Some of the leprosy survivors in Notkhana village of Nilphamari Sadar upazila. | PHOTO: STAR

Communities still shun leprosy survivors

Our Correspondent, *Nilphamari*

After getting infected with leprosy or Hansen's disease at a young age, Mokaddes Ali was stigmatised and driven away from his home village of Sonakhuli in Saidpur upazila.

Ostracised by the community, Mokaddes, now 60, had to beg for food and spend numerous nights in the open, away from the locality.

He later came to learn about Danish Bangladesh Leprosy Mission (DBLM) Hospital, in Notkhana village of Nilphamari Sadar upazila, where he finally found shelter and started receiving treatment free of cost.

The Leprosy Mission International, a fellowship of 31 member countries, has been operating the hospital for decades in Nilphamari -- a district that has high prevalence of Hansen's disease.

But by the time Mokaddes was cured fully, the disease maimed his hands and legs and deformed his face.

Years later, he returned to his village and opened a small grocery store to make a living. But his physical disfigurement and social stigma attached to leprosy are still keeping many villagers from shopping at his store.

Like Mokaddes, Paban Roy, 60, of Toronibari, Abdus Sattar, 58, of Baraipara and Tepra Barman, 65, of Polashbari, also had similar experience when they returned to their villages after fully recovering from the disease.

A handful of social organisations such as 'Kustho O Sadharon Protibondhi Unnayan Sangathan (KSPUS)' have come forward to eradicate the deep-rooted stigma among the general public and integrate the leprosy survivors into the society.

Sumon Chandra Sarker, secretary of KSPUS, said they have been campaigning for the eradication of superstition about leprosy and social discrimination against leprosy survivors so they can be rehabilitated and integrated into the society.

The organisation is registered under the Department of Social Services, which allocates annual funding for them, said KSPUS President Sombaru Mamud.

The fund is converted into loans for members who can use the money for setting up small ventures to get back on their feet.

KSPUS also helps them obtain different allowances under various social safety programmes of the government, he added.

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The Leprosy Mission International-Bangladesh (TLMI-B) is also creating awareness on social stigma attached to leprosy through various social organisations which they term 'Community-Based Rehabilitation Partners'.

They also provide vocational training and artificial or prosthetic limbs to leprosy survivors, said Surendra Nath Singh, community programme leader of TLMI-B.

Emdadul Huque Pramanik, deputy director of the Department of Social Services, said the government has been funding organisations like KSPUS to rehabilitate leprosy survivors in the society.

A metaphor of asymmetrical development

Remote govt pry school runs sans building being a metaphor of sheer negligence and disproportionate development

Ahmed Humayun Kabir Topu with Md Mizanur Rahman Himadri

At a first glance, you may not believe that it's a government primary school. The ramshackle tin shed structure houses Dayarampur Government Primary School. All activities including the academic and administrative have been going on under the tin shed since its inception in 1991. The school, which is located at Dayarampur village in Haripur union of Pabna's Chatmohor upazila, was nationalised in 2017.

However, there has been no development work even after its nationalization. A little to moderate rains flood the school disrupting normal functioning.

The school is the only recourse for some 150 children coming from the surrounding villages on the banks of the sprawling Chalanbeel.

"Since its inception, the school has been imparting education among the children of Chalanbeel area. Finally, the school was nationalised in 2017. However, there has been no touch of development in the last four years," Abul Kalam Azad, acting headmaster of the school, said.

As the school is in the middle of Chalanbeel, the school remains inaccessible without boats for a few months every year.

The 40-foot-long tin shed is the lone establishment that houses five classrooms and an administrative office, he said.

"Academic activities of around 154 students reading in grade one to grade five, administrative activities—all are going on in the lone tin shed hampering both academic and administrative work," Abul Kalam Azad said.

Tamim Iqbal, a fifth-grader, said, "We are to attend classes along with the students of other classes hampering our academic progress. We also do not have access to a toilet in the school."

Arifa Khatun, another fifth-grader, said that they often have to miss out on classes due to its poor communication link.

"In the monsoon, we have to come to school on a boat. Now, we are to traverse along a muddy path to attend classes," Arifa said.

Contacted, Khondokar Mahabub Hossain, Chatmohor upazila primary education officer, said that the development project of the school was in the offing.

"The school was nationalised in the third phase. We have already visited the school and found the existing problems. We have already reported the matter to the DG office. The authority will take development initiative of the school soon," Hossain said.

"We have already planned to allot Tk three lakh this fiscal year for administering urgent repair work of the school," he claimed.

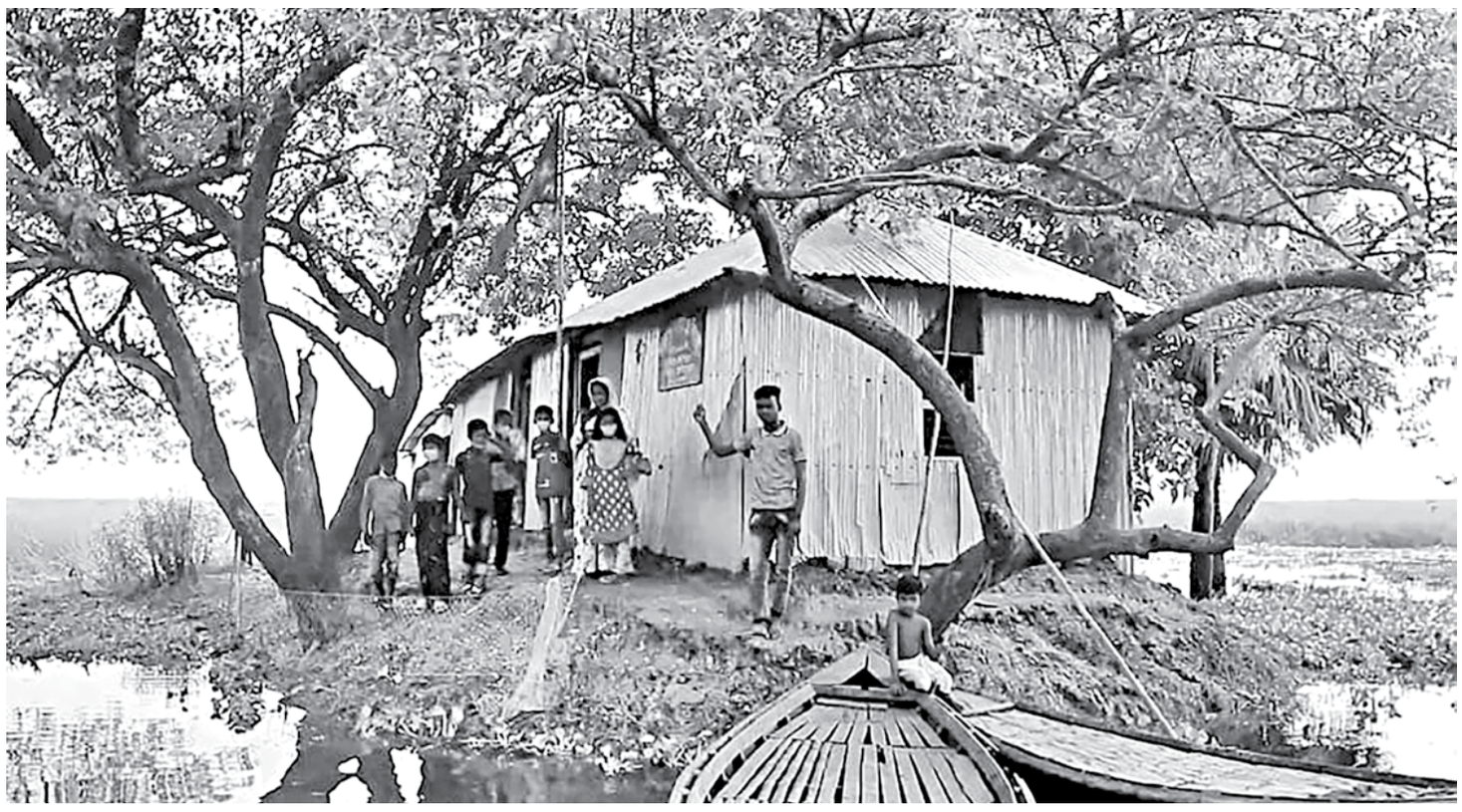

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Dayarampur Government Primary School, the lone lighthouse for the children of the surrounding villages of the sprawling Chalanbeel Pabna's Chatmohor upazila, stands sans building being a metaphor of negligence and disproportionate development. Inset, the children are to attend the school travelling on boat as it remains surrounded by waters for several months. The photo was taken a few weeks ago.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) unearthed an illegal factory of banned Chaina Doary, a locally made fish trap, in Sirajganj's Salonga upazila yesterday and seized around 14,430 kilograms of the traps. The law enforcers also detained two traders from the spot for producing the harmful fishing nets. PHOTO: STAR

BGB steps up surveillance in border

Our Correspondent, *Benapole*

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has stepped up surveillance in Benapole Land Port area to prevent possible smuggling of diesel through the port.

BGB members were inspecting the Indian trucks, entering or departing from the country, at the import-export gate of the port yesterday.

Habildar Abdul Quddus, BGB commander at ICB check post, said have been measuring the fuel tanks of every Indian trucks while entering and departing the country through the border to prevent smuggling of diesel.

Sources said price of per litre diesel costs Tk 25 more, compared to Bangladesh market price.

Govt hospital conducts first operation in 47yrs

Our Correspondent, *Tangail*

Basail Upazila Health Complex in Tangail has opened its operation wing for the first time in its history of 47 years.

Having begun its journey through a caesarean operation 28-year-old Sathi Akter of Purbo Para village on Friday afternoon, the health complex will provide a wide range of operation services.

Both mother and daughter remain well following the surgery, said Kamal Miah, husband of Sathi.

Basail Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Firozur Rahman conducted the caesarean operation while Consultant Dr Suja Uddin Talukder and Medical Officers Dr Rakib and Dr Nazmun and anesthetist Dr Arif assisted him.

Dr Firozur said that this was the first operation in the upazila health complex. Various operations like appendicitis and gallbladder stone will be conducted at the upazila hospital from now.

As a result, the local poor and helpless patients will not have to go to the private hospitals for operations by spending a huge amount of money, he added.

Dr Abul Fazal Mohammad Shahabuddin, civil surgeon in Tangail, said operation theatre (OT) was installed at the health complex in 2017 but the hospital could not conduct operation due to lack of facilities at the OT at that time.

Basail Upazila Health Complex in Tangail on Friday conducts its first operation in 47 years through a caesarean operation. PHOTO: STAR