

## EARTHQUAKE THREAT IN SYLHET

## Tenants bar demolition of risky market

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Built in 1975, Raja Mansion has been an integral part of the post-Liberation War literary and cultural history of Sylhet.

This multi-storey market in the city's Zindabazar area, built by the family of legendary mystic poet Hason Raja, houses numerous bookstores and remains a must-visit place for students and youngsters.

However over time, the three-storey building has become dilapidated. After the recent series of earthquakes in the city, Sylhet City Corporation (SCC), based on experts' suggestions, flagged it as "risky".

In line with that, owners of the building also wanted to demolish the market. This decision, however, is being opposed by the tenant, who said the building is just "rusty" and not risky.

Shamsher Raja Chowdhury, great grandson of Hason Raja and owner of the building, on Thursday held a press conference in the city in this regard.

He expressed grave concern over the present condition of the structure and said a disaster can take place any time due to the risky condition of the market.

He also questioned the city authorities' "mysterious" decision of reopening the market even after it was termed "risky" by experts, and the tenants' risky move of keeping the shops open, putting lives in danger.

On May 29, Sylhet experienced four mild tremors within four hours, followed by another one the next morning.

In response to the threat of a major earthquake, the city corporation on May 30 closed six commercial buildings for ten days, including Raja Mansion.

The corporation on June 2 also served notices to the owner of Raja Mansion to conduct a retrofitting study within a month.

SCC later consulted with the



Although the owners want to demolish Raja Mansion, as the structure was deemed vulnerable to earthquakes, tenants are opposing the move. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

experts of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology to inspect the buildings to specify how risky they were.

A team led by Prof Jahir Bin Alam and Prof Mostaque Ahmed of the university's civil engineering and environment department on June 10 inspected all six buildings and termed them "risky" for earthquakes.

However, the city authorities said they reopened the buildings "on demand of tenants".

Earlier on June 5, Raja Mansion Byabsayi Samity held a meeting, protesting the decision to term the market "risky".

In the meeting, presided over by the samity's chief adviser Abul Boshor, tenants said the building has a five-storey foundation and is not risky.

"In 2016, the city corporation said the front column of the market is risky, and we repaired that part. As the building is not properly maintained, it looks rusty and risky; but the base is still strong," they added.

On June 22, the tenants served a legal notice to the owners, stating

that they [owners] failed to get a retrofitting certificate and will be liable for losses due to an earthquake.

Asked, Shamsher Raja said, "For decades, we've considered the building as part of our family tradition and never charged tenants exorbitant rent."

"We receive only Tk 50,000 as rent from 187 shops, while tenants sub-rent the stores and earn at least Tk 25 lakh," he claimed.

"Though experts termed the building risky, on which ground the city corporation reopened it for business?" he asked, adding that they want this building to be declared abandoned.

He said, "We want to demolish the building and construct a new multi-storey complex. We also promised to rent the first three floors to existing and listed tenants."

Contacted, Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury said, "Experts termed the building risky, but they also need further tests to confirm how risky it is and the possibility of retrofitting it. Only after getting the reports, we can take legal action in this regard."

## Moinuddin Mondal passes away

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Moinuddin Mondal, a freedom fighter and president of Chapainawabganj district unit of Awami League and chairman of Zila Parishad, died from Covid-19 at Rajarbagh Police Lines Hospital in the capital yesterday. He was 75.

He left behind a son, a daughter and a host of admirers to mourn his death.

He was diagnosed with Covid-19 and admitted to the hospital few days ago. He will be buried at Ramkrishnapur Mridhapara graveyard.



## 'Khaleda subjected to state repression'

Alleges Fakhru

UNB, Dhaka

Alleging that their party Chairperson has been subjected to "state repression", BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday said her life is now at risk since the government has snatched her right to receive advanced treatment abroad.

"Khaleda Zia has been imprisoned in completely false and fabricated cases, and she has been subjected to state repression..." he said.

In a message on the occasion of International Day in Support of the Victims of Torture, the BNP leader said although Khaleda needs advanced treatment abroad, the government has put a restriction to her travel abroad.

"It's nothing but a manifestation of government's vengeance and extreme torture," he alleged.

He urged the democracy-loving people to get united and put up a resistance against the government's repressive acts.

On Tuesday, Fakhru at a press conference said the BNP chief has a heart problem and her kidney and liver complications are very critical and she needs treatment at an advanced centre abroad.

On June 19, Khaleda Zia got back home from the capital's Evercare Hospital after 53 days of treatment for Covid-19 infections and other physical complications.

## Reward offered for info on missing Chinese engr

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A reward of Tk 2 lakh has been announced for information on the missing Chinese engineer working in the Padma Bridge project.

China Major Bridge Engineering Company declared the reward after Zhao Jianpeng (26) went missing from Lauhajang upazila of Munshiganj on Tuesday night while working.

Leaflets have already been distributed among various boat workers, fishermen and people of riverside villages in this regard, said Sai, an engineer of the company.

It is suspected that Zhao fell into the Padma river from a barge.

## Doa mahfil for Touheed Rouf held

STAR REPORT

A doa mahfil for late Touheed Rouf (Chengize) was held at Baridhara Central Jame Masjid "Baitul Atiq" after the Asr prayers yesterday, said a press release.

Tauheed, son of Brig (ret'd) late Abdur Rouf and Bilquis Rouf, from Baridhara in Dhaka passed away at Evercare Hospital in the capital on May 19, aged 61.

He was the managing director of New Victor Limited. He was actively involved in social works in his home town Manikganj.

Hailing from Sheota (west) village in Manikganj, Tauheed left behind his wife, two daughters, mother and one sister.

His friends and relatives are requested to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.



## 'UNFAIR' DISMISSAL Workers' demo continues

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Molvibazar

For the fourth consecutive day, workers at Luhauni Tea Garden in Molvibazar's Kulaura staged demonstrations yesterday, protesting a co-worker's "unfair" dismissal with their 11-point demand.

The workers said authorities had assured that the situation will be resolved by yesterday, but no headway was made.

Nahidul Islam, deputy director of divisional labour department's Sreemangal office, said a meeting will be held within the next two or three days.

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## Urban, new poor

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people and all of them were rural poor."

Explaining the urban-rural social assistance gap, Ugo Gentilini, Global Lead for Social Assistance, The World Bank, said, "Perceptions that there are more jobs and opportunities in the cities, assisting urban poor may trigger rural to urban migration, adapting design of social assistance to urban livelihoods and lack of specific data are some of the major reasons behind urban-rural social assistance gap."

Dr Shamsul Alam, GED (senior secretary), Bangladesh Planning Commission, said, "I think the government policy makers have deliberately and rightly made this decision of delivering most of the assistance to the rural poor because in Bangladesh already there exists visible attraction towards cities among rural population. Prioritising rural poor in social protection programmes will control mass migration towards cities and this will ultimately check the spread of the disease."

Hossain Zillur Rahman pointed out that the evidence on Covid-19 impact calls for major rethinking on poverty alleviation approaches. He identified three new priorities -- urban social protection, addressing the "new poor" and a new policy look at the informal economy.

"55% of Bangladesh GDP comes from service sector and much of this sector is constituted of various informal enterprises. Yet policy attention has systematically been more on the big players and less on the millions of small players," said Rahman.

The webinar ended with the launching of PPRC-BIGD research publication Livelihoods, Coping and Recovery during Covid-19 Crisis jointly launched by Hossain Zillur Rahman and Imran Matin, executive director, BIGD.

## Barishal

FROM PAGE 3  
Dilip Chandra Das, another artisan from the village, said they used to sell at least 50 of the mats to markets in Jhalakathi every week. But these days, sales have dropped by half. A lot of this is due to the absence of wholesalers, who are not coming to the villages.

In many cases, weavers have received some support, but none from the government as of yet.

Rafiqul Alam, Barishal divisional president of Shital Pati Pratikar Unnoyon Samiti, said along with Helencha village, various villages of Bakerganj and at least 500 families in Jhalakathi's Rajapur are involved in this profession. Although they can produce at least 2,000 mats per month now, buyers are hard to find.

As a result, almost 1,000 weavers and their families are passing days in unimaginable strife, being forced to stock up Shital Patis they're unable to sell.

Contacted, Jalish Mahamud, deputy general manager of BSIC Barishal, said they are willing to come forward, but it will be difficult to do so with financial means.

"We can help the artisans train or help with marketing their products, but it is difficult for us to provide financial support, due to our own lack of funds."

## Khulna residents

FROM PAGE 3  
traveling on bicycles, motorbikes and private cars. At some areas like Daulatpur, Boyra and Gallamary, people of all backgrounds were out and about, stating different reasons or excuses for leaving their homes.

Almost all kitchen markets of Boyra, Gallamary and Daulatpur were crowded from the morning. Kitchen markets are allowed to stay open till 2 pm.

Md Saddam Hossain, a resident of Boyra who came to the market around 10:30am with his child, told The Daily Star that there was nothing to cook at his house, so he went there.

When asked why he brought his son during the lockdown, he replied that the child was determined to go with him, so the father could not convince him to stay home.

Battery-run rickshaws and easy-bikes were running on different roads. Due to lack of vehicles, many people were seen riding on rickshaw-vans to reach their destinations. Around one-third of people were seen wandering around without face-masks.

However, long-distance public transport was suspended, and all types of shops were closed at New Market, Shivbari intersection, Sonadanga and Moylapota intersection.

A significant number of law enforcement personnel had to patrol the streets.

Habibur Rahman, a resident of Bastuhara area, told The Daily Star that the government should have enforced the

lockdown earlier, as the virus has already spread to rural areas.

"People are not taking the situation seriously. Why are they coming out? They're out for no reason," he said. "The government should be stricter about maintaining the lockdown properly," he added.

Putul Khatun, a day labourer at Khalishpur Crescent mill area, said after one year, following the shutdown of nine state-run jute mills, she along with others have been working as day labourers. "But suddenly, the strict lockdown forced us to stay home. How will I live? I didn't get a single taka from anyone last year."

"My four-member family is in a destitute condition now. We are starving," she said.

Meanwhile, Ariful Islam, executive magistrate of Khulna district administration, said there are six mobile courts operating in Khulna city.

"Every day, we are operating at different points to maintain health guidelines and the lockdown," he said.

About kitchen markets, he said authorities will carry out drives at the locations to ensure social distancing.

According to the health department, 23 people died in the division yesterday; seven of them in the district.

A total of 176 positive cases were identified yesterday in the district, bringing the infection rate to 54.82 per cent.

In Khulna district, a total of 233 people died till yesterday. In the division, till yesterday, 916 people died, and of them, 164 died in the last seven day (June 19-25).

## Outcry for proper healthcare at Gaibandha chars

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

"Around one and a half years ago, my sister-in-law, Taslima, died after suffering from post-pregnancy complications. She gave birth to a baby while still on the boat, heading towards the hospital. Unfortunately, she passed away before we made it," shares 27-year-old Shahida Begum, a local of Kochkhali char.

"If a pregnant woman needs emergency treatment, we have to take her to the town hospital, which is 20 kilometres away from the village and takes two to three hours to reach," adds Shahida.

The char, located at the Fulchari upazila of Gaibandha district, has a population of 1,000 people. Most of them receive primary healthcare services from a government community clinic named Ujaldanga community clinic and an NGO-run satellite clinic. However, these health centres are suffering from serious shortage of medical equipment and human resources.

Shapla Akter, 30, another local of Kochkhali, shares, "The CHCP (community health care provider) visited the area a few times in the last one year. When asked about this, CHCP Anju Monowara Rikta said, "I try to attend office regularly, but I cannot go there when boats are unavailable. Besides, I cannot visit the office when the weather is bad."

When contacted the civil surgeon of Gaibandha, A.M. Aktaruzzaman, stated, "It is the basic duty of a CHCP to attend office every day. I will be contacting the local authorities regarding this."

In the char areas of Gaibandha, over half a million people do not have proper access to healthcare services due to poor quality of roads, shortage of medical facilities and equipment, and a lack of human resources.

According to the Fulchari Upazila health administration, there are 19 community clinics in the Upazila. 12 are in the char areas, and three have been closed for years due to a lack of human resources. Among the 12 char community clinics, five were destroyed due to floods.



PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

The makeshift community clinic at Kochkhali char remains mostly unused due to a shortage of medical facilities and human resources.

The char people urge the government to renovate the existing community clinics, set up more clinics and appoint sufficient human resources including health assistant, community doctor and paramedic. They suggest that shelter houses should be built in char areas where medical camps can be run to provide for this absence of improved treatment facilities. They also feel the need of organising health campaigns in char areas regularly to make people aware of various health issues particularly water-borne diseases.

Selim Parvej, Chairman of the Fulchari Upazila Parishad, says, "Over 60 percent of the people from the Upazila live in 40 to 50 chars, but there are not enough hospitals for them. The government should build more healthcare facilities as well as roads to ensure proper healthcare for the inhabitants." He also suggests that the government should train community health volunteers and provide them some incentive to address the gap of human resources in the health centres.

The central and transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, leave no one behind, is especially applicable for people living in chars since they are much more vulnerable to flash floods and natural disasters than people living on the mainland.

If the government can't ensure appropriate healthcare support,

people will suffer from diseases and lose the ability to work since most of the poor people in char areas rely on physical labour for their livelihoods. The health issue needs to be addressed adequately as healthy lives and well beings are closely connected with the achievement of other SDGs including SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 5 (gender equality).

The government must allocate more budget for char areas and provide additional support to the health system. The health service providers can be given a motivational allowance, living arrangements, security etc. The Civil Surgeon or their representatives must ensure proper and periodic monitoring of the needs and quality of services in these remote chars.

The voices of the people of the chars are also vital to moving forward. There must be a platform where the thoughts of the people can be put into effect. A citizen oversight mechanism should be institutionalised through periodical citizen-led social audit and public hearing on the services of the existing healthcare facilities. Information on health services in community clinics, thana and district health complexes need to be made available through noticeboards and other accessible means.



## CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL BANGLADESH Virtual Graduation Ceremony 2021

This is an announcement to all of our Students, Parents, and Well Wishers of CISB that the Virtual Graduation Ceremony of Canadian International School Bangladesh will be held online on Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 8pm on our YouTube channel. We cordially invite you all to watch the graduation ceremony live.

Link: <https://youtu.be/bqVY0dLLr4w>