

Ponds, canals in Sylhet city disappearing fast

Encroachers grab most of the water bodies

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Once known for ponds and canals, Sylhet city is now virtually bereft of water bodies. Most of those have been occupied illegally or filled up. Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) took no step to stop the indiscriminate encroachment of water bodies by influentials having political clout. Big ponds like Machhu Dighi,

Majumdari Dighi, Ramer Dighi, Dastidar Bari Dighi, Sagar Dighi, Chara Dighi, Dhopa Dighi, Rajar Mai Dighi, Indranir Dighi, Kajol Dighi, Kashtoghar Dighi, Brahmanshason Dighi have disappeared. At least 20 such water bodies, which served the purpose of floodwater retention spots have been grabbed or filled up for con-

struction of houses or markets, said septuagenarian Ataur Rahman of the city's Modhushahid area. These were natural water reservoirs used by people and for draining out flood water in the city, he said. Except for a few elders, nobody now knows about Beka Dighi which was in the heart of the city, just on the eastern side of Keane bridge on northern bank of Surma. The area is

now Jalalabad Park, where a private nursery has been set up with permission from SCC, sources said. The Majumdar Dighi and Machhu Dighi are now big ditches due to encroachment and garbage dumping by people around while the city corporation played the role of an onlooker. Once the city's biggest water body --Laldighi-- is dying fast. A huge commercial complex has been built by filling up a sizeable portion of the water body. The SCC has also built markets there and allotted shops.

A large portion of the Ramer Dighi has been grabbed by organised groups. SCC has allotted parts of its banks to individuals for commercial purposes while the shanties have cropped up on the rest. The Kajol Dighi near Naiorpul has shrank due to expansion of the Sylhet-Mirabazar road, encroachment and waste dumping.

The Kashtoghar Dighi is almost derelict now and covered with water hyacinth.

SCC officials when contacted could not give any statistics on the number of ponds and water bodies in the city or give satisfactory reasons behind their disappearance.

"They are more interested in construction of markets by filling up the ponds", said a city dweller.

Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran said the water bodies could not be maintained properly due to fund constraint. "I personally feel bad seeing their condition", he said. "We were compelled to construct the markets", he concluded with a funny belief.



PHOTO: STAR

Like most others, major portion of a canal in Bagbari area in Sylhet city has been grabbed.



MAOLANA BHASANI UNIVERSITY Teachers give VC 72-hr deadline to step down

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Students of Maolana Bhasani University of Science and Technology (MBUST) continued agitation yesterday on the campus to press their 16-point demand including removal of Vice-chancellor Dr Mohammad Khalilur Rahman.

Teachers of the university at a press conference at Tangail Press Club yesterday gave the VC a 72-hour ultimatum for resignation.

Fifteen out of 28 teachers including the Proctor, Assistant Proctor and chairmen of departments threatened of mass resignation if the VC does not resign by the deadline, the press conference was told.

The teachers blamed the VC for the present situation, saying he (VC) ran the administration and did irregularities at his will as there is no pro-vice-chancellor, resistor or treasurer.

Among others, DrAKM Mohiuddin, Dr Mohammad Yunus Miah, Mohammad Habibur Rahman and Mohammad Motiur Rahman addressed the press conference.

VC Dr Khalilur Rahman is not on the campus though a virtual deadlock is prevailing for last six days due to agitation by students and teachers. The VC is in Dhaka since last week,

when the students began demonstrations.

The students have been demanding for about a year recruitment of adequate number of teachers, sufficient classrooms, students' hostels, laboratories, workshops and other educational facilities.

On Monday last the students locked the administrative building for two hours and demolished all the foundation stones on the campus, laid by the VC, alleged to be a pro-BNP man.

On Wednesday, they declared executive engineer of the university Sarwarul Islam 'unwanted' on the campus, locked his office for two hours and confined him on his room, alleging that he was VC's accomplice in all the irregularities.

On Monday last, the teachers at a press conference expressed solidarity with the students' demands. They also put forward a 6-point demand including promotion of deserving teachers and urged the authorities to fulfill those immediately in the interest of bringing back a congenial academic atmosphere.

No move in 37 days to restore road link

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Road communication between Sirajganj and Tarash upazila is disrupted for over a month half as the Deobhog bailey bridge on the lone connecting road collapsed.

No step has yet been taken either to reconstruct the bridge or build a diversion road.

Local people said that the bridge became vulnerable years ago as the area was flooded several times. The dilapidated bridge was being used for years and heavy trucks were also allowed, but the authorities did not take any initiative to repair it.

Local people staged demonstrations and submitted memorandums to authorities through Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) for repair of the bridge, but to no effect, sources there said.

The bridge collapsed on January 23 when a stone-loaded truck was crossing it. One person was killed and five others were injured in the accident. Traders and farmers are the worst sufferers as they face hurdles in marketing commodities.

When contacted, Abu Rawshan, executive engineer of Roads and Highway Department in Sirajganj, said initiative has been taken for construction of a diversion bailey bridge but the work is delayed due to neglect of the contractor.



PHOTO: STAR

The collapsed Deobhog bailey bridge on the Sirajganj-Tarash road awaits repair for over a month now.



PHOTO: STAR

A teacher taking classes under the open sky as a new building of Chandkuthi Primary School in Rangpur Sadar upazila is yet to be constructed.

Where teachers hire proxies to take their classes!

Primary dropout rate 40pc in Rangpur Sadar union

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Students' dropout rate at government and non-government primary schools in Rangpur Sadar union is now between 37 and 40 per cent.

This was revealed in a survey conducted by Mass-Line Media Centre, a local NGO.

Apoor state of primary education came to light during the survey, officials of the NGO told The Daily Star. The survey report was submitted to district education officer on February 8.

The frustrating standard of education at the grassroots level is mainly due to poor infrastructure, shortage of teachers, lack of proper

monitoring by the authorities and lack of sincerity of teachers, the report said.

This correspondent, after getting the survey report, visited four primary schools in the area.

Chandkuthi Primary School is hardly seven kilometers from Rangpur town but students there attending classes under open sky due to lack of classrooms. A new school building is yet to be constructed after the old one was declared abandoned and sold at Tk 25,000, its headmaster Muzaffar Ahmed told this correspondent.

There are only three classrooms for about 250 students of class one to five. Due to accommodation

problem, students of class one and two attend classes under open sky on its compound. The problem has increased after more 75 students were enrolled this year, he said. We have introduced two shifts for students of classes three, four and five due to accommodation problem, he said.

On February 7, at about 11am, when this correspondent reached Bodhukomla Non-government Primary School, students were playing on the ground.

Asked, some of the students said their teachers were absent. They also said that some people 'hired' by the appointed teachers sometimes come to the school and take

classes.

Firoz Kuttila, younger brother of headmaster Abdul Mobin Kuttila came to the school at 11:45 am. He said, "As all students are yet to get books, teachers are casual in taking classes."

"My elder brother and my niece are the other two teachers of this school. In fact, we established the school on our land."

Asked about the survey report, Upazila Education Officer Nazrul Islam said, "I got the report. I don't believe that the findings are correct". He however said he hopes the education department will take steps to solve the problems."

Drilling of 6th gas well starts in Kailashtila

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Sylhet Gas Field Limited (SGFL) has started drilling of a new gas well its Kailashtila gas field in Golapganj upazila.

It will take three to four months to complete the drilling, said an official. State run drilling company Bapex is drilling the well no. 6.

Directional drilling of the well will have a depth of 10,000 feet approximately, the official said.

Earlier, drilling of well no. 5, which began 16 April last year, was completed in September. About 25 MMCFD gas is being supplied to the National Grid from the well, he added.

Drilling of the wells (No 5 and 6) were to be completed by December last year but could not be completed. However, Bapex authorities said they are would complete the drilling by June to add another 25 MMCFD gas to the National Grid. An amount of Tk 70 crore including a foreign exchange component of Tk 50 crore is being spent for drilling of the 2 wells.

Managing Director of SGFL Jahangir Kabir inaugurated the drilling on Thursday.

SGFL has 4 gas wells in its Kailashtila field. Of them, production in well no 3 was resumed in September last year after being suspended for years. Wells no 1, 2 and 4 are in production. About 100 MMCFD gas is being supplied to the National Grid from the wells. Besides, petrol, diesel and NGL are being extracted as by products.

Int'l trade fair opens in Barisal today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

An international trade fair, organised by Barisal Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BCCI), begins at BIWTA marine workshop ground here today.

Preparation for opening of the fair is almost complete. There will be more than 150 stalls, with participation of some foreign countries including Iran and Pakistan, according to Ebaidul Huq Chan, president of the fair management committee. Special measures have been taken to ensure security and law and order during the fair, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Ripe mellow plums in Abdus Salam Ranju's (inset) garden.

Mouth-watering plums are money-spinners too

GOLAM MOSTAFA JIBON, Sirajganj

The idea was not liked by any of his relatives and neighbours. But within two years, it opened up the door to fortune for once unemployed Abdus Salam Ranju.

He raised a plum (locally known as Kulboroi) garden on five bighas of land at his Protab village in Ullapara upazila in Sirajganj district. He has already earned about Tk 3 lakh and hopes to sell the rest of seasonal fruits for at least Tk 2 lakh.

Traders from different areas buy the attractive apple shaped plum boroi and other varieties of the fruit. The apple boroi sells at around Tk 100 per kilogram.

After graduation in 1984, Ranju opened a medicine shop at Ullapara upazila headquarters. He is the son of Omar Ali.

In 2000, a gang of dacoits looted cash and medicines from his shop. He passed hard days with his family with two children and tried many ideas.

In the meantime, he came in contact with the upazila agriculture officer, who advised him to raise a fruit garden. He planted some olive trees on the backyard, which yielded good results.

Being encouraged, Ranju collected 7 plants of high yielding plum from Bangladesh Agriculture University (BAU) at Mymensingh and some other varieties from tree fairs in 2004.

This was simply an experiment, he told this correspondent during a visit to his garden on Friday.

"The lively plants bore fruits within a year", he said.

He then decided to raise a plum garden of good and high yielding varieties.

Last year, Ranju planted more 900 plants of high yielding plums evolved by BAU and some of Indiana and Taiwanese origin on 5 bighas of land.

Now all the plants are full of ripe mellow fruits.

Ranju sold about 150 mounds of 'jujube' variety of plum so far. With the

money, he has started setting up a poultry firm and fishery. He has also set up a nursery in front of his house.

He has a plan to expand the fruit garden to 22 bighas. The deputy commissioner, deputy director of district agriculture extension department, Ullapara upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) and the upazila agriculture officer have assured him help, he told this correspondent.

During the visit, this correspondent found many visitors from different areas of Sirajganj and neighbouring districts, showing interest to raise such gardens.

Ranju's garden has provided jobs for seven people including four women.

When contacted, Deputy Director of Sirajganj district agriculture extension department Khandaker Hasibur Rahman said 'jujubi' variety has good potential for export also. Ranju's initiative will encourage many others, he said.