Star city

DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 14, 2006

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source: accuweather.com

Weekly weather forecast for the city

Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
High: 31° C	High: 34° C	High: 34° C	High: 37° C	High: 35° C	High: 36° C	High: 34° C
Low: 25° C	Low: 26° C	Low: 26° C	Low: 26° C	Low: 27° C	Low: 26° C	Low: 27° C
Cloudy, thunde-	Partly sunny and very warm	Very warm with clouds and sun	Periods of sun;	Partly sunny, hot summerlike	Clouds and sun; and humid	Clouds and sun; hot, humid

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Lowland turns marshy swamp

Stagnant, dirty water polluting environment in Mirpur

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

A vast swamp in Mirpur with poisonous water and waste has become an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, polluting environment and causing sufferings to the locals.

People living along the 675-hectare 'jheel' said only six to seven years ago it was a cultivable lowland, which used to remain under water during rainy season only. Now it has become a polluted marshy land with stagnant water.

Since the dirty water cannot be pumped out of the swamp, it remains submerged with three to four meters deep water even during winter.

"As there is no flow of water through the sluice-gates, water from this wetland never drains out. It has become an excellent habitat for mosquitoes, worms, insects, snakes and plenty of hyacinths," said a local resident.

Around two lakh people living in Mirpur section 12 and 13, Bhashantek, Baunia embankment, Manikdi, Dewanpara, Balurghat and adjoining areas alleged that the swamp is the main reason for environmental pollution in the area.

A section of people are engaged in fish farming in the poisonous water and selling those kitchen markets in the area, which include Muslim Bazar, Mirpur 11, 12 markets and Pallabi bazaar. Locals have stopped buying fish from these local markets as many of them became sick after consuming fish from that water body.

The people living along the city protection embankment are dumping wastes into the water making it more polluted. The black, dirty water releases bad odour all the time.

"The vast area along the embankment used to be a lowland even seven years back. We used to cultivate paddy in this land. There was a narrow strip of canal which was used for irrigation," said Amin Miah, a resident of Mirpur section-12.

"Seven years ago, there was no water in this land during winter. And during monsoon we used to catch fish," said Engineer Mahbubur Rahman, a teacher in Baunia school.

"The water is absolutely stagnant and day by day the swamp is being filled up by the locals with waste. The water has become completely unusable. Poor fishermen like me are dying," said Kamar Alam, a resident of the area.

This water body meets the Turag river near Tongi railway station. There are eight sluice-gates from Tongi to Mirpur for letting the water flow into the river. But the sluice-gates and most pumps are inoperative due to low height of water.

When contacted, Sub-divisional Engineer of Water Development Board Abul Kalam Azad said the water level in the jheel is now 2.5 meters high and if the water level is under 3.5 meters they cannot pump out the water.

Sources said there should be at east nine pumps to pump out water from the swamp but at the moment only three are operating.

The residents also complained that there are plenty of illegal ghers (enclosures) for fish cultivation in that jheel. Owner of the enclosures Ekhlas Molla, who is an influential person, does not want the swamp water to be pumped out, they alleged.

People living along the 675-hectare 'jheel' said only six to seven years ago it was a cultivable lowland, which used to remain under water during rainy season only. Now it has become a polluted marshy land with stagnant water

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

WATER CRISIS AT DEMRA

To have or not to have

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Water supply situation has improved in city's Shanir Akhra and its adjacent areas since violent demonstrations for water and power on May 5, but the residents of other surrounding areas in Demra and Shyampur are still facing severe water crisis.

People of Rasulpur, Mridhabari, Muradpur, Kajla, Jurain and Sontek areas alleged that they are not getting adequate water supply.

'The movement for water and power is partially successful as people around the Shanir Akhra and its adjacent areas are getting water supply regularly since the agitation," Ashfaq Ahmed, a resident of Matuail, told this correspondent on Friday.

Locals said the authorities had the capability of supplying water regularly but they did not. "How can the authorities now supply water despite continuous power failure?" asked Altaf Mahmud, a restaurant owner at West Matuail.

"Before the demonstration I had to spend between Tk 100 and Tk 125 to fetch water daily from other areas but since the demonstrations, water is available in WASA line all the time," he said. "Now I don't have to spend extra for water anymore."

Moslem Uddin Masud, a leader of the Demra-Shyampur Sangram Parishad, said the authorities are supplying water only to those areas where people came out on the street to demonstrate for water.

Minara Begum, a housewife in Kajla area, expressed frustrations over the lack of water supply. She said that she and her family members could not bathe for three days.

Shahida Banu, another housewife at Rasulpur, said she heard that army men were supplying water but there was none in her house to collect water from the army vehicle.

Some house owners at Mridhabari, Muradpur, Kajla and Sontek areas expressed similar views and blamed the authorities for supplying adequate water to the particular areas where the demonstrations took place.

Fokrul Alam, a local madrasa student who did not join the May 5 movement, said the demonstration proved effective in getting water in the area. "I will definitely join the programme in future if water crisis occurs again."

However Motahar Hossain Sarder, assistant pump operator at Matuail Pump Station, claimed that no one in the area is now facing water crisis. The pumps are running at least seven hours daily, he added.

Another pump at Paterbagh area was also found operating at 4:30pm on Friday and the pump operator said no crisis was prevailing in the area.

Abdur Rouf, a tenant at Nurpur, which had severe water crisis, said that before the demonstration he was thinking of shifting his family from the area but now the situation has changed and water is available.

But Ferdousi Akhter, an NGO activist and a housewife at Gobindapur where water is available after the demonstration, was not sure whether the good times will stay for long. She said: " Water would be available in the area as long as the authorities feel the heat of the movement. Once the focus is shifted to something else, the situation might go back to square one."

Rise in price puts brakes on gold sales

IMRUL HASAN

Gold jewellery sales are seeing a sharp fall with the increase in gold prices in the international market, goldsmiths alleged.

In the local market, 22-carat gold is selling Tk 18,229 a bhori (11.664 grams), while 21-carat gold, locally known as guinea gold at Tk 17,600 a bhori.

Jewellery traders at the city's different markets are anxious that the prices of 21-carat gold may reach Tk 18,000 a bhori at any time in the local market.

"We do not raise or lower the prices of gold in the local market at our whims. Gold prices are dominated by international market rates," said an official of Apurba jewellers at Mouchak market.

MA Wadud Khan, president, Bangladesh Jewellery Samity (BJS) at Baitul Mukarram Jewellery Market said: "Gold prices in Bangladesh are low, and we have to be at par with the international market."

"If similar prices are not maintained, the possibility that gold smuggling out of the country may arise at any moment," he added.

BJS sources said that 22-carat gold was selling at Tk 15,220 a bhori, while 21-carat at 14,200 a bhori only three months ago.

"Since international market prices continue to rise, gold prices in the local market shot up as well," said MA Hannan Asad, general secretary, BJS.

The BJS sources also said that the constant devaluation of the taka against the dollar has led to a further increase.

Hannan said that around 25 lakh people involved in the country's jewellery industry are seriously affected with the up slide in gold prices.

"The middle-income groups that usually frequent the jewellery shops have decreased," Hannan said resulting in a sharp drop in sales.

"Many of our shops have already closed down, while scores of goldsmiths have joined

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Recent price hike of gold in the international market has had its effect on local market too. Middle income groups are finding it difficult to purchase gold these days.

STAR PHOTO

Premlal in action.

STAR PHOTO

It's magic!

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

At the first glance he would be hardly visible but once you take a look at his visiting card you could be taken aback.

Premlal has been a magician since 1987 and has performed on various stage and television shows.

The proprietor of Rangdhanu community centre, he is also an executive member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians (an organisation of international magicians) and the Bangladesh Jadughar Parishad (an organisation of local magicians).

"Magic is based on 'tricks' a technique that shows things that do not exist or tasks that seem impossible," he said.

He had learnt the primary stages of magic from Ulfat Kabir and the later from George D' Cruze and Mainul Khan. He currently knows around 1001 tricks, that includes floating a ball in the air, covering it with a piece of cloth and then making it disappear.

"The difference between magic and illusion is: illusion is seeing something that does not exist whereas magic is seeing something that does exist but seeing it in a different way," he explained.

To demonstrate this concept, he showed this correspondent a piece of rope with a knot that he moved through the rope. He then covered the knot with his hand and rubbed it on a red scotch tape holder. When he uncovered the knot, it had turned red. Being aware of this correspondent's suspicion that the knot could be an external piece that could be easily separated from the rope, he untied it to show that it was one long piece of rope.

He showed a dice that has two dots on one side and three dots on the opposite side. He placed this correspondent's hand on the side with the two dots and then turned over the dice where there were five dots in the place of three.

Responding to a question, he said that hypnotism in magic exists to the extent the spectators could feel they are seeing something that does not really exist such as cutting a person in two and separating the parts.

"This trick can be attempted only by experienced magicians," Premlal said. "A spectator who has some knowledge of magic will understand a trick even if he or she sees it from a distance unlike an ordinary spectator," he added.

He also said that it was a myth that magicians perform tricks only when they have a black cloth in the background to create optical illusions. "I have performed on several occasions when I was surrounded by people on all sides," he said.

He added that elements like amulets and panipora given by most peers and fakirs has nothing to do with magic but could be plain manipulation. "Magicians do not require any psychic powers but wits and entertaining abilities," he further said.

No institution in the city for teaching magic exists, but if a school can be opened, it would help would-be magicians immensely, said Premlal.

" I learnt magic as a hobby and it was my luck that I had access to magicians who taught me the art. There are many would-be magicians in the country who have the talent but are in need of mentors. Such magicians, if nurtured, could represent our country abroad and ultimately earn fame both for themselves and the country," he said.

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