



Pitchers wait for hours for water from a tap of Sylhet City Corporation in rail station area.

Water crisis deepens in Sylhet city

No early solution in sight: Private suppliers doing brisk business

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

There is no possibility of an end to the severe water crisis in Sylhet city in next two to three years.

The Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) can not supply even 50 per cent of the daily demand for 1, 07,52,500 gallons.

A large number of city dwellers are now compelled to buy water from the three private suppliers and even vendors, who charge Tk 40 to 50 per 20 gallons.

People in Mirabazar, Barutkhana, Ambarkhana, Eidgah and Sheikhghat areas said they spend Tk 600 to 1000 every month to buy water from private suppliers. They are doing this for long.

Many others in Zindabazar, Bandarbazar and Kalighat commercial areas made the same complaint.

The low income groups are mainly dependent on traditional sources like shallow tube wells, the Surma river and a few ponds that still exist in the city.

The problem is getting worse day by day as the SCC did not take up any major programme in the last few years to augment the supply while

the city area and its population increased.

The Nine Town Water Supply and Sanitation Project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which included Sylhet city, contributed insignificantly to solve the problem. The project taken up in 1995 ended three years ago.

A Tk 38 crore project prepared by the SCC got pre-ECNEC approval three months ago but its funding has not yet been finalised.

"I hope it (the project) will soon get ECNEC approval", Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran told The Daily Star yesterday.

"If things go well we will get a scope to resolve the crisis", he said without giving a time frame.

If the project gets ECNEC approval and work starts this year, it will still take two to three years to increase the supply, SCC sources said.

The Mayor agreed with this correspondent that SCC now supplies only 50 per cent of water needed daily and that there is no possibility of ending the crisis in 2-3 years.

The Tk 38 crore project includes

setting up of a water treatment plant, extension of supply lines in new and old areas and sinking of more deep tube wells.

Besides inadequate supply, there is a huge system loss due to worn out supply lines at many places and unauthorised connections by a section of people.

There are also allegations that a large number of residents use electric motors to take water from supply lines. The SCC sources said, on an average, they get about 20 such complaints a month but no effective measure could be taken yet to stop it. This deprives many genuine subscribers from water in their domestic supply lines.

Some residents talking to this correspondent said repair of supply lines and stopping use of motors could ease the situation at least in certain areas but the authorities so far did nothing in this regard.

The SCC could not yet supply water in 5 out of its 27 wards.

Water supply pipelines are yet to be laid in wards 25, 26 and 27. Water is yet to be supplied in wards 7 and 18 even two years after pipe-line laying, residents there said.

‘Take action against Niko, officials’

RU CORRESPONDENT

The Anti Imperialism and Communalism Teachers Forum at Rajshahi University yesterday held a protest rally and brought out a procession at Alupoti in the city demanding cancellation of the agreement with Canadian oil company Niko, saying it is responsible for the blowout in Tengratila gas field.

They also demanded compensation from Niko for the victims and action against the minister concerned and officials involved in the agreement process.

They blamed the alliance government for not taking any action against the oil company and the officials.

The rally, joined by many cultural activists and left leaning student leaders, was addressed by, among others, Forum Convenor Prof Abu Nasser, Prof Golam Kabir, Prof Abu Bakkar Siddik, Prof Nurullah, Prof Sujit Kumar and Bangladesh Chhatra Union Organising Secretary Promothis Shil.

They claimed that gas worth Tk 1000 crore has so far been destroyed by the blowout.

They also urged all progressive organisations to launch tougher agitation to press the demands.

AL leader held with pistol

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Awami League (AL) leader Mashiur Rahman from Batra village in Kalaroa upazila and recovered an illegal pistol from his possession.

Soon after his arrest, Satkhira district AL president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and general secretary Nazrul Islam in a statement claimed that arrest of popular leader Mashiur Rahman was part of a conspiracy by some vested quarters in the area to tarnish the image of the party. They demanded his immediate arrest.

They said the conspiracy behind the arrest will come out if the incident is probed.

Bhandaria JCD leader's hand, leg chopped off by party rivals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A JCD leader's hand and leg were chopped off allegedly by party rivals at Bhandaria in Pirojpur on Sunday.

Bhandaria upazila JCD literary and cultural secretary Nurul Huda Mintu was attacked by publicity secretary Tasir Hanif and his accomplices.

Assistant secretary of the party Abul Kalam Mallick and party member Saiful Hanif and Mintu were coming by a motorbike. Hanif and his men intercepted them on the Bhandaria-Pirojpur road near Balbari bus stand in the evening. There the culprits chopped off Mintu's right hand and left leg and critically injured his associates.

Following the incident, three JCD leaders of Bhandaria upazila were expelled from the party. They are: H M Kazi Tasir Hanif, Al Amin Munshi and Babu Jomaddar. However, the district level leaders termed the rivalry as a sequel to their business interest, not 'a factional clash'.

Drive to arrest Plabon's killers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Gaibandha police Sunday night raided different areas of Palashbari upazila but failed to nab the killers of SSC examinee Plabon.

The drive followed publication of news items on murder of Plabon who got GPA-5 in the SSC examination this year.

Meanwhile, Palashbari Police Station officer-in-charge (OC) Badsha Mia was stand-released for his failure to improve the law and order in the upazila..

Rezbul Huq Plabon, a meritorious student of Palashbari SM Pilot High School was beaten to death allegedly by BNP activists on June 14.

A two-hour highway blockade programme will be observed today in Palashbari demanding arrest of the killers.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The rift in Rajshahi district Awami League widened as some 30 top leaders of the 51-member district committee on Sunday threatened to quit the party protesting what they said 'arbitrary activities' of its general secretary Tajul Islam Md Faruk.

Some of the disgruntled leaders at a press conference here on Sunday said Faruk violated the party high command's directive to welcome veteran politician Sardar Amjad Hossain and his followers at the Bagmara upazila AL council, scheduled to be held on July 17. Sardar Amjad left Jatiya Party (Ershad) and joined AL recently.

Talking to this correspondent, some party sources claimed that Sardar Amjad would be the best AL candidate to contest in the next general election from Bagmara-Mohonpur constituency, where Faruk is also an aspirant.

But Faruk and his followers cold-shouldered Amjad, they alleged at the press conference.

They said a team of party leaders called on AL chief Sheikh Hasina on Saturday night and handed over a letter demanding immediate dissolution of the district committee.

5 to die in Runa gangrape, murder case in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Five persons were sentenced to death yesterday for rape and murder of 14-year old schoolgirl Runa two years ago.

The convicts are Imarul, Mahatab, Kamal, Uzzal and Nazrul of Gobindogunia village in Mirpur upazila in Kushtia district.

Three accused were acquitted in the verdict delivered by the District and Session Judge's court.

The sources said that on that fateful night, some of the villagers had heard Runa's screams while being violated but none dared to

his four accomplices had entered Runa's room on the night of 15 May 2003 and dragged her out by pressing a cloth on her mouth. They took her to a nearby paddy field, gangraped and slaughtered her. Runa was a student of class VIII at Mirpur Girls High School.

Imrul used to tease her on way to school. He had proposed to Runa's father Mokbul, a carpenter, to marry her. But she declined.

The sources said that on that fateful night, some of the villagers had heard Runa's screams while being violated but none dared to

save her as the miscreants were influential and possessed arms.

Imrul was a close associate of a local BNP leader, they said. After the incident, local people, joined by students, journalists and human rights activists brought out processions demanding arrest and punish the killers. Women also joined the demonstrations.

PALOK, a local legal aid and human rights organisation, extended legal aid to the victims father after her brother Liton filed a case with Mirpur police station accusing eight persons.



PHOTO: STAR

A schoolgirl addressing a press conference at Chittagong Press Club yesterday demanding security for all girl students in the city. The programme was organised by two local NGOs.

Rift in Rajshahi AL over Amjad issue

The party in Rajshahi now faces an 'image crisis' under Faruk's leadership, they alleged.

They told newsmen that they would step down from their posts and quit AL if proper action is not taken against Faruk.

The 30 leaders include acting president of Rajshahi AL Meraj Mollah, vice-presidents Mizanur Rahman, Quazi Abdul Awai, Saiful Islam Dulal, Badiuzzaman Robu, joint secretaries KM Shafikul Islam Naofel, Amanul Hasan Dudu and publicity secretary Monirul Islam Tajul.

In the letter submitted to the party high command, they alleged that Faruk, violating party constitution, formed different ward and municipal

committees at his will, thereby dividing AL into many groups at Puthia, Durgapur, Bagmara, Tanore, Godagari, Paba, Bagha, Charghat and Mohonpur upazilas. He is also influenced by local BNP lawmakers, they alleged.

They said AL workers in Bagmara upazila welcomed the joining of Sardar Amjad in the party. But their spirit was dampened by "unwanted intervention" by Faruk.

"To undermine Amjad in the party, the general secretary (Faruk) asked party men not to select his followers as councilors. He even directed them not make Amjad a special guest at council preparatory meetings", said a senior AL leader.

The last council of bagmara AL

was held in December 1996. Since then council could not be held for different reasons including intra-party feud, party sources said.

Talking to The daily Star, Tajul Islam Md Faruk, however, denied the allegations and said that certain groups in the party backed by the ruling alliance were spreading propaganda against him.

"I had talks with many of those 30 leaders who told me they do not belong to the protestors", he said.

On alleged irregularities in formation of party committees, he said those were formed in presence of central leaders and as per the party constitution.

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