

Kalondi remains a sorrow for 30 Akhaura villages

Toxic canal water destroying ecology, posing serious health hazards

SHEIKH MD SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Brahmanbaria

Toxic water flowing from across the border through the Kalondi canal is destroying the ecology and posing a health hazard in 30 villages in bordering Akhaura upazila of Brahmanbaria district.

The 'highly polluted water' looks like tar. It contains pollutants including chemicals which are destroying fertility of lands, greens and fishes, and is causing diseases among humans, local people and district officials said.

The canal was once a boon for

farmers as it supplied irrigation water and was a source of fishes. It turned into bane after waste and toxic substances generated in factories, hospitals and houses in Agartola and Tripura towns in India started flowing into it through a link canal in Tripura several years ago. There is a tannery and some Phensidyl factories in Agartola and their pollutants flow into the canal, it was gathered from different sources including Indians visiting Bangladesh.

The canal enters Bangladesh near the Akhaura check post, flows through Akhaura town and falls

into Titas and Jarisor rivers, polluting their waters too.

At least 300 hectares of lands on both sides of the canal have lost fertility as this canal is the only source of irrigation water in the areas. Soft soil of the lands have hardened and are now unfit for growing crops, farmers told this correspondent during a recent visit. The worst affected areas are Kalikapur, Sunarbadi, Bongcherchar, Rahimpur, Anandapur, Saheb Nagar, Kendai, Anwarpur, Hirapur Rajendrapur, Narayanpur, Noorpur, Taragon, Debogram villages and Akhaura pourasabha

area. Local farmers said the water emits a bad odour and farmers using it for irrigation develop skin disease and respiratory problem. This correspondent also experienced a bad odour during the visit.

The farmers said paddy plants turn yellowish if irrigation is done with the canal water. Lulu Mia, 55, of Bngarchar village said "kala pani" (black water) of the canal is so harmful and emits such unbearable odour that we can not work in fields. The water is harmful for crops and plants, he added.

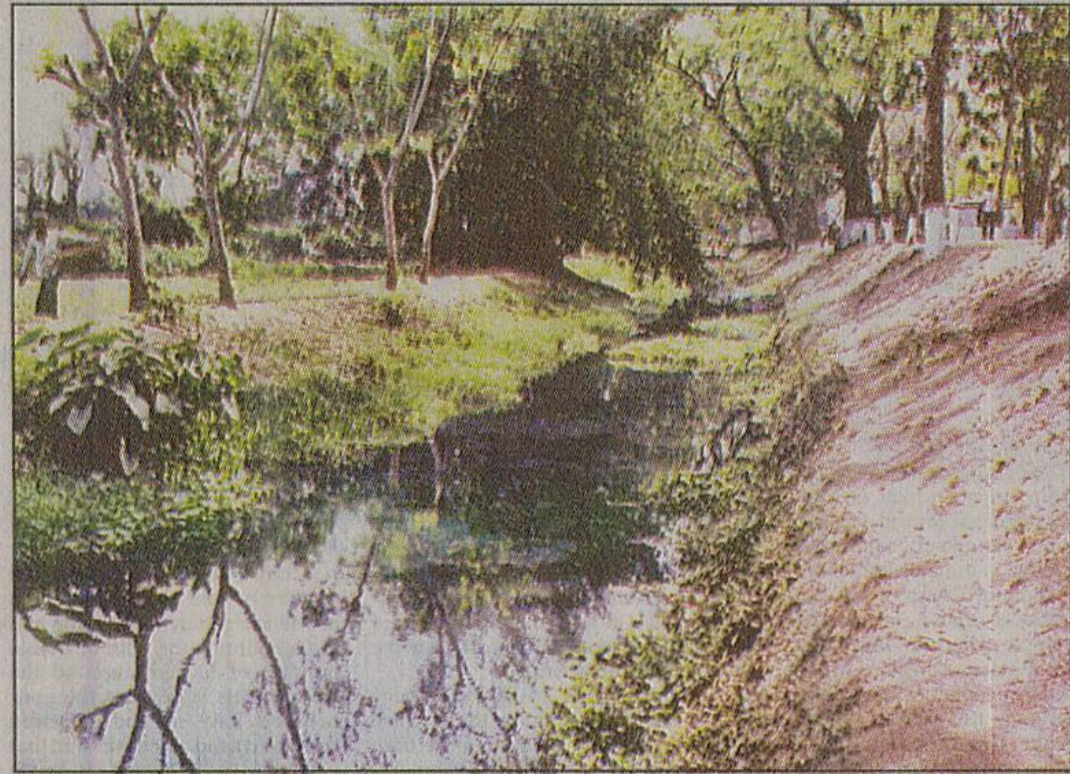
Md. Jalal Mia, 45, of the same area showed his affected hands and blamed the polluted water for this. Akhaura South Union Parishad Chairman Md. Shah Nawaz Khan said several thousand acres of land in the area are losing fertility because of irrigation with the canal water.

At a recent immunization review meeting, Brahmanbaria Civil Surgeon Muhammad Ishaq Khan said people of areas near Kalondi canal are vulnerable to polio, jaundice and other waterborne diseases because of pollution.

The Civil Surgeon told this correspondent that human waste and garbage are carriers of Polio and Jaundice germs. "We can not ignore presence of polio and jaundice germs in impure water of Kalondi canal as it carries human waste and garbage", he said.

Sources at Civil Surgeon's office said sample of the water was sent to Mahakali in Dhaka for test. The reports awaited.

When contacted, sources at Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner's office said the issue was raised at a Deputy Commissioner-level meeting between India and Bangladesh held in the district in 2003. But there was no step by India. It will be raised again, they said.



Black toxic water of the Kalondi canal in Akhaura upazila in Brahmanbaria district.

PHOTO: STAR

Darshana Sugar Mill set to incur loss this year

Neglect in repairing lone turbine alleged

AMANUR AMAN, back from Darshana, Chuadanga

KUSHTIA: Darshana Sugar Mill in Chuadanga, which earned Tk 12 crore profit last year, is set to incur loss this year, allegedly due to neglect of BSFC in repairing a major equipment, which kept the mill idle for 23 days so far.

This is the lone sugar mill in the country which earned profit last year.

The mill authorities hope to resume production today but related sources would only hope against hope.

The disruption in production has also thrown about 20,000 farmers in the mill zone into uncertainty with their sugarcane grown on about 13,000 acres of land this year, mill sources and farmers told this correspondent during a recent visit to the area.

The mill started sugarcane crushing on November 18 with a target to produce 14,108 tonnes of sugar from 1,65,000 tonnes of sugarcane in 132 working days.

Forty-three days into operation,

its main turbine broke down on December 31, stopping production after crushing 54,000 tonnes of sugarcane.

The mill sources said a crack developed in the turbine (rooter generator) on November 26. The mill authorities kept the mill running by repairing the turbine but it broke down on December 31.

They said the mill has two old turbines, never repaired since setting up of the mill in 1986.

This year, production was started with one turbine as the other is out of order for several years.

Before starting production this year, the mill authorities drew the attention of higher authorities of BSFC (Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation) to repair the turbines. As there was no response, the mill start production with the lone and partially damaged turbine, they said.

Even after halt in production on December 31, the BSFC did not respond quickly. BSFC engineer Abdul Hakim came to the mill on January 4.

The mill authorities said they sent a file to BSFC several years ago with a request for purchase of a new turbine at a cost of Tk 1.40 crore but the Finance Ministry is still undecided on the issue.

Its Managing Director (MD) Toslim Uddin Pramanik said, "If everything goes well, the mill will resume production today (Monday). We have examined the repaired turbine and it is now fit for functioning," the MD told this correspondent over phone yesterday.

"We are hoping some success after a painful wait", he added.

The sugar mill, also known as Carew and Company, has also a distillery section to produce molasses and distillery products.

Last year, the mill produced 11,700 tonnes sugar by crushing 14,26,005 tonnes sugarcane, a record in last several years. The average recovery rate was 8.19 per cent.

The mill earned a profit of Tk 1.50 crore from sugar production and Tk 10.50 crore from distillery products.

The mill also set up a new exam-

ple by giving 30 paise incentive per maund of sugarcane to farmers last year.

The mill has 109 days left for this year. Asked whether the sugarcane crushing target can be met by this period, Toslim Uddin said,

"We are not sure of earning profit this year".

The farmers in the mill zone are now at a fix with their sugarcane.

Some of the farmers are trying to sell their sugarcane to other sugar mills like Kushtia Sugar Mill and Mobarakganj Sugar Mill in Jhenidah.

Toslim Uddin said, considering loss of farmers this year, they have decided to buy sugarcane and supply the leftover to other sugar mills.

They have already sent 535 tonnes to Mobarakganj Sugar Mill and 410 tonnes to Kushtia Sugar Mill, he said.

Meanwhile, farmers held a rally at the mill gate on January 18 to press the mill authorities to buy their entire product immediately as the season for other crops is approaching.

Unfavourable weather worries potato growers in N-dists

RAFIQUE SARKER, from Rangpur

Abnormal change in the weather in northern districts has made potato farmers worried as germination from planted seeds is being hindered.

Officials of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in the region say cultivation of the vegetable may be affected by the rise of temperature in the winter season.

Farmers in Mahiganj, Topodhon, Kounia and Baderganj in Rangpur district said potato plants are dying due to sudden rise in temperature. Similar reports were also received from other districts in the region.

The DAE officials and farmers said potato cultivation needs chilly wind and foggy weather. They had bumper yield last year as the sun remained covered with fog for around six hours a day on an average. The density of fog is very thin

this year and the sun remains covered only for 2-3 hours a day in the morning, they said.

"We have nothing to do except waiting for low temperature for potato cultivation", Rangpur DAE Deputy Director Aynul Haque told this correspondent.

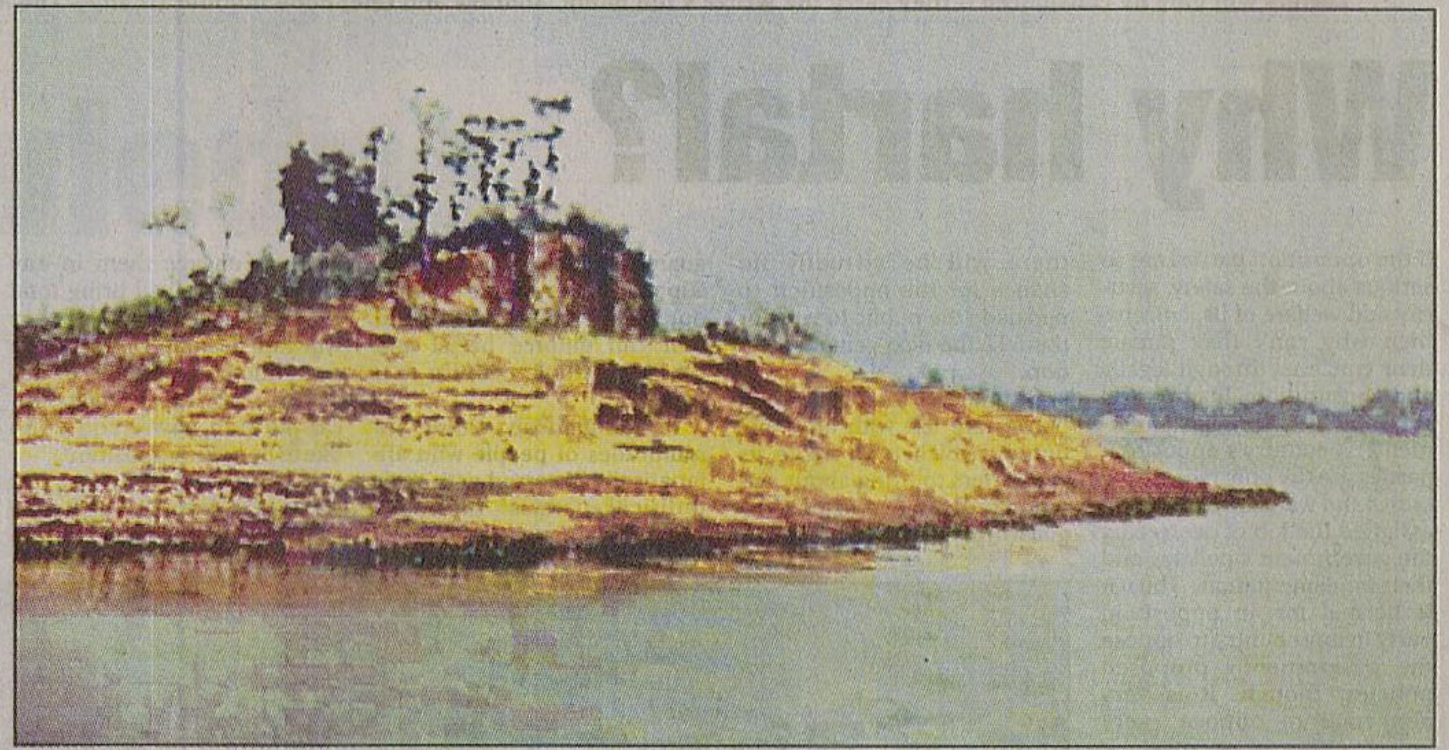
Officials of local meteorological department said the temperature this weather in the region is more this year. It unprecedented in ten years. They said fog is lesser due to higher humidity in air.

According to DAE, the target was to bring about 1,13,000 hectares of land under potato cultivation in eight districts under Rangpur agriculture region this season to produce 16,95,000 tons of potato. But only 70 per cent of the target has been fulfilled as many farmers did not go for potato cultivation after the paddy harvest because of the unfavourable weather, the DAE officials said.



The Gulshan Society, Dhaka handing over a truckload of warm clothes to Assistant Commissioner Mokbul Hossain of Nilphamari for distressed people of the district. The consignment handed over on Saturday on its office premises included 100 blankets, 18 cartons of new sweaters, three bags of ladies shawl and six bags of old sarees and sweaters.

PHOTO: STAR



As the water level of Kaptai lake has fallen, a hillock has emerged with marks of erosion. Erosion of numerous hillocks and riverbanks and dumping of about two tonnes of garbage a day is gradually silting up the lake.

PHOTO: STAR

Kaptai Lake getting silted up

10-12 feet soil deposit at places: Besides erosion of hillocks, two tonnes of garbage dumped daily

MONIRUL ALAM, Rangamati

Picturesque Kaptai Lake, the country's lone manmade lake in Rangamati hill district, is gradually becoming silted due to deposit of soil because of erosion of hillocks and dumping of garbage.

Besides long term affects, it is causing disruption in power generation by Kaptai Hydroelectric Project and hampering growth of fishery due to low level of water in dry season.

Sources in the Fisheries Research Institute (FRI) here said erosion takes place at hundreds of hillocks in the 380 square mile lake and in banks of different rivers, mainly during the monsoon.

"As a result the lake is becoming silted, affecting proper growth of fishes in shallow waters in different areas in the dry season" said FRI Senior Scientific Officer Md.

Alamgir Hossain.

The issue was discussed at a meeting held at the Rangamati Deputy Commissioner's office in March last year where Deputy Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Affairs Moniswapon Dewan had said a proposal was sent to appropriate authorities for dredging in vital flow-points of the lake. But nothing has been done.

When asked, Rangamati Deputy Commissioner Gazi Md. Zulhash told the Daily Star yesterday that the proposal was sent during the tenure of the previous DG. "I am not aware what has been done in this regard", he said.

Sources at the hydroelectric project said in many areas, there has been 10-12 feet soil deposit in prime flow pints. Creaks in many areas, seen earlier is not seen now, which also proves deposit of soil, they said.

During peak dry season, one or two power generation units out of three can be operated as the level of water declines, they said.

The lake was built by clogging a channel of Karnaphuli river at Kaptai Mukh in Kaptai upazila in 1960s by the then Pakistan government for setting up of the hydroelectric project. The dam however closed flows of four hill rivers -- Chengi, Katchalong, Karnaphuli, Mainee-- displacing about one lakh people. About 54,000 acres of arable land were also lost to the lake.

Dilip Choudhury, Sub Divisional Engineer of the Department of Public Health, said yesterday their study showed that about two tonnes of garbage are being dumped into the lake everyday. These are released mostly by small and cottage industries, saw-mills and handloom centres.

Waste from around 500 hanging

latrines in Reserve Bazar, Tabalchhari, Public Health area, Rajdeep, Bonorupa and Tribal Adam in the town flow into the lake, adding to the siltation and pollution.

"We tried to motivate the people but did not get an encouraging response", he said.

The pollution is also seriously affecting growth of fishes, he said.

Meanwhile, some voluntary organisations conducted several campaigns including formation of human chain to create awareness among the people not to dump garbage or waste in the lake.

"But these produced virtually no result as people living on the lake's banks are mostly poor and illiterate", said Sabuj, a campaigner and resident of Rajbari area.

The authorities concerned should play a strong role in this regard to save the lake from being pollution and being silted, he said.

10 get life for killing trader in Meherpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Ten persons were sentenced to life term rigorous imprisonment (RI) yesterday in businessmen Enamul Haq murder case in Meherpur.

The convicts are Yarnabi, Ahmed, Ailhim, Siddik, Malek, Sadi, Dukhu, Sahid, Amirul and Johurul. Of them Yarnabi, Ahmed, Siddik, Ailhim Dukhu and Sahid were tried in absentia.

The convicts were filed Tk 10,000 each, in default to suffer RI for one year more. All are from Razganj village in Meherpur Sadar upazila.

Three of the accused were acquitted in the verdict delivered by District Judge Abdul Hamid. The case was on the list of sensational cases.

The ten stormed into the house of Enamul at Shayampur village in the Sadar upazila on the night of January 13, 1999 and shot him. Enamul died while being taken to Meherpur general hospital.

Drug smuggler flees jail custody

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A notorious drug smuggler of Godagari who was being treated at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) fled yesterday.

Anwarul Islam, an inmate of Rajshahi Central Jail was shifted to RMCH following complaints of abdomen ailment on Thursday. But he made his good after going to toilet without 'dandaberi' (shakles). He was under care of four prison guards.

Two jail guards were suspended after the incident.

Anwarul is an accused in a drug-related case of Savar in Dhaka. Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members rounded him up along with one kilogram of heroin and Tk 3.5 lakh in cash from SA Paribahan court service office on December 20.

Flag meet held in Ramgarh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) held a flag meeting in Kailermuk border area in Ramgarh in Khagrachhari district yesterday after BDR objected raising of barbed wire fence by the Indian border guards within 150 feet of the no man's land.

Besides the illegal barbed wire fencing, the meeting also discussed firing on Bangladeshi citizens by BSF near the border, cross-border crimes and movement of citizens of the two countries.

Gas theft in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mobile court in a drive against illegal consumption of gas here yesterday unearthed another incident of stealing gas worth around Tk one lakh a month by an industry in Bandar thana area.

The mobile court detected the theft by Bay Washing Industries Limited, set up on more than 4,000 square feet land at Hazi Yakub Sawdagar Lane in Gosaidanga.

The factory was found stealing gas through tampering the meter after destroying the lead-seal of the meter installed on the main supply line of Bakharabad Gas System

Limited. It was also stealing gas through several other illegal connections from the main supply line of BGSIL, by-passing meter, sources in the mobile court said.

It was further revealed that the factory illegally set up two drying machines, run with the stolen gas.

The factory stole gas worth at least Tk 96 lakh in last eight years. The mobile court disconnected the illegal lines and seized the pipes and materials.

Neither the owner nor the manager of the factory was found during the drive led by Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Magistrate Mohammad Munir Chowdhury.

The officials and BGSIL team were assisted by Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) during the drive from 10 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon.

BGSIL is preparing to file case against the company, sources said. Earlier, the same mobile court in last three weeks unearthed four cases of gas stealing through illegal lines in the port city.

The mobile court disconnected illegal gas connections at A One Food and Pragati Biscuit unit at Pashchim Madarbari Jugichand Masjid Lane under Double Mooring thana on January 8.

It demolished an illegal salt factory for stealing over one lakh 15 thousand Cft gas a day through illegal connections at Firingee Bazar Yakub Nagar on January 4.

The price of the gas stolen by the five factories including the Bay Washing Industries Limited is about Tk 10 crore, the sources said.

19 outlaws held in 3 dists

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least 19 outlaws were arrested by police following drives conducted in Sirajganj, Pabna and Jessore districts in the last two days.

Our Sirajganj Correspondent reports: Fifteen outlaws were arrested in police raids conducted in Sirajganj and Pabna districts during the period.

A team of Sirajganj Sadar police launched a drive in Charmaalshapara area in the town and arrested two Purbu Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) cadres yesterday morning.

The arrested are Rafiqul Islam, 27, and Abdul Malek, 26.

In an earlier raid in Jatrapur area of Pabna, 13 outlaws were arrested Saturday morning. The arrested are Moazzem Hossain, 38, a PBCP (CML) regional leader, Anis, 27, Samad, 35, Iqbal, 37, Moksed Ali, 30, Jalaluddin, 35,

Jahidul, 20, Abdur Rahim, 45, Nazrul, 31, Fazlu, 50, Nuru, 25, Rafique, 40, and Kashem, 35.

Police said the arrested were regrouping in the areas for conducting crimes.

Police also claimed that most of the arrested might have been involved in killing Ansars and looting ammunition from Bamihal police outpost in Natore district.

Besides, they were involved in robbery and kidnapping in different areas of the northern region including Pabna, Natore and Sirajganj districts.

Our Jessore Correspondent reports: Four Purbu Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janojuddho) cadres were arrested by Chowgachha police from Ballabpur village under Chowgachha Upazila early Sunday.

Shahin Alam Shipon, 22, son of Abdul Malek, Alamgir Biswas, 25,

son of Sirajul Islam Biswas, Tabibor Rahman Tabi, 35, son of Sirajul Islam and Bikul Hasan, 19, son of Abdus Sattar all of Ballabpur village were arrested in a raid conducted at the village at about 3.35 am by a contingent of police led by Chowgachha Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC), according to Jessore Superintendent of Police (SP) Monjur Kader Khan.

Police also recovered a foreign made gun, three rounds of bullets and four bombs from the grave of late Fakir Chhand of Mollikipara at the village.

Meanwhile, Chowgachha police arrested two Janojuddha cadres Sonu Mollah of Jibonnagar, Chuadanga and Babul Akhtar of Ramkrishnapur village under Chowgachha upazila on January 15.

Of them Sonu Mollah was killed in an encounter with Jibonnagar police the next day.