



A village of two

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Imagine yours is the only family in an entire village — just you and your better half living there. Sirajul Islam Sarker, 75, and his wife, Monwara Begum, 60, are the only heartbeats of Umanathpur, a tiny village in Mymensingh's Ishwarganj upazila.

The village falls under Ward-8 of Razibpur union. It does appear on the map and even has a separate mouza designation, yet, it is a village of only two.

The couple wakes up each day to the calls of birds, the soft rustle of leaves, and the quiet flow of life around their 25 decimal plot.

The Old Brahmaputra River glimmers nearby and stretches of green surround their humble abode. Their plot also has a cowshed and an outdoor kitchen.

The village, just 15 kilometres from Ishwarganj's centre, feels miles away from the busyness of the outside world.

Despite its charm, Umanathpur has always been remote — untouched, even uninviting to many.



But in 1965, Sirajul's father, Romzan Ali Sarker, found the desolate place and saw an opportunity.

He built a house here, setting down roots in the wilderness and settling his family where others hesitated to go.

A deed writer by profession and a well-loved figure in the area, Romzan became a permanent part of Umanathpur, serving as a union parishad member five times.

For Sirajul, the village became home when he was only seven. He grew up surrounded by the land's beauty, learning to cherish the isolation that Umanathpur offered.

But with that beauty came the challenges of living in such a far-off place. There are no roads connecting his home to the nearby villages — a quarter-kilometre of narrow, rugged path separates them from the nearest main road. "We need a proper road," Sirajul said.

"This house, this land — they're who we are. I can't imagine leaving it behind."

But Sirajul and Monwara were not always alone. Life was different just a few years ago when their son, Shariful Alam, a deed writer like his father, lived there with his own family.

But three years ago, Shariful passed away. His wife, taking their two children, moved to another village for better opportunities.

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Port city needs foot-over bridges

Residents forced to cross busy intersections amid risks

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Every day, Laila Begum, a resident of High Level Road in the Lalkhan Bazar area, takes her daughter, an eighth grader, to school in the Jamal Khan area.

To reach her school, both Laila and her daughter must cross the busy Lalkhan Bazar intersection.

"I accompany my daughter to and from school. Since we don't have a private vehicle, we rely on public transport. To catch a bus heading towards Jamal Khan Road, we must cross the wide Lalkhan Bazar intersection, which spans approximately 20 feet and has one-way traffic on its two-lane road," Laila said.

"The road is so wide that it takes at least 15 seconds to cross from one side to the other, and vehicles constantly pass by, making it dangerous for pedestrians in the middle of the road. Every day, we risk our lives," she added.

Like Laila, many others face daily struggles at the aforementioned intersections due to the lack of foot-over bridges.

Pedestrians in different intersections of Chattogram city are forced to cross the roads putting their lives at risk as most intersections do not have footbridges.



People crossing the GEC intersection amid traffic for lack of a foot-over bridge in the area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Currently, Chattogram city has only 12 footbridges at various intersections.

Locals have pointed out that footbridges are urgently needed at several busy intersections across the city, including Chawkbazar Gulzar, Nawab Sirajuddaula Road, GEC, Kotwali, Bahaddarhat, Sholoshahar Gate No.2, Wasa, Lalkhan Bazar, Dewan Hat, Chowmuhuni, Agrabad Badamtol, Oxygen, Anderkilla, Laldighi, AK Khan, Alankar, Tulatoli, Mohora, Jalalabad, and Kazir Dewri intersections.

SM Abu Tayab, president of Nirapad Sarak Chai's Chattogram

unit, emphasised the urgent need to construct footbridges in around 40 locations across the city.

According to sources, CCC conducted a survey in 2020, including a feasibility study for the construction of footbridges in various areas.

The survey revealed that 93.4 percent of respondents expressed a desire to use those.

Following that, CCC launched an initiative to construct 38 footbridges across different locations. This project is part of the larger "Development of Various Roads Including Airport Road and Important Infrastructure Development Under the Jurisdiction of CCC."

CCC's acting chief engineer, Shahinul Islam Chowdhury, said 30 percent of

the project's infrastructural work has already been completed. Construction on the foot-over bridges at three locations — GEC, Jalalabad, and Mohora — has begun, and the tender process for 25 more bridges is underway.

Regarding the delay in construction, Chowdhury said that there have been some obstacles, such as the need to relocate utility service lines from Wasa, PDB, and Karnaphuli Gas.

He mentioned that CCC has already sent letters to the authorities concerned to expedite the removal of these utilities to allow construction to proceed smoothly.

ESCALATOR FOOTBRIDGE
In January 2020, CCC installed the city's only escalator-equipped footbridge at a cost of approximately Tk 4 crore.

However, the bridge was operational for just two months after its inauguration before being rendered inoperative for over three years.

The then mayor of CCC, AJM Nasir Uddin, inaugurated the bridge on January 30, 2020. However, after only two months of use, its operations were halted due to the pandemic, and it has remained out of service ever since.

A senior CCC official said the electricity consumption required to operate the escalator was too high, making it unsustainable in the long term. When asked why this issue wasn't considered during the planning of the project, the official could not provide a satisfactory answer.

SM Abu Tayab criticised the CCC for spending public money on a project that proved to be unfeasible, especially when the city has yet to construct any footbridges at busy intersections in the past decade.



Despite polythene bags being banned from open markets from November 1, shops in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar continue to use them to pack and sell fruits and groceries. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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US wants Dhaka to respect freedom of religion: Miller

UNB, Dhaka

The United States has said they want to see freedom of religion respected in Bangladesh, and that people are held accountable for any attacks.

"We have, in our discussions with Bangladeshi officials, made clear that we want to see freedom of religion respected," US Department of State Spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters in a regular media briefing in Washington on November 7.

Miller said they want to see people are held accountable in any attack as is appropriate under Bangladeshi law. And, he added, it is true of their position in Bangladesh and anywhere in the world.

BOMB EXPLOSION

'Boma Arman' held from Geneva Camp

UNB, Dhaka

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion have arrested an accused in a case filed over the death of a man in a bomb explosion in Geneva Camp in the capital's Mohammadpur area.

The arrestee, Md Arman, alias Boma Arman, was held from the camp on Thursday evening.

Shihab Karim, senior assistant superintendent of police (media) of Rab-2, confirmed the arrest yesterday.

Arman was handed over to Mohammadpur Police Station.

On November 1, two drug-peddling groups clashed over the control of Geneva Camp. At one point, Arman reportedly threw a crude bomb at his rivals, injuring 10 to 12 bystanders, including Raj.

Raj was taken to Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

On November 6, the victim's cousin filed a murder case with Mohammadpur Police Station, naming several individuals, including Arman.




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