

Plant idle as people cry for arsenic-free water in Kalaroa

Lawmaker blamed for stringpulling

ABU AHMED, *Satkhira*

A laudable initiative to supply arsenic-free water in Kalaroa has fallen flat allegedly due to non-cooperation by some vested quarters.

The Kalaroa Arsenic Free Water Supply Project, jointly implemented by Bogra Rural Development Academy (RDA) and a local NGO—JESH Foundation is unutilised for about 11 months.

Over two lakh people of Kalaroa municipality and adjoining areas where arsenic contamination of ground water is much beyond the permissible level is deprived of safe water even after completion of the pilot project.

Severe arsenic contamination of ground water is a long standing problem in Kalaroa. Level of arsenic is between .70 (point seven zero) and .50 (point five zero) against the WHO (World Health Organisation) permissible level of .05 (point zero five).

According to the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), about 96 per cent of the 18510 tube wells are arsenic-contaminated in the upazila.

According to a survey done in 2001, there were 683 arsenicosis patients in the upazila. The number would be more now, PHED officials told this correspondent yesterday.

People of the small town on several occasions demanded steps by the municipal authorities to supply arsenic-free water but the authorities were helpless due to lack of funds.

Bogra Rural Development Academy (RDA) came forward with assistance and signed a contact with JESH Foundation, a local NGO, on December 3, 2003 to implement a project to supply arsenic-free water. An agreement was also signed between Kalaroa municipality and JESH Foundation on September 9, 2003.

Bogra RDA gave Tk 18 lakh interest free loan to JESH Foundation to implement the pro-

ject. The loan is payable in 20 installments in 10 years.

As per contract, Kalaroa municipality leased six decimal land to JESH Foundation for the project on an annual payment of Tk 1500.

Under the project, an overhead tank has been built, a water treatment plant installed and a deep tube sunk. The work started on December 12, 2003 and was completed in March last year. Laying of PVC pipeline in the town is yet to be done.

As per agreement with JESH Foundation, the pourasava would bear the cost of laying PVC pipeline in the town and get 40 per cent of the profit from the project.

Pourasava authorities floated a tender in February 2004 for the Tk 5,50,000 PVC pipeline laying work. Ten firms bid for the work. But the pourasava cancelled the tender in the same month allegedly without showing any reason.

It is alleged that the tender was cancelled following pressure from some vested quarters backed by a ruling party lawmaker. The municipal authorities again floated a tender for the work on June 16 in 2004. But there has not been any progress in the pipeline laying work since then.

As pressure from townspeople mounted, the pourasabha in January this year asked project authorities to supply arsenic-free water from the project site, with a plan that residents would take safe water from there till pipeline is laid. As per the agreement, the pourasabha would take the water from the NGO and supply it to people.

The NGO complied with the municipal authorities' request and started supplying water from the overhead tank on January 27 last year.

But after three days, the pourasabha authorities declined to take water from the project and wrote a letter to Bogra RDA for handover of the project to it. Bogra RDA refused as it was not in the



PHOTO: STAR
The overhead tank and water treatment facilities lying ideal for about 11 months in Kalaroa.

agreement, sources said.

The project authorities then started supplying arsenic-free water to people from its compound. But the supply came to a halt after valuable equipment was stolen. Since then, supply of water is suspended.

On contact, Bogra RDA's Deputy Director Engineer Nazrul Islam said the pilot project was funded to supply safe water to people but they are not getting the facility for unknown reason.

Asked about the fate of the project, Kalaroa UNO Bashirul Alam who is also administrator of the municipality, said fund constraint is hindering the project.

"The theft is part of conspiracy by some vested quarters to stop commissioning of the project", JESH Foundation Chairman Enam Haque claimed when contacted by this correspondent.

"We also requested the municipal authorities to bear half of the cost for buying the stolen equipment, to construct a boundary wall for security and to take over the project by paying the cost but they are yet to reply", Enam Haque said. "Commissioning of the project has become uncertain", he said.

The Bogra RDA had a plan to implement 10 more such projects in the area if the Kolaria project could be commissioned successfully.

As the project could not be run, it

shifted those to Sharsha upazila in Jessore district, said Engineer Nazrul Islam.

"We took the decision to shift the proposed projects to Jessore as we failed to run the project at Kalaroa", said Enam Haque.

Costly appliances including the chemical dosing pump (not available in Bangladesh), two planet boards and capacitors along with 10 kilograms of water purifying chemicals worth about Tk one lakh were stolen on June 16 last year, putting last nails on the project.

Sources claimed that the vested quarters engaged a gang to commit the theft.

Police arrested the night guard but released him allegedly due to political pressure, they claimed. Police could neither nab the culprits nor recover the stolen goods.

On contact over cell phone, local ruling party lawmaker Habibul Islam Habib denied all the allegations.

When asked about shifting of 10 proposed projects to Jessore from Kalaroa upazila, he said he does not know anything about it.

Officials demand UNO's removal

A CORRESPONDENT, *Rangamati*

Officials and employees of different government departments at Jurachhari upazila headquarters on Monday submitted a memorandum to Rangamati Deputy Commissioner demanding removal of Upazila Nirbahee Officer (UNO) Md. Saleh Ahmed for his alleged involvement in corruption, abuse of power and ill treatment with them.

The memorandum was signed by officials including upazila agriculture officer, fisheries officer, health and family planning officer, livestock officer, Ansars and VDP officer, social welfare officer, youth development officer, upazila engineer, upazila food controller and some teachers of different schools, sources said.

They also held a rally in front of the DC office.

In the memorandum, the signatories alleged that the alleged corruption by the UNO is greatly affecting normal official activities in most of the departments. A virtual deadlock has been created in day to day work at government officials, they alleged.

Speakers at the rally also brought against him charge of misappropriation of food grains allotted for development work and realising bribe for official work.

When contacted over phone yesterday, Deputy Commissioner Gazi Md Julhas said he received the memorandum. "I am yet to take any decision", he said.

BCL enforces strike at SUST

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

Classes and semester examinations were not held in Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST) yesterday as opposition Awami League's student front Bangladesh Chhatra League enforced a day-long strike on the campus) to press their demands and protest attack on its activists on the day before.

Their demands include dissolution of SUST Central Students Union (SUCSU) and fresh election. BCL brought out a procession and held a rally on the campus yesterday, where its leaders gave the authorities a deadline till Sunday to accept their demand and threatened of tougher agitation including indefinite strike for non-compliance.

On the other hand, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, student front of ruling BNP, also brought out a procession and held a rally protesting the BCL move to disturb the academic atmosphere on the campus.

PROF TAHER MURDER

Teachers, students march RU campus for arrest of killers

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University (RU) Geology and Mining Department teachers and students yesterday took out a silent procession on the campus demanding arrest and punishment to killers of Prof S Taher Ahmed, a founding teacher of the department.

Prof Taher was killed by miscreants in his campus house at night on February 1.

Departmental chairman Prof Sayed Shamsuddin Ahmed led the procession attended by all teachers, students and staff. The

processionists paraded the campus streets.

After the procession, a meeting was held in front of the department. Prof Sayed presided the meeting.

In his presidential address, he announced to hold procession and rally on the campus every Saturday and Tuesday. "The university teachers feel insecure in absence of adequate security measures", he said.

Other speakers said although the teachers, students and employees are agitating for arrest of killers, but there has been little progress in the investigation.

The university unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) brought out another procession on the campus and held a meeting in front of the Central Library. BCL demanded arrest and punishment to killers of two slain university teachers Prof S Taher and Prof Muhammad Yunus.

BCL leaders alleged that Jamaat-Shibir leaders are trying to protect Prof Taher's killer Mahabub Alam Salehi, who is the university unit president of Islami Chhatra Shibir. They blamed police administration for not arresting Salehi.

15 hurt in Natore Jubo League clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

Two Awami Jubo League factions yesterday clashed and traded gunfire in Natore town, leaving 15 people injured.

The office of Natore Jubo League (JL) was ransacked and two motorcycles set ablaze during the clashes that turned the Hemangini Bridge areas near the district Awami League office into a virtual battleground.

The rival factions led by Natore JL president Shariful Islam Ramzan and general secretary Shafiqul Islam Shimul were locked in clashes at around 12.30 pm while the party activists were returning in procession after an agitation pro-

testing power and water crisis.

At least 12 shots were fired during the clashes that created a panic in the area. But none of the injured was bullet-hit.

One of the activists Kamal who was hacked with sharp weapons, was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. Two others—Ratan and Shamim—who also sustained serious cut injuries were taken to the Baptist Mid-Mission Hospital.

Police brought the situation under control.

Jubo League president Ramzan and secretary Shimul blamed each other for the clashes. Additional police were deployed in the area to avert further violence.

TAGORE ANNIVERSARY Sirajganj artistes boycott Kuthibari programmes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Sirajganj*

All cultural organisations in Sirajganj yesterday boycotted Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary programmes at Shahjapur Kuthibari organised by the district administration, alleging mismanagement and misbehaviour by officials.

The boycott was announced at a press conference at Sirajganj Press Club, jointly organised by Sirajganj Sammilita Sangskritik Jote and Sirajganj Natyto Federation.

It was addressed by, among others, Asad Uddin Pablu, president of Jote.

When asked, he said the celebrations in Shahjapur continued with artistes from outside Sirajganj.



PHOTO: STAR
The Gonda High School in Kendua, one of the many structures tore down by Sunday's nor'wester in Netrakona.

10X2

7X2

8X4