

# Impact of Farakka on Bangladesh

## Desertification in the north, salinity in the south

By Masud Hasan Khan Back from Kushtia

A silent ecological devastation is taking place in Bangladesh as a result of the dehydrational impact of the river Ganges, known as the Padma in this country.

A slow, almost inexorable process of desertification has set in in the northern part of the country while the south-western region is getting more and more salinated.

A major river, the Gorai, is almost dead while the huge Ganges-Kobadak Irrigation Project, which pours fresh water into the dry croplands of Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Rajbari, Jhenidah, Magura, Jessore and Narail districts, faces a collapse.

A newspaper factory and a powerplant in the coastal Khulna district are now forced to bring fresh water from up-country because the high salinity in the river Passur has made it difficult to keep the plants operative.

The Sundarbans, the world's largest estuarine swamp, is also threatened by high salinity with the tops of the Sundari trees of the forest withering.

Home of the endangered Royal Bengal tigers, the 6000 sq km Sundarbans provides half of the country's forest products, besides being used as a critical wildlife sanctuary.

About 17 per cent of the total Sundari trees in the aquatic forest have already fallen victim to the top-dying syndrome, the officials said.

All these have occurred because of a barrage on the mighty Ganges at Farakka in the Indian state of West Bengal — only 19 kilometers from the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Bangladesh's ecologists and water experts warn that fresh water diversion by the Farakka Barrage will deteriorate the agricultural capacity of 11 south eastern districts of the country, entailing a catastrophe for the country.

"It is a bad time for us," said Sonu Mia of Kushtia's north-west Mirpur thana. "Our life is linked to the Padma's waters... no water means no work, no food," he said.

A ferryman by profession, Mia had to dock his boat or the whole dry season from March through June. During this period he works as a menial

labourer in a sand quarry. Fifteen piers of the Hardinge railway bridge, up north from Mirpur, now stand on a sand bank as a caravan of carts and people on foot or on bicycle take to the sandy trails to cross the river during the four dry months.

The total water width of the Padma near the bridge has reduced to a mere 0.6 kilometers from 1.6 kilometers during winter, the BWDB officials said.

In the coastal Khulna and Sakhira districts, daily morning treks for fresh drinking water has become a tedious but unavoidable chore.

Most of the tubewells in these areas have either become inoperative either due to low ground water level or salinity.

Officials of the WDB in Dhaka explained that the Gorai, the Rupsha and the Passur rivers are the only fresh water sources for the whole south-western part of the country.

These rivers supply drinking and irrigation water, besides keeping the local wetlands alive, they said.

Health officials of Khulna district said the people of Baithagata, Dakop and Paikgacha areas have developed acute diarrhoea because of regular saline water consumption.

Saline water is a safe haven for the diarrhoeal germs, the officials point out.

The highest tolerance level of salinity for drinking water in the Khulna region is 500 micro-mhos and 2000 micro-mhos per centimeter for agriculture.

With dwindling discharge of fresh water because of the Farakka Barrage, there has been a successive build-up of salinity in 16 southwestern coastal districts over the past ten years.

Latest figures available from the Irrigation Ministry show that with increasing diversion of water at Farakka, the salinity front has moved 220 kilometers inland.

Due to the high salinity in the river Bhaира, the 48,000 tons production-capacity Khulna Newspaper Mills (KNM) has to spend about Taka two crore every year for bringing

fresh water from 30 miles upstream.

Carrying of water by barges costs the mills Taka 125 for every ton of newsprint it produces. The Mills requires about 400 tons of water a day, according to reports received in Dhaka.

Other than the cost of carrying water, the salinity is also causing serious damage to the plant machinery.

Fresh water is also brought for the Goalpara thermal power station from the northern areas to keep the plant operative.

Open water fishing has been seriously affected in Khulna Division because of leanflow in the Bhaира, Pashur and the Gorai rivers.

Production of capture fishery in the Ganges-dependant areas has reduced from 277,000 metric tons in 1974 to 185,000 metric tons in 1991. The loss is estimated at Taka four billion at 1991 prices.

The fishing season has also been squeezed from the previous May to February period to the current May to December period, according to reports available from the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC).

People of Kushtia, Jhenidah and Magura now report fall of ground water due to the upstream diversion by the Farakka Barrage.

Early morning chill and an unprecedented dry wind in Meherpur, Chuadanga and Kushtia districts were nothing but signs of the desertification set in motion they pointed out.

The shallow irrigation units and tubewells in these districts no longer pump adequate water these days, said Deputy Commissioner of Kushtia Md. Nazrul Islam.

Irrigation Ministry officials explained that due to the decreasing surface water, the ground water was flowing to the rivers.

Agricultural production has also gone down significantly due to the loss of soil moisture, BARC officials said.

They spelled out that direct loss of agricultural products due to soil moisture depletion, delayed planting, price hike and salinity has been estimated at Taka 500 crore.



A US study team led by Dr Marshall M Bouton called on Awami League chief and leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina at her Minto Road residence in the city yesterday.

## JP (Huda) convention begins in city

The Jatiya Party (Nationalist) yesterday called for national unity based on Bangladeshi nationalism and Islamic values to consolidate democracy and ensure development of the country, reports UNB.

The call came at the opening session of party's national representative convention chaired by its chairman and former Speaker Shamsul Huda Chowdhury at the Engineers' Institute in the city.

"We believe in the politics of Bangladeshi nationalism and Islamic values," Huda said inaugurating the convention and urged all like-minded forces to rally round the banner of his party, a splinter of the Jatiya Party of deposed President General Ershad.

This is the first convention of the JP (Nationalist) after a group of leaders deserted the Jatiya Party, now led by Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury as acting chairman.

JP (Nationalist) secretary general Prof M A Matin, BNP leader Anwar Zahid, the Muslim League's Jamir Ali, Gano Forum leader Mostafa Mohsin Mantu, NAP leader Abdul Matin Master and JP (Nationalist) joint-secretary general Nazimuddin Al-Azad also spoke at the opening session.

Shamsul Huda Chowdhury said he convened the council aiming to forge a greater unity of all nationalist forces to build the nation on the basis of the concept of nationalism to fulfill the aspirations of the people.

He criticised the rule of the BNP for stagnation in the economy and deterioration in social conditions.

In an oblique reference to the present leadership of the Jatiya Party, Huda Chowdhury said former President Ershad might have given money to others but "We were not given money by anybody."

Chowdhury also brushed aside the speculation that they are being patronised by the ruling BNP "We have no link with the BNP... We do not do

## US study team meets Hasina

A US study team on post-Cold War South Asia and the United States led by Asia Society executive vice-president Dr Marshall M Bouton yesterday met with Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina at her 29 Minto Road residence, reports UNB.

Other members of the team are: Prof Stephen Cohen of Illinois University, Prof Anne O Krueger of Stanford University and Prof C Kumar N Patel of California University.

They exchanged views on the prevailing political, economic and social conditions in south Asian countries with particular reference to Bangladesh.

Hasina apprised the study team members of the Awami League's policy and programme. The Awami League chief said her party attaches priority to population control, poverty alleviation, employment, universal education, health and agricultural development.

Asia Foundation representative in Dhaka Ray Offenhausser, Awami League Advisory Committee members S A M S Kibria and Mafizur Rahman, Mohammad Nasim MP, Mizanul Haq MP and Syed Abul Hossain MP were present during the meeting.

## Security tightened in Larkana

LARKANA, Apr 3: Security was tightened today in this ancestral hometown of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, on the eve of the 15th death anniversary of her late father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, reports AFP.

Army and police pickets have been placed on the roads leading to the family's graveyard, Garhi Khuda Baksh, some 10 miles from here.

Officials said that security has been intensified because thousands of people would be pouring in to pray at the gravesite of the founder of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

The prime minister's mother, Nusrat Bhutto, has said she will not pray at her late husband's grave to "avoid bloodshed."

## Flash floods

From Page 1 Col 4  
Habibur Rahman, president of the district BNP, in a joint statement, said that flash floods have totally submerged the haors of Astagram, Mithamoni and Itna while the areas of Kotadi, Bajitpur and Karimganj thanas have been partially submerged, causing hardship and miseries to the farmers who had placed their hopes on harvesting their paddy.

Our Feni correspondent informs that four cracks have developed in the Muhuri river embankment at Fulgazi.

When contacted, Water Development Board sources said the river Chhoto Feni was flowing two feet above the danger level.

A bypass of nearly 100 feet has been washed away by the rushing waters near the Parshuram bazar.

In the last three days five unions of Parshuram thana in Feni have been affected badly by flood and rain waters.

According to unofficial estimates crops in at least 10,000 acres have been damaged in Munshirhat, Mirzanagar, Parshuram, Chitolia and Fulgazi unions.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin met with settler leaders to assure them none would be moved, while the state attorney rejected a lawsuit by settlers for advance warning of any evacuation.

In Jericho, a group of about 30 to 40 Palestinian youths chanted "P-L-O, Israel No" as cabinets, computers and boxes were loaded onto a blue truck at police headquarters on the main square of Jericho, a town of 15,000 people where PLO chief Yasser Arafat is expected to set up a base after Israel withdraws.

## Ward commissioner

From Page 1 Col 4  
Dwipjol was elected a commissioner for Ward no. 9 of the Dhaka City Corporation as an independent candidate in the January 30 polls.

A former activist of the Jatiya Party Dwipjol has reportedly joined the ruling BNP recently.

A few months ago he was arrested from a guest house at Gulshan with a number of young girls. Later he was released from the police station.

Dwipjol is likely to be produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate today.

## JCD-Shibir clash

From Page 1 Col 5  
ing of the teachers' council was going on. At least ten persons were injured. About 50 crackers were exploded during the skirmishes. Traffic on the Khulna-Jessore Road remained suspended for about two hours. Tutul, a third year student, was admitted to hospital and three others to private clinics. Police took precautionary measures in and around the college to prevent further violence.

The Islami Chhatra Shibir and the Chhatra Dal held press conferences at the Khulna Press Club holding each other responsible for the incident.

The college was closed on the 20th of September last year following a tragic incident in which two students, including the GS of the college union, were killed.

## The Midnight File

### 19 more killed in Natal

DURBAN (South Africa), Apr 3: At least 19 people were killed overnight in political violence in South Africa's Natal-Kwazulu region, state-run radio reported today. The latest killings brings the death toll since a state of emergency was declared in Natal and the adjoining Kwazulu black homeland last Thursday to at least 40. The South African defence force said on Saturday it would deploy some 1,200 troops in the region to ensure that people in Natal-Kwazulu can take part in the country's first all-race elections at the end of the month, reports Reuters.

### Goa Governor resigns

NEW DELHI, Apr 3: The governor of the Indian resort state of Goa resigned today, the day after he sacked its chief minister and drew the ire of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party. Governor Bhanu Prakash Singh of Goa submitted his resignation to President Shankar Dayal Sharma, who was said to be upset over the former's sacking of Goa Chief Minister Wildred D'Souza, officials said here, reports AFP.

## China may send team to DPRK to defuse N-crisis

SEOUL, Apr 3: China is expected to send a high-ranking delegation to North Korea in mid-April to help defuse the nuclear crisis, South Korea's national news agency reported Sunday, says AP.

The agency, Yonhap, also reported that South Korea's military will hold off until at least mid-May on its annual war games, which had been shelved and then revived as nuclear tensions eased and tightened.

Quoting an unnamed Foreign Ministry official, Yonhap said the Chinese delegation will visit Pyongyang for North Korean President Kim Il Sung's 82nd birthday on April 15.

"Chinese delegates are expected to urge North Korean leaders to resolve the nuclear issue through dialogue," Yonhap quoted the ministry official as saying.

The Chinese also will convey South Korea's assurances that it has no ambition to unify the peninsula German-style, in a way that would make the Communist state disappear, he was quoted as saying.

No official comment was reached for comment Sunday.

On Friday, South Korean President Kim Young-sam said China would feel more obligated to work for a solution now that the UN Security Council has met China's objections to a sanctions threat and settled for a relatively mild criticism of North Korea's nuclear secrecy.

North Korea's refusal to allow a thorough UN inspection of its nuclear programme has deepened suspicions that it is developing atomic weapons.

China, North Korea's only major ally, is considered best positioned to influence its neighbor.

The official also predicted that North Korea and the United States would resume contacts, also around mid-April, Yonhap said.

## Liquor factory found in Tongi

The Narcotics Control Department yesterday detected and demolished a liquor fermentation factory in Tongi industrial area, reports UNB.

A notorious liquor manufacturer of the area, Katy Mia, and his associates were arrested during the raid.

On information, officials and employees of the department conducted a special drive in Milligate area and unearthed the factory.

Huge fermentation tools, ingredients and 300 litre of fermented liquor were hauled up from the spot.

## PM meeting

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posed the view, sources added. However, the ruling party could not take a decision on the issue yesterday evening.

According to one cabinet minister, the party caucus would meet again some time today to finalise its strategy to face the April 7 siege.

The time and venue of today's meeting would be decided after the weekly cabinet meeting this morning the minister, requesting anonymity, said.

The leaders who attended the meeting included, Deputy Leader of Parliament Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury, LCRD Minister and party Secretary General Barrister Salam Talukder, Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman, Communications Minister Oli Ahmed and Public Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah.

## Rule on govt

From Page 1 Col 4  
including the son, now owns shares worth Tk 1.30 crore, passed an order in the notification directing the petitioner to transfer or sell the shares beyond Tk 60 lakh.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed, who appeared for the petitioner, said the notification and the order passed by the Comptroller are violative of Article 27, 31 and 40 of the Constitution.

## 5 killed, 11 injured in road accidents

By DMCH Correspondent

At least five people were killed and 11 others injured in separate road accidents in and outside the city during the last two days.

A student of UCEP (Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme) was knocked down by a speeding minibus when he was selling flowers near the Shisu Park at Shahbagh in the city Sunday morning.

Fatally injured 12-year-old Ranjit, a student of class three, died on way to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Police seized the minibus and arrested its driver.

In another road mishap, Ajuja, 10, was killed when she was hit by a speeding minibus near Banani Chairmanbari at about 1 pm yesterday.

Abdul Jalil, 27, was knocked by a speeding auto-rickshaw near Peerjangi Mazar at Kamapur at about 12 noon. He later died at the DMCH, hospital sources said.

On Saturday morning, a carpenter was crushed under the wheels of a speeding bus at Nawabganj.

Seriously injured Santosh, 22, was rushed to the DMCH

## Call to make SAARC people-oriented

By Staff Correspondent

An international seminar in Dhaka yesterday suggested the inclusion of non-government organisations in the SAARC to make the regional forum more people-oriented.

The suggestion was made by Dr Syed Anwar Hossain, Chairman of the History Department of Dhaka University, on the second day of the three-day seminar on "Prospects of Peace, Development and Harmony in South Asia".

Jointly organised by the Bangladesh Peace Council and the Asian Regional Centre of the World Peace Council, the morning session of the seminar was chaired by Romesh Chandra and co-chaired by Tahira Mazhar Khan.

The second paper of the session, entitled "South Asian Economies in Transition: Application and Implication of the Reforms", was presented by Debapriya Bhattacharya — a BIDS fellow, with Prof Rehman Sobhan in the chair.

The seminar will end today at Sundarban Hotel.

## Textile team off to Bangkok

A 10-member textile delegation led by the State Minister for Textiles Abdul Mannan left Dhaka for Bangkok yesterday for a two-week official visit to four South-East Asian countries, reports UNB.

The delegation will visit Thailand, Malay-sia, Indonesia and Singapore aiming to promote bilateral cooperation in augmenting trade, investment and technology transfer on textile and allied industrial products.

## Lightning kills 7 in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 3: Seven people were killed by lightning in parts of the district which were battered by storm Saturday night, reports UNB.

Reports reaching from remote areas said some 150 kutcha houses were damaged, electric and telephone lines disrupted and trees uprooted by the storm.

The lightning victims were identified as Rubel, 13, of Melanda, Nazak, 25, of Mehmanshahi, Nazruddin, 47, of Falchar, Banipromani, 30, of Charkantanagar, Abu Sayed, 60, of Mahmudpur and two minor brothers Momin and Hares of Dorota village.

The deaths were confirmed by Union Parishad Chairmen and members of the respective areas.

## GATT deal

From Page 1 Col 7

groups on the question of signing the global trade accord. The LDCs accepted the accord for maintaining the aid flow, while the countries which are more dependent on trade rather than aid, consented to the accord on considerations of trade.

The two groups of countries would seriously be hit by some clauses incorporated in the accord by the developed countries unilaterally.

The clauses which are likely to affect the developing nations seriously relate to the removal of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), the incorporation of the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) and permitting foreign entrepreneurs or firms in the services sector.

"What would happen when a foreign doctor starts practising in Dhaka or a foreign Chartered Accountancy firm sets up its office in Bangladesh. Or, for that matter, what would happen when the foreign entrepreneurs open bus services on various routes in the country?" the expert asked and said it would be terrible for a least developed country like Bangladesh.

The volume of trade of the 47 least developed countries out of the 117 involved in GATT is only 0.3 per cent of the total world trade.

This would have to be increased substantially through increased cooperation among the developing nations if they really want to survive in the stiff competition, the experts observed.

## Israeli police begin to quit Gaza, Jericho

JERICHO, Apr 3: Israel closed a jail and started withdrawing from police stations in the Gaza Strip and Jericho on Sunday in preparation for the arrival of Palestinian police, but the appearance of moving vans sparked clashes, reports AP.

Also Sunday, after a month-long manhunt, police arrested the leader of the Jewish extremist Kach group outlawed in the wake of the Hebron mosque massacre.

Baruch Marzel, 35, arrested in a small settlement near Hebron in the occupied West Bank, was the last Kach activist still at large. Seven other activists have been arrested and held without trial, and about 50 were ordered to return their army-issued weapons.

Israel ordered the crack-

## Israeli police begin to quit Gaza, Jericho

down on Kach, which advocates expelling Arabs from all Israeli-held territory, after Jewish settler and Kach member Baruch Goldstein killed 30 Palestinians at the mosque on February 25.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin met with settler leaders to assure them none would be moved, while the state attorney rejected a lawsuit by settlers for advance warning of any evacuation.

In Jericho, a group of about 30 to 40 Palestinian youths chanted "P-L-O, Israel No" as cabinets, computers and boxes were loaded onto a blue truck at police headquarters on the main square of Jericho, a town of 15,000 people where PLO chief Yasser Arafat is expected to set up a base after Israel withdraws.

## Pollution spoils an anglers' haven

By Sharier Khan

Dhanmondi Old Road No 32. A Fisheries official said there was no fish in the lake in the area between the Dhanmondi Road-8 bridge and the Dhanmondi Road-32 bridge. The soiled water of this part can no longer be purified with chemicals due to the high level of pollution, officials said.

Some ten years ago, anglers caught fish weighing even upto 30 kgs from this lake but that is unimaginable now. "Even a small catch should be considered very good luck nowadays," an official of the Anglers' Association said.

With fish having become scarce in the lake the number of anglers, who buy seasonal tickets from the association, has also dropped markedly from 400 to 100 this year.

"In addition to the pollution, thieves raid the lake with current net in the night and

take away whatever they find," the Fisheries official said, adding that innumerable cases have been lodged with Dhanmondi thana.

Only a year ago, the situation was even worse as with 44 sewer lines emptying into the lake at that time. On one occasion last year, most of the big fish of the lake died due to lack of oxygen. The Wasa later closed over 50 per cent of the sewer connections. Many trees planted along the banks of the lake have died due to water-logging.

The Fisheries Department has an annual budget of around Tk 20 to 30 lakh for the development and conservation of the lake, which once provided relief to the city dwellers. It also releases carp fries worth Tk 40,000 to 50,000 into the lake annually.

**বকেয়া আদায়ের লক্ষ্যে গ্যাস লাইন বিচ্ছিন্নকরণের বিশেষ অভিযান**

গ্যাস অত্যন্ত মূল্যবান জাতীয় সম্পদ। এর পরিমিত ব্যবহার ভবিষ্যৎ প্রজন্মকে জ্বালানী সংকট থেকে রক্ষা করবে।

রাষ্ট্রা শেখ হওয়ার সাথে সাথেই গ্যাসের চুলা বন্ধ করুন।

বিদ্যুৎ ও সার উৎপাদনে এবং অন্যান্য শিল্প ও বাণিজ্যিক কার্যক্রমে গ্যাস, দেশের অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নের চাবিকাঠি। তাই সর্বক্ষেত্রে গ্যাসের অপচয় ও অবৈধ ব্যবহার থেকে বিরত থাকুন।

বকেয়া আদায়ের লক্ষ্যে তিন মাসের আওতাভুক্ত সকল এলাকায় সরকারী ও স্বায়ত্বশাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানসহ সকল খেলাপী গ্রাহকের গ্যাস লাইন বিচ্ছিন্নকরণের বিশেষ অভিযান ৫ এপ্রিল '৯৪ থেকে পুনরায় শুরু হচ্ছে।

সকল সম্মানিত গ্রাহকের অবিলম্বে বকেয়া গ্যাস বিল পরিশোধ করে সংযোগ বিচ্ছিন্নকারী দলকে গ্যাস ব্যবহারের স্থানে বকেয়া পরিশোধের রসিদ প্রদর্শন করার অনুরোধ জানানো হল। সংযোগ বিচ্ছিন্নকৃত গ্রাহক বিকাল ৫-০০ টার মধ্যে কোম্পানীর সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ জোন/অফিসে পরিশোধিত বিলের রসিদ দেখাতে পারলে তৎক্ষণিকভাবে পুনঃসংযোগ প্রদানের ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে।

সংযোগ বিচ্ছিন্নতা ৩ (তিন) মাসের মধ্যে পুনঃ সংযোগ না নিলে গ্যাস সংযোগ স্থায়ীভাবে বিচ্ছিন্নকরণসহ গ্যাস সরবরাহ চুক্তি বাতিল করা হবে।

বকেয়া আদায় এবং গ্যাসের অপচয় রোধ ও সংরক্ষণকল্পে সকলের সহযোগিতা আমাদের একান্ত কাম্য।

**তিন মাসের গ্যাস ট্রান্সমিশন এন্ড ডিস্ট্রিবিউশন কোম্পানী লিমিটেড**

(পেট্রোবাংলার একটি সাবসিডিয়ারী কোম্পানী)

ফোন ৪২০২০০, ২০২১৭২, ২৫৪৪৬২, ৮১২১৩৫-৪২

**"গাছ লাগান, পাছের পরিচর্যা করুন এবং পরিবেশ বাঁচান" — প্রধানমন্ত্রী।**

তিত্তাস/জনসংযোগ-১৬৪ (১৩-৯৪)      ডি-২০৮

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