



The present condition of Rajapur canal at Bagri Bazar in Rajapur upazila of Jhalakathi.

PHOTO: M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL

Grabbing puts canal on death throes

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL, Jhalakathi

Once flowing Rajapur canal in Jhalakathi is nearly dead now, thanks to the mindless encroachment and pollution by locals on both sides of the waterbody.

The four-km-long canal, originating from the Dhansiri river and falling into the Jangalia river beside Rajapur Bazar adjacent to the upazila headquarters, also connected several small streams in the area with the two rivers.

Big boats and trawlers plied the canal only a decade ago but now it has lost navigability, said Mizanur Rahman, a college teacher.

"The grabbers, mostly the people living beside the canal, set bamboo fences on parts of the canal and gradually fill up the area with

garbage and soil. If the canal disappears, Rajapur Bazar and its surroundings will be submerged during monsoon," he added.

Shops, houses, buildings and even gardens have been made after occupying the canal land, said Saiful Islam, a trader of Rajapur Bazar.

Many people are tempted to grab the canal land due to price rise of land in and around Rajapur upazila headquarters, he added.

"When the canal had enough flow, we could easily bring different products from Jhalakathi on trawlers for cheap fares. The canal also helped water communication with Pirojpur Sadar, Kawkhali and Bhandaria upazilas. But it is no longer possible," said Shajan Howlader, another trader.

Hemayet, a farmer of Angaria of Rajapur, said earlier he brought rice and other produce to Rajapur Bazar on boat and but now he has to bring them on trucks.

"Two decades ago, the canal was the main source of fish for the locals. Like me, many people used to catch fish here and sell it in the local bazaar. But now the canal has hardly any water, and hence no fish," said Hanif, a fisherman of Rajapur.

Contacted, Rajapur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Sohag Howlader said, "We will soon conduct drives against illegal occupiers on both sides of the canal. No illegal set-ups will be allowed on the canal. I will also take steps to excavate the canal shortly."

Earth being stolen from banks of Bhairab river in Mujibnagar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

With government drives against river encroachers on the wane, soil from the banks of the Bhairab river is being stolen in Meherpur's Mujibnagar upazila.

A group of influential locals have been stealing the soil from at least eight points along a 13-kilometre stretch of the riverbank in the upazila, violating the Agricultural Land Protection and Land Use Act, 2012.

Locals alleged that the earth is being sold mostly to different brick kilns in the area.

During a recent visit to Mahajanpur village in the upazila, this correspondent also came across unabated theft of soil from the riverbank in different places of the village.

A large number of workers were seen cutting soil from different parts of the river's bank and loading it up on tractor wagons.

Unable to mention any name, the workers said they were engaged in the work by some earth traders in exchange for payment.

Labourer Mobarak Ali said, "The earth is being sold mostly to brick kilns. Some others also buy it for constructing their houses."

Without being able to provide the amount of earth they extract daily, the labourers said around 50 to 100 wagons are engaged in the work every day there.

Requesting anonymity, one labourer said owners of as many as six brick kilns in Mahajanpur union of the upazila are the primary buyers of the earth that they

extract from the riverbank.

Demand for earth is high around this time as it is the peak season for making bricks at the kilns, he also said.

Worried villagers said the destruction of the banks of the river will eventually cause severe erosion of their land during the monsoon, resulting in substantial damage of their property and crops.

They also said the frequent movement of heavily loaded tractor wagons is causing extensive damage to the village roads that are not suited for such heavy traffic.

Nawab Ali Khan, a resident of Mahajanpur village, said the way the earth traders are destroying the river and roads in the village, it seems that they are above the law.

Land owner Imrul Hossain of the same village said, "They are taking away earth from beside my land. My land will definitely be eroded during the upcoming monsoon."

Nevertheless, he said he did not dare to raise objections against the soil theft as the offenders are highly influential in the area.

A local brick kiln owner, wishing not to be named, said while buying earth, it never crossed his mind to question where the supplier had got the earth from.

After this correspondent drew the attention of Mujibnagar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Usman Ghani over the soil theft, he said he sent out police to the riverbank for investigation, but the criminals fled the scene before police made any arrest.

He assured that necessary action against the offenders would be taken.



Workers loading up a tractor wagon with earth illegally cut from the bank of the Bhairab river in Mahajanpur village of Meherpur's Mujibnagar upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR



Instead of traditional earthen pot, cheap and readily available plastic bottle is now used in some places to collect sweet sap from a date tree, an item for preparing delicacies during the winter. The photo was taken from Pattashi village in Indurkani upazila of Pirojpur on Saturday.

PHOTO: HABIBURRAHMAN

Schoolteacher files GD for security

The teacher in Lalmonirhat alleges harassment by headmaster

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A teacher of Kumrihat SC High School in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila on Saturday filed a general diary (GD) with Aditmari Police Station, seeking protection after harassment and threat allegedly by the school's headmaster and his men.

"Kamrul Islam, headmaster of the school, got dissatisfied with me as I declined to give bribe of Tk 8 lakh that he demanded in the name of expenditure for inclusion of my job in the government's MPO (Monthly Payment Order)," said the teacher, Manowarul Islam, in the GD.

"The headmaster, who has been trying to make me quit my job, withheld my salary for two months. He is also preventing me from going to school. Anonymous callers from different mobile numbers are giving death threat to me," he complained.

Manowarul, son of marginal farmer Mainul Islam of Dulali village of Kaliganj upazila, was appointed as a mathematics teacher at Kumrihat SC High School in 2016. Later in September 2019 his post was listed with MPO. He also got salary from the government's coffers for September and October in last year.

Contacted, headmaster Kamrul Islam got furious and said he did not want to talk to journalists in this regard.

Aditmari Police Station OC Saiful Islam said the police will take legal action after investigation regarding the GD.

Missing student found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The body of college student, who went missing on Tuesday, was found floating in a pond in Trishal upazila yesterday.

The deceased, Ashraful Alam Siam, 22, an under graduate student at a college in Narayanganj, was son of Akkas Ali of Darirampur village in the upazila.

Quoting the deceased family members, Officer in Charge of Trishal Police Station Azizur Rahman said Siam went out of his house on Tuesday evening and did not return home since then.

Local people found Siam's body floating in a pond adjacent to his house yesterday noon and informed the police, who recovered the body and sent it to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital for autopsy, the OC said.

An unnatural death (UD) case was lodged with the police station in this regard.

Green pea cultivation on rise

Many farmers in 7 upazilas of Natore cultivated the cash crop as it requires a low production cost and brings good profit

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Farmers in seven upazilas of the district are getting more interested in cultivation of green pea in the fallow land, considering it as a bonus crop between Aman and Boro seasons.

Many farmers in different upazilas have changed their luck by cultivating green pea, locally known as 'motorshuti', on their fallow land as the vegetable requiring low production cost brings good profit.

Only eight to 10 years ago, after harvesting Aman paddy, farmers used to keep their lands idle till the Boro cultivation starts, Natore Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Mehedul Islam said.

Green pea farming also increases the fertility of the land as the vegetable is a pulse crop, he added.

Farmer Alam Hossain of Chougachhi village in Sadar upazila said he cultivated green pea on eight bighas of land this year spending Tk 35,000.

He has already earned Tk 1.5 lakh by selling his produces, said Alam, who struggled to maintain his family only five years ago, but now lives a solvent life.

Abul Kalam of Chandrakala village in the upazila said although green peas is a short time crop (three months duration) but it benefits them a lot.

"This year I have earned Tk 20,000 by selling pea from each bigha land," Kalam said.

Farmer Belal Hossain of the same village said farmers usually sows pea seeds in between October and November and harvest their

produce in January and February

Besides, no plough is required to cultivate pea in paddy fields, Belal added.

Housewife Jaheda Begum of Bangabaria village said cultivation of pea brings an opportunity for many women like her as they can earn Tk 100 to Tk 200 every day by plucking pea during this time of the year.

Trader Afaz Uddin said he buys pea from different areas of Natore and sell those at different markets across the country including Dhaka and Narayanganj.

Deputy Director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Natore Subrata Kumar Saha said green pea was cultivated on 1,195 hectares of land in the district this season while it was only 715 hectares last season.



A number of women harvest green pea from a field at Bangabaria village in Natore Sadar upazila. The photo was taken a few days ago.

PHOTO: STAR