangladesh Betar office in Rangpur on Friday. Immediately he contacted Rangpur Metropolitan Police [RMP]," said Assistant Commissioner Altaf Hossain, also Media Wing officer of RMP.

"Later, the police found out its owner -- Md Ibrahim, a resident of Engineerpara in Rangpur city. After confirmation of his identity, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Abdul Alim Mahmud handed over the money to Ibrahim in presence of Pranta at RMP office on Saturday evening," he said.

Ibrahim expressed his gratitude to Pranta for returning the money.

"After getting the bag with money, I felt the responsibility to return it to the owner. It is a big relief as I could do that," said Pranta, son of Ranjit Adhikari of Nilphamari's Domar upazila.

MEGHNA BULKHEAD CAPSIZED

3 labourers missing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Three labourers went missing after a passenger launch hit their sand-laden bulkhead in the Meghna river near Gajaria launch terminal early yesterday.

Two of the missing labourers were identified as Aslam, 24, and Emaidul, 38.

Being informed, members of Bangladesh Coast Guard and fire service personnel started a rescue operation for the missing labourers, Officer in Charge (OC) of Gajaria Police Station Harun-or-Rashid said.

The coast guard members seized the bulkhead for plying in the night on Wednesday and anchored it near Gajaria Ghat, the OC said.

The bulkhead along with the four labourers, who were asleep, capsized immediately after Dhaka-bound launch from Barishal, Kritankhala-2, hit the vessel around 5.15 am, he added.

One of the labourers, Nizam, 40, managed to swim ashore while the other three went missing, he said.

Coastguards arrested Shahidul Islam, master of the launch, and two of his assistants--Jahangir Hossain and Younus--from Dhaka's Sadarghat yesterday morning, Station Officer of Bangladesh Coast Guard MM Asif said.

Acid thrown on housewife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A woman suffered burn injuries as a youth allegedly threw acid at her for refusing love proposal at Jagonathdi village in Madhukhali upazila on Saturday.

Police arrested accused Sujan Kumar Hawladar, 28, son of Sushil Hawladar of Beleshwar village, in this connection.

The victim was identified as Saraswati Malo, 23, wife of Chaitano Malo of the village. She is the mother of a child.

The victim's brother-in-law Krishna Malo said Sujan used to stalk Saraswati for the last two years.

A few days ago, they informed Sujan's family about the matter that angered him, said Krishna.

On Saturday night, Sujan threw acid at Saraswati when she was cooking in her house.

Widow suffers double blow

Cyclone Bulbul damaged her fragile shelter

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

For Monwara Begum, fate was always crueller than imagined.

On the night of November 9, the cyclonic storm Bulbul even damaged her last fragile shelter where she lived for the last nine years with her mentally challenged daughter.

The 60-year-old widow hails from Tungbaria village in Patuakhali's Rangabali upazila.

After her husband's demise 10 years back, Monwara lived in a shanty on a piece of their land with her two children. But her son Nasir Bayatee left for Dhaka in 2000 and since then she ran her two-member family by begging.

But her luck betrayed her again on November 9. She along with her daughter took shelter at the cyclone centre following Bulbul on the day.

After returning from the centre, Monwara

found the shanty totally damaged under the influence of Cyclone Bulbul and became frustrated. Since then she has been living at the veranda of a neighbour's house with her mentally challenged daughter.

"I run my family somehow but I'm very helpless now as my only shelter was totally damaged by the storm," said Monwara.

"I live on begging and I have no ability to rebuild a new house. So, where I will live with my mentally challenged daughter from now?" she said, adding that her only son left her in utter despair and now how she will survive?

Anyone is yet to come forward to help them, said Monwara.

Contacted, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Mashfaur Rahman said he is trying his best to manage a new house for the widow and her mentally challenged daughter.

A total of 2,808 houses have been damaged by the storm in the district.



Abdus Salam Santu, member of Gopgram union parishad in Kushtia's Khoksa upazila, puts signature on a paper at the sub-registrar's office on Thursday, as the local administration made him return a one-katha land, which he had illegally occupied from elderly widow Halima Khatun about four months ago. Inset, Halima with a relative.

PHOTO: STAR

Elderly woman gets back land from illegal occupier

Local admin forces the offender, a UP member, to return the land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An elderly widow has got back her one-katha land with three shops at Gopgram village in Kushtia's Khoksa upazila after four months of illegal occupation by a local union parishad (UP) member, thanks to the prompt action by the local administration.

Abdus Salam Santu, member of Gopgram UP, occupied the land and shops worth about Tk 50 lakh from Halima Khatun, 63, four months ago, said ABM Mehedi Masud, OC of Khoksa Police Station.

"Halima inherited the one-katha land at Gopgram Bazar from her husband. Her son Montu built three shops there eight years

ago. Montu died of disease four years ago and Halima continued living at the village with his widow and their two sons. The three shops were rented to one Altaf Hossain," said the OC.

"Over four months ago, Santu member called Halima to his home through Altaf and offered her old age allowance. As Halima happily agreed, Santu asked her to sign some papers. Illiterate Halima signed the papers and Santu gave her Tk 2000.

"When Halima asked Altaf to pay the monthly rent of her shops in July this year, the latter said that she had sold the shops to Santu member. Hapless Halima approached several persons for a solution but to no effect.

After learning about the matter from a report

published in local Bangla daily Dainik Kushtia, Khoksa Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mousumi Zerin Kanta asked the OC to see the matter.

The OC conducted an investigation and found that Santu had captured Halima's land by cheating her.

The local administration gave an ultimatum to Santu to return back the land and suggested Halima to file a case.

Halima, however, expressed her unwillingness to file a case and said she would be happy if she gets back her land.

On Thursday, Santu member formally returned back the land to Halima at local sub-registrar's office.

"I am happy to get back my land," said Halima.



Widow Monwara Begum and her mentally challenged daughter in front of their damaged shanty at Tungbaria village in Patuakhali's Rangabali upazila. PHOTO: STAR