

# Rickets take heavy toll on children

Over one lakh suffer in Cox's Bazar, no treatment facility at govt hospital

MUAZZAM HOSSAIN SHAKIL, Cox's Bazar

Rickets is spreading in Cox's Bazar at an alarming rate. The number of children attacked with the disease can be as high as one lakh, who face threat of being crippled for life.

The horrifying picture was revealed in a recent survey conducted by an NGO-- Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable (SARPV).

There is no government step to prevent spread of the disease or treatment of the affected children. There was no survey either.

About nine per cent of children in the district are now attacked with the disease. The incidence is more in Moheshkhali, Chakaria and Sadar upazilas than in other areas, the survey report claimed.

Earlier in 1991, SARPV conducted a survey in the coastal district when it found 4.7 per cent of the children affected with rickets.

District health officials also admitted that rickets is 'wide-spread' in the district. But they could not provide any estimate as there was no survey by the government.

"The disease is widespread", Civil Surgeon Abdul Wadud Bhuiya admitted while talking to this correspondent. He declined to say anything more.

Child Specialist Arup Dutta of Sadar Hospital said around 60,000 children could be affected with the disease in the district. He lamented that there was no rickets treatment facility at the government hospital.

SARPV Programme Officer Kazi Moksudul Alam said there are families where 3-4 children are suffering from the disease.

He said deficiency of calcium and Vitamin D is the main cause of the disease.

SARPV runs a clinic at Chakaria where 1580 affected children have been treated so far, Alam said.

The treatment becomes difficult if the patient is not taken to hospital at early stage.

"We treated 128 children through operation on their legs and providing them high calcium and vitamin enriched food. They also needed physiotherapy for long", he said.

Suriya Akter, a rickets specialist and physiotherapist at the SARPV clinic, said rickets is a disease of

immature skeleton characterised by inadequate mineralisation of bone matrix. Rickets affects structure of the growing bone, causing deformities of ribs and limbs. Bones that lack minerals become weak and consequently weight of the body causes bones of legs to bend. Vitamin D deficiency has long been regarded as the main cause of rickets, she said. Lack of exposure to sunlight deteriorates the condition, she added.

Adding vitamin D to child food can improve the situation, she said.

Cases of rickets have also been detected in children with severe calcium deficiency and premature birth with phosphate deficiency.

There are also cases of 'hereditary rickets or acquired vitamin-D resistant rickets', but these are rare.

Bringing a change in food habit, supplying nutrition-enriched food to children and parents and ensuring healthy environment can improve the situation. Otherwise, they feared that the disease could cripple up to 20 per cent of children in the area in next 10 years.

The government should immediately take up some steps to control spread of the disease, they said.

## 98 BNP men resign in Kolaroa

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sakhira

Ninety-eight leaders and activists of ruling BNP and its front organisations in Kolaroa resigned en-masse yesterday protesting 'attack, torture and false cases' against them filed by rival factions.

They submitted their resignation to the president of Kolaroa Upazila BNP, according to a joint statement issued here.

Those who submitted resignation include ward BNP vice-president Ensan Ali, upazila Juba Dal office secretary Montaz Ali, ward Juba Dal president Humayun Kabir, general secretary Khkon, organising secretary Shahidul Islam and publicity secretary Kawar Ali.

The sources said the resignation followed an attack by a rival group led by Babu, nephew of local BNP lawmaker Habibul Islam Habib, on June 12.

In the statement, they alleged that they were tortured for protesting 'wide spread corruption and terrorism in last four and a half years by the BNP-Jamat men in the area'.

## Five to die for kidnap, murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Five persons were sentenced to death yesterday for killing a shop keeper for refusing to pay toll.

The convicts are Zia, Aminur, Makul, Manju and Ful Mia, all from Hindukandi village in Shariakandi Upazila of Bogra district.

Additional District and Session Judge KG Mostafa delivered the verdict.

The five had demanded a toll of Tk one lakh from Indrajit of the same village but he denied and informed police.

They then abducted him from his shop on the night of September 7, 1999. Indrajit's body was later recovered from Charparavillage.

In his confessional statement before the court, Manju admitted that he and his accomplices killed Indrajit.

## 8 ancient coins recovered: Four nabbed in Bogra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Saturday recovered eight ancient coins and arrested three persons in this connection at Gokul in Sadar upazila.

Acting on a secret information, Rab arrested Raju, 25, an inhabitant of Saden village in Palashbari upazila, Gaibandha and Ranu, 20, an inhabitant of Harinmara village in the same upazila.

Following their confessional statements, Rab arrested Ahmmad Ali, 55, of Chalk Durgapur village in Sadullapur upazila and recovered 8 coins in his possession. The coins included an original silver coin of 1908. A police official said the seven other silver coins are fake ones.

## Repeal of 8th amendment demanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Speakers at the Hindu-Bouddho-Khristan Oikya Parishad, a unity council of the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian communities, triennial conference here demanded repeal of the eighth amendment and restoration of the 1972 Constitution.

Held at local Shaheed Minar, the conference was presided by Sadullapur Degree College vice-principal Pares Chandra Sarker while it was attended by Parishad general secretary Dr Neem Chanda Bhaumik as chief guest.

Speakers also demanded cancellation of the Vested Property Act and representation of minority community in the national assembly.

Among others, Chhattra and Jubo Oikya Parishad president Satendra Nath Bhakta, Sukhendu Shekhar Baidha, former lawmaker Abu Taleb Mia, Aminul Islam Golap, Abu Bakkar Siddique, Mihir Ghosh, Gopal Chandra Barman and Debashis Roy addressed.

Hundreds of activists of seven upazilas attended the conference. Earlier, they brought out a procession and paraded the main streets of the town.

Later, a 61-member Gaibandha district unit committee was elected with Pares Chandra Sarker as its president and Ranajit Bakshi Surjo as general secretary at the concluding session.



A truck leaving Modhupur (left) with timber brought from reserve forest area on hackney carriages drawn by horse. Locals say 20 to 25 truckloads of illegal timber find their way to different destinations every day.

# Madhupur reserve forests disappearing fast

20,000 out of 45,565 acres grabbed for banana, pineapple plantation

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Reserve forests in Madhupur upazila in Tangail are shrinking due to indiscriminate cutting of trees and encroachment of forestlands.

The forest department is busy to save the controversial wall built for creating an Eco Park rather than taking steps to preserve the forests.

Some of the contractors who constructed the wall and are now involved in its maintenance are also behind the large scale destruction of forests, some local people alleged while talking to this correspondent recently.

They have links with organised gangs including local sawmill owners and timber merchants. Valuable timber trees are stolen from reserve forests in Madhupur allegedly in connivance with a section of forest department staff and law enforcers.

Forests officials sometimes recover stolen timber and take alleged thieves into custody but this is only an eyewitness, they alleged.

Meer Abdul Latif, a timber merchant at Battala in Tangail, said that everyday, specially at night, 15 to 20

truckloads of timber like shal and gajari leave the forest areas for different destinations. Parts of these are also sold at nearby sawmills.

The pilferage continues due to ineffective steps by the local administration and forest department, he alleged.

There are over 50 sawmills and numerous brick fields near the forests, most of which are illegal, sources said.

Some influential quarters having political clout have grabbed vast areas of the reserve forests by using 'forged documents', an official of Tangail Forest Department told this correspondent seeking anonymity.

"We are virtually helpless", he said.

He said the gangs engage poor indigenous people at small remuneration for cutting and removing timber trees.

The reserve forests in Tangail were earlier spread over 1,22,876 acres in five upazilas - 45,565 acres in Madhupur; 47,220 in Sakhipur; 21,855 in Ghatail; 7,576 in Mirzapur and 669 acres in Kallhati, according to forest department sources.

Large portions of reserve forests in Madhupur have been illegally grabbed. Local influential encroachers, most of them aligned with ruling parties, have raised banana orchards and pineapple gardens and constructed makeshift structures to strengthen their position, they said.

Besides, there are 17,436 acres of reserve forest in Madhupur Gar in Mymensingh district.

Over 70,000 people including indigenous and Bangalees live in forests in Tangail and Mymensingh regions, who depend on the forests for their livelihood, forest department sources said.

Forest department officials however claimed that they can not take prompt action due to shortage of manpower and logistics.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) in Tangail, Abu Hanif Patwari, admitted that about 20,000 acres of forestland out of 45,565 acres in Madhupur region have been occupied by land grabbers, most of them local influential. About 10,000 acres were brought under rubber plantation, he said.

He however denied the allegation that a section of forest department staff was involvement in stealing timber trees.

"Local people steal trees. This is their profession", the DFO said.

The Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) and the Conscious Citizen Committee (CCC) in Madhupur jointly formed a human chain at Madhupur upazila headquarters on Wednesday last demanding steps to stop the plunder of Madhupur forests and save its biodiversity.

A large number of local people from different professions joined the human chain.

At a rally prior to the human chain, CCC Convener Abdul Latif said about two-thirds of the reserve forests in Madhupur have already disappeared and the lands occupied by local influential. They are cultivating pineapple and banana on grabbed forestlands. Use of banned DDT power, insecticides and hormone in the fruit gardens is damaging the environment and biodiversity, he said.



Some of the rickets-attacked children at a village in Moheshkhali upazila in Cox's Bazar.

# Fish farming changes days of day-labourers in Patuakhali

MD. SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Only four years ago, poor Harun Majhi had to work under a duska as an agricultural labourer for survival. Illiterate Harun had no cropland.

His mini hatchery earned him about Tk 50,000 this year from sale of fish fry.

Harun of Hazipur village in Kalapara upazila inherited only the homestead with a ditch in front of his house. Like others, he had to leave school while in class VI.

Harun started a mini hatchery in the ditch with help from Patuakhali Barguna Aquaculture Extension Project (PBAEP), assisted by Danida.

In January 2001, after two days' short training Harun took a loan of Tk 5,000 from ASA an NGO. He collected some mother fishes from ponds in the village and released those in his ditch.

He sold over one lakh fingerlings and earned a profit of Tk 50,000.

Now Harun is a self-reliant and owns several acres of cropland. This

project has changed my life", Harun while talking to this correspondent.

Nazma left school after crossing the only primary level due to poverty. She now earns Tk 3000-4000 a month by selling fish feed.

"I was inspired by PBAEP field supervisor Swapna", Nazma said.

She prepares fish feed from oil cake, dry fish and other ingredients, bought from local market and sells to fish farmers and hatchery owners of Nazma's husband was a day labourer. Now they run the business together, she said.

BPAP is helping about 1.20 lakh poor farmer by involving them in aquaculture in Patuakhali and Barguna district, its officials said.

The 10-year project launched in October, 1997 is scheduled to end in June 30 this year.

Seeing its success, different quarters have demanded extension of the project.

PBAEP is implementing a Tk 36.89 crore Danida (Danish International Development Agency)

project.

Under the project, 62,000 people have been trained as fish cultivators, 909 as fingerling traders, 65 as fish feed producers, 63 as carp hatchery promoters and 1106 in raising nursery. Loans amounting to Tk 2.10 crore have been distributed among fish farmers in the project area.

The project brought 55,850 ponds, 5,586 gheras (water bodies) and nine canals covering 226.5 hectares of water body under fish cultivation.

"This project has brought a great change in Patuakhali and Barguna districts as most of derelict ponds and canals have been brought under fish cultivation and a large number of people engaged in fish farming. They are gradually changing their life", said PBAEP Project Director Wahid-Un-Nabi while talking to this correspondent.

"This will bring about a sustainable development in the area", he said.



Harun Majhi (cross mark on chest) with shrimps netted from his pond in Hajipur village in Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali.

# Booster for Tanguar Haor

Intensive management planned as interim one sees success

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

After success of a two and half years' 'interim management' by Sunamganj district administration, Tanguar Haor, is going to be under a 6-year intensive management programme soon.

Swiss Development Corporation (SDC), a Swedish organization, has expressed its interest to provide assistance for the country's second Ramsar site.

The offer came after several surveys in the 3,868 acre waterbody in last few months following visits by Swiss ambassador Dora Rapold and SDC's country Representative Christine Poffe in November last year.

Tanguar Haor, home to about 140 species of sweet water fishes, over 60,000 birds, and a resting place for numerous guest birds during the winter, was declared an Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) in 1999 and was taken as a Ramsar site in 2000.

But, implementation of the Ramsar project remained uncertain due to indecision by policymakers and failure to select financial investors, leaving it to hands of plunderers.

At least Tk 5 crore resources were plundered by organised gangs and politically backed vested quarters till the Sunamganj district administration took over its control and placed it under an interim

management in November 2003.

The surveys were done by SDC and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Now, things are under process for finalising plans for the 6-year intensive management. Sunamganj Deputy Commissioner Zafar Siddique told this correspondent.

The plans were discussed at a May 10 meeting in Dhaka, organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, where officials of SDC, IUCN, Centre for Natural Resource Services (GNRS) and Inter Co-operation (IC) attended.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) will be signed soon after finalising the plan, he said.

The people living in 48 villages around the Haor have been motivated not to net mother fishes during breeding season and to protect its resources, the DC said. They will be involved in its management and alternative jobs will be created for them during the fishing season, he said.

"We got very good results under the interim management". Five camps manned by BDR, police, Ansars and magistrates were set up in the Haor area to protect the resources since the Sunamganj district administration took it over.

"Recently we withdrew BDR and police from the camps, but the situation remained satisfactory", he noted happily.

The Tanguar Haor, spread over

Sunamganj, Habiganj and parts of Netrokona and Kishoreganj districts, plays an important role in fish production as mother fishes can breed in vast natural waters.

Some fishermen in Manikkhila, Indrapur, Patabuka, Anandanagar villages on the bank of the haor however told this correspondent that they are in hardship as fishing in the haor, their main profession for long, is stopped for over two years. Montu Barman of Bhabanipur, Abdul Majid of Nishchintapur and Jagadish Barman of Anandanagar said they want alternative jobs.

They however admitted that fish resource increased in the last two years.

Fishery officials and villagers said big quantities of fries of kalabaush, ghania, pabda rui etc were netted in last two years, which contributed to fish culture in the country.

"We got all out support from all quarters including local people and are determined to protect the resources until a comprehensive management strategy to save the nationally important waterbody is finalised by the government and the Swiss organisation," the DC said.

Jatiya Sangsad Whip Fazlul Haque Aspia, also minister in charge for Sunamganj district, said, "We got tremendous results from the interim management".

Local people and public representatives also supported the programme to protect and develop the haor's resources. Plunder is stopped since November 2003, he said.

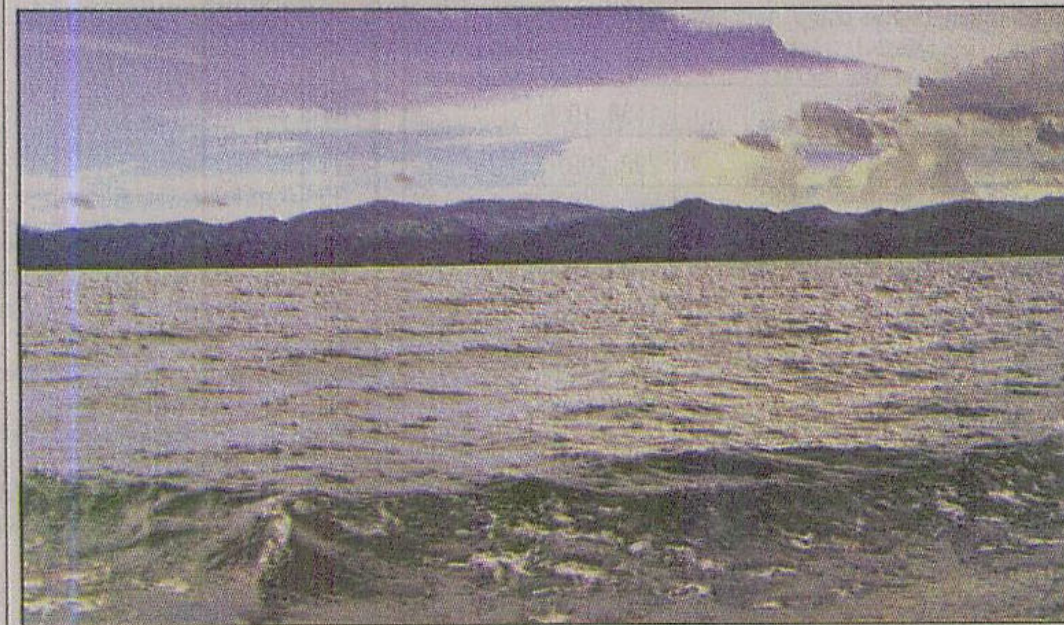
A fishery department official in Sunamganj said strict vigilance in last two and half years has saved different depleting species of traditional fishes worth crores of taka.

"It will be a great achievement if this can be continued", he said.

Current nets worth over Tk 30 lakh were seized during the initial period of the interim management by the district administration, he said.

Different varieties of water plants like hijal karach (barringtonia acutangula) and cane clusters grow in the Haor in plenty.

In wet season, the Haor becomes vast sheets of water dotted with island-like small villages. In dry season, when water recedes into major rivers, all that remain are 51 odd beels (small waterbodies).



WHAT A BIG CATCH! A fisherman with a big mother fish (top) that grew undisturbed in Tanguar Haor during the interim management by Sunamganj district administration.