

KOLAROA ARSENIC-FREE WATER SUPPLY PROJECT

Cries for safe water mount as plant remains idle for 2 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Cries for safe water are getting louder in Kolaria, one of the areas in country worst affected by arsenic-contamination of ground water, but the plant for pure water supply is inoperative for about two years after completion. Allegations have it that some vested quarters are behind keeping the Kalaroa Arsenic Free Water Supply Project idle.

As agitation by people for years failed to bring succour, a section of local elite made an appeal recently to the caretaker government to take immediate steps to commission the project. In the appeal made in a joint press statement in Satkhira, they alleged that a former BNP lawmaker from the area was behind the vested quarters.

The level of arsenic in ground water in Kolaria is between .70 (point seven zero) and .50 (point five zero) against the WHO (World Health Organisation) permissible level of .05 (point zero five).

According to Public Health Department (PHED), about 96 per cent of the 18510 tube wells in Kolaroa are arsenic contaminated. The survey conducted in 2001 said there were 683 arsenicosis patients in the upazila. It would be more now, PHED sources and locals claimed.

People of the small town on several occasions demanded steps by the municipality authorities to supply arsenic-free water but the authorities were helpless due to lack of funds.

The Kalaroa Arsenic-free Water Supply Project, jointly implemented by Bogra Rural Development Academy (BRDA) and a local NGO—JESH Foundation, is unutilised about two years after completion.

Over two lakh people of Kalaroa municipality and adjoining areas are affected because of serious arsenic contamination of ground water.

Bogra Rural Development Academy (BRDA) came forward with assistance and signed a contact with JESH Foundation, a local NGO on September 9, 2003 to

implement a project to supply arsenic-free water.

An agreement was also signed between Kalaroa Municipality and JESH Foundation on December 3, 2003. Bogra RDA gave Tk 18 lakh interest free loan to JESH Foundation to implement the project.

As per contract, Kalaroa municipality leased six decimal land to JESH Foundation for the project on an annual payment of Tk 1500.

Under the project, an overhead tank has been built, water treatment plant installed and a deep tube well sunk. The work started on December 12, 2003 and was com-

pleted in March 2005.

Laying of PVC pipeline in the town is yet to be done.

As per the agreement with JESH Foundation, the pourasava would bear the cost of laying PVC pipeline in the town and get 40 percent of the profit from the project.

Pourasava authorities floated a tender in February 2004 for the Tk 5,50,000 PVC pipe-laying work.

Ten firms bid for the work. But the pourasava cancelled the tender in the same month without showing any reason.

It was alleged that the tender was cancelled following a pressure from

some vested quarters.

The municipal authorities again floated a tender for the work on June 16, 2004. But there has not been any progress in the pipeline laying work since then.

However, the NGO, complying with a request of the municipal authorities, started supplying arsenic-free water from the overhead tank on January 27, 2005.

After three days, the pourasava authorities declined to take water from the project and wrote a letter to Bogra RDA to hand over the project to it. Bogra RDA refused as it was not in the agreement, sources said.

The project authorities then started supplying arsenic-free water to people from its compound.

But supply came to a halt after valuable equipment were stolen on June 19 night. Since then, supply of water is stopped.

Mir Maniruzzaman manager JESH foundation filed a case with Kalaroa thana on June 20 (case no 9 dated 20.05.05).

Police arrested Jahangir Hossain but released him allegedly under pressure and submitted final report to the court.

Asked about the fate of the project Kalaroa UNO Samimul Islam Siddique who is also the administrator of the municipality said, he joined recently and came to know that the project is lying unutilised for about two years.

"Vested quarters are behind so that the project can not be commissioned", said the statement. The signatories include veteran freedom fighter Sheikh Amanullah, former MP BM Nazrul Islam, Prof. MA Farooque, Sajedur Rahman Khan Chowdhury and local journalist Palash Chowdhury.

On contact, the former lawmaker denied all the allegations.

But he remained mum when asked why he did not take any initiative to commission the project during his tenure.



PHOTO: STAR
Rab recovered a 250 kg touchstone statue during a raid at Kuri Pakia village in Singra upazila in Nature district in the early hours of Thursday.

Poverty alleviation programme in three *haor* districts

BAU signs MoU with CWB

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Mymensingh*

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) and Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh (CWB), a global organisation, to work together for alleviating poverty of poor people living in haor areas of Kishoreganj, Sunamganj and Habiganj districts.

The MoU signing ceremony was held at the conference room of BAU vice-chancellor (VC) Prof Dr Muhammed Mosharraf Hossain Mia on Thursday.

The aim of the partnership is to enhance and improve interaction between the two parties on various activities including dissemination of knowledge and technology and support in cultivation of vegetables, crops, poultry and fisheries. It outlines terms and conditions of future collaboration between BAU and CWB and assignment of roles and responsibilities.

On the occasion, BAU VC said we need food to feed a huge population and BAU is working for decades together towards the goal by developing technologies for modern agricultural activities. It is a gigantic task to feed tens of millions of people, but we are working to overcome the great challenge, he said.

Terming the activities of CWB very positive, the VC said the organisation is concerned to improve the lifestyle of poor people. Research works are also going on in BAU to change the fate of poor and marginal people, he added.

In his address, Concern Worldwide Country Director Kieron Crawley said poor people living in

vast areas of haors face untold sufferings due to abject poverty. CWB is working under the Haor Initiatives for Sustainable Alternative Livelihood (HISAL) Project to alleviate poverty in the haor areas. The project will continue till 2011, he said.

CWB is working to mitigate sufferings of 21,688 landless people in 29 unions of Nikli, Mithamoin and Astagram upazilas of Kishoreganj, Salla upazila of Sunamganj and Ajmiriganj upazila of Habiganj, he

SATKHIRA SHRIMP INDUSTRY

Equal wage for male and female workers demanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Speakers at a workshop here yesterday demanded equal wages for man and woman in shrimp farms and urged the government to formulate a policy to remove the gender discrimination.

Allegations were also made at the workshop that women were also physically abused at their work places in shrimp enclosures.

The workshop was jointly organised by two NGOs—Centre For Women and Children Studies (CWCS) and Biswas Foundation, supported by Australian High Commission Dhaka. It was held at the officers club in the town with Biswas Foundation chair-man Abdur Rahman in the chair.

Satkhira Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Kefayetullah was the chief guest while Police Superintendent Mirza Abdullalhel Kafi and CWCS president Prof Ishrat Shamim of Dhaka University and were special guests.

It was addressed by, among others, Unicef Representative Shabnaz Zaherin, Sadar police station officer-in-charge Saifur Rahman, Arifa Rahman, journalists

Subhas Chowdhury and Mostafizur Rahman Ujjal, shrimp cultivator Talib Hossain and women and child workers Anowara Khatun and Sonia Khatun.

Narrating the plights of women workers, Anowara Khatun said, they get Tk 25 to 30 a day while a male worker gets Tk 65 to 70. Women also face physical abuse at times at work places.

Child worker Sonia Khatun, a student of class seven at Debhata Pilot High School she works in a shrimp enclosure to add to the family income but gets less than half of what a man gets for the same work.

The speakers said women and children account for at least half of the work in shrimp industries in Satkhira district, which earn a foreign exchange of over Tk 2000 crore a year. But they are deprived of their real wages.

Government officials, teachers, journalists, social workers, cultural activists, public representatives, NGO activists and shrimp cultivators, participated in the workshop.

Four PBCP men held in Rajshahi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

Police arrested four members of banned Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) including its regional leader from Bagmara upazila on Thursday.

Police said, Ranajit Kumar Mondol, the 'regional leader' of PBCP was arrested from Baroipara village. Police also arrested Monirul Islam, 30, Raju Ahmed, 26 and Rafikul Islam, 40.

Acting on a tip off, police arrested them from their houses.

Ranajit was accused in several cases. He was evading arrest for last several years, police said.

During primary interrogation they revealed important information regarding their activities, police said.

TK 14CR IRREGULARITIES

Second phase probe begins in Barisal T&T

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board has started the second phase of investigation into Tk 14 core revenue loss at Barisal divisional office of T & T, allegedly due to meter tempering, illegal connections and other irregularities.

The probe is being made by a three-member body headed by A M Moasser, director (inspections) of T&T Board. The two other members are Deputy Director Md. ShawkatAli

and Divisional Engineer Md. Abdur Rahim.

Sources at Barisal T & T office said, during the first phase of investigation done in the first half of last month, the team detected about Tk 2.5 core revenue loss at the divisional office.

After the first phase of probe, eight employees including three sub-assistant engineers were suspended and another five transferred from Barisal for involvement in irregularities and corruptions.

The second phase probe was initiated as the team, during its earlier investigation, got clues on more about Tk 14 core irregularities, done in last 14 years, the sources said.

Following order by higher authorities, the team came to Barisal again on Thursday and started the second phase of investigation.

But members of the team declined to make any comment, saying they will complete the probe in a week and submit their report to higher authorities in Dhaka.

Woman caught by BSF found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

The body of a Bangladeshi woman, taken into custody by Indian BSF along with her husband, was recovered from the zero line near Bhomra border yesterday.

The victim was identified as Manilata Mondal, 37, wife of Tarun Kumar Mondal of Dumuria in Khulna.

Tarun Kumar Mondal was handed over to BDR at a flag meeting yesterday.

After release, Tarun Kumar said he had taken his wife to India for treatment of her cancer. Their daughter Poly Rani Mondal and relative Rabin accompanied them.

Poly said the four were crossing the border at about 7 pm on Thursday to return home. She said, as soon as they reached Ghojadanga village across the border, BSF chased them. She and Rabin ran into Bangladesh but her father and mother were caught by BSF, Poly told this correspondent.

Tarun Kumar said he and his wife were kept separate in BSF custody.

Satkhira Sadar thana Sub-inspector Rafikul Islam said Manilata's body bore marks of injury. The body was handed over to Tarun Kumar after autopsy at Sadar Hospital. The autopsy report is yet to be available, he said.

8X3

10X3

6X2