

Fishes decline alarmingly in Kaptai Lake

7,200 tonnes netted last year against 30,000 to 40,000 tonnes 15 years ago

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

Fish production in Kaptai Lake, the largest artificial freshwater body in the country, is dwindling gradually. Although lack of proper maintenance, use of 'current' nets and indiscriminate netting of fish fries and mother fish are causing the fish production to go down, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation (BFDC) is yet to take any effective step in this regard.

Sources said the government now earns about Tk 2 to 3 crore in revenue annually from fishes in the lake. Earnings may be Tk 7 to 10 crore if the lake is maintained properly, they claimed.

Kaptai Lake, which stretches over an area of 250 square kilometres, came into being during

implementation of Kaptai Hydroelectric Power Project (KHPP) in the 60s.

About 54,000 hectares of arable land went under water and more than two lakh people were displaced due to construction of Kaptai Dam.

The then government handed over the lake to Fisheries Development Corporation for maintenance and fish cultivation. A project was also introduced to build necessary infrastructures and develop the lake.

Although the government continues to allocate funds for the project, fish resources are declining for lack of effective steps by BFDC (Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation) authorities.

Indigenous fishes including

ruhi, katla, mrigel, mohashoyl, chital, tengra, pabda, baraputi, sarputi, boal, kalibous, sadaghannya, kalighannya, mola and chapila, which were in plenty in the lake earlier, are becoming scarce day by day.

However, smaller varieties like chapila and kachki has increased, the sources said.

After the creation of the lake, pangas, sada ghonia, baghaira, and sarputi were thriving. But those are also declining, BFDC sources said seeking anonymity.

They claimed that though the government imposed a ban on use of 'current' nets, indiscriminate catching of fries and mother fishes during breeding period goes on.

About seven to eight tonnes of fish are collected daily from the lake now. The authorities hope that

the fish production will witness a rise, BFDC sources said.

About 7200 tonnes of fish were collected from the lake last year that earned a revenue of Tk 3 crore for the government. The production may be lesser this year, the sources said.

In previous two years, annual production varied from 10,000 to 12,000 tonnes while it was 30,000 to 40,000 tonnes about 15 years ago, the sources said.

BFDC releases 33 tonnes of fish fries in the lake during rainy season. But soon after the release, some unscrupulous fishermen in collusion with a section of BFDC officials net those.

Former chairman of Rangamati municipality Kazi Nazrul Islam, also a member of Kaptai Lake Control Committee (KLCC), said BFDC authorities release fish fries in the lake but they do not take care of those.

He alleged that although the government banned fishing in the lake for three months from May 15 to August 15, indiscriminate netting of fries and mother fishes continues during the period.

Nirmolendu Tripura, a member of KLCC, also alleged that the lake is not properly looked after by BFDC.

Alamgir Hossain, scientific officer at Fisheries Research Institute in Rangamati, said fish production is decreasing due to damage of natural breeding places, diversion of water flow, use of 'current' nets and netting of fish fries.

Blaming BFDC for its poor management, he said the government can earn at least Tk seven crore if the lake is managed properly.

Contacted, BFDC project manager Anisur Rahman denied all the allegations. He also claimed that there is no scope to conceal the real quantity of fish collected from the lake as it is measured in presence of both BFDC officials and fish traders.



PHOTO: STAR

Illegal fishing in Kaptai Lake goes unabated.

Piranha in Kaptai Lake!

No step by BFDC though the fish was netted about 2 months ago

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Presence of carnivorous fish Piranha in Kaptai Lake has worried fishery officials and people alike in Rangamati. Some fishermen netted some Piranha fishes from Longdu area in the lake recently.

Senior scientific officer of Rangamati Fisheries Research Institute (FRI) Md. Alamgir Hossain told The Daily Star that Piranha was netted by some fishermen from Katthali area about a couple of months ago. "They brought those to our office as they were confused about identity of the fish (Piranha)", he said.

"I don't know how many fishes (Piranha) are in the lake. I wondered how the fish come to the lake," Alamgir said, adding, "Piranha is terrible for all animals, even humans". No fish can survive in an water body if there is Piranha, he said.

"It's a very bad news that Piranha was found in the lake. It will destroy fish resource", Hossain said.

"Amongst most terrible animals of the world --- tiger is in forests, shark in ocean and piranha is in sweet water," said Mojibur Kibria, associate professor of biology at Chittagong University.

Monjurul, also a fishery scientist and researchers, said immediate steps should be taken to save fishes in the lake.

Sources said Piranha is being sold in different areas of the country in the name of 'tekchanda' and 'thaichanda'. Its scientific name is



PHOTO: STAR

Officials examining a Piranha at Fisheries Research Institute, Rangamati.

Pygocentrus Nattereri or Red Belid Piranha. It grows up to 33 centimeters and three kilograms in weight.

It grows rapidly and moves in groups. It always hunts for blood. They can kill and eat up a human within few minutes, he said.

Businessman Babu Das of Baghaichhari, claimed that some fishermen men cultivated Piranha in some ponds in Baghaichhari taking it to be Rupchanda. He claimed that Piranha could spread in the lake during the last flood most ponds in the area flooded their banks.

Sources said Piranha is available in the Latin America, Bolivia, Venezuelan, Colombia and Brazil.

However, authority of Rangamati Fishery Research Institute is being concealed the fact, it's alleged.

Though Piranha was caught from lake a couple of months ago, FRI authorities concealed it and did not take any action, he alleged.

Asked whether FRI was taking any step, Alamgir Hossain said, "Step have to be taken by BFDC and we can only assist them".

"In the past, I told several meetings to precautionary steps so that fish cultivators do not cultivate Piranha and African Magur in Rangamati," he said.

Contacted, BFDC manager Md. Anisur Rahman said, "I have just heard about Piranha. I came here some days ago. I will take steps soon".

2 JCD leaders held in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Saturday night arrested two Jatityabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leaders for their alleged involvement with destructive activities.

They are Hasanuzzaman Sumon, organising secretary of Kushtia district JCD, and Arifur Rahman Sumon, general secretary of Sadar upazila unit JCD.

Rab handed over them over to police who produced them before a judicial magistrate's court yesterday. The court sent them to jail.

Police said they arrested the JCD leaders on May 4 last year for their involvement with attacking a journalists' convention at Kushtia Public Library ground on April 29 in 2006, leaving injured 25 journalists including Bangladesh Observer Editor Iqbal Sobhan Choudhury.

During interrogation by police, the JCD men had also admitted their involvement with the attack and said two local BNP lawmakers were behind the attack.

A magistrate's court granted them bail after 22 days of their custody.

Jute workers stage sit-in for wage hike, arrears

Project directors of 6 mills hold closed-door meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT Khulna

Casual workers of six state-owned jute mills of Khulna-Jessore industrial belt staged sit-in demonstrations from 9 am to 11-30 am yesterday.

They wrapped their heads with a piece of white cloth in demand of payment of arrears and increase of their daily wages from Tk 110 to 190. The workers are in agitation for the last two weeks to press home their five-point demand.

Laid off workers of Alim Jute Mills and casual workers of Crescent Jute Mills, Platinum Jute Mills, Star Jute Mills, Eastern Jute Mills and Jessore Jute Mills Industries (JJ) faxed a letter to the Jute Adviser yesterday requesting him to resolve the crisis.

The project directors of six jute mills held a close-door meeting at the zonal office of Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) at Charerhat in Khalishpur thana on

Saturday. They discussed the present situation prevailing in the industrial belt due to agitation of workers bringing down production at the lowest level.

Presided over by coordinator of zonal BJMC Abu Taher, the meeting was attended by five other project directors Mokaddes Hossain of Star Jute Mills, Dr Rabindra Nath Sarker of Platinum Jute Mills, Aminur Rahman of Eastern Jute Mills and Mosharaf Hossain of Carpeting Jute Mills who is also holding temporary charge of Jessore Jute Industries. They also sent a report to the BJMC head office after the meeting.

The report mentioned that the situation in the aforementioned jute mills are aggravating day by day due to loss in production of jute goods and mounting indignation of jute workers for delay of the government in payment of their arrears dues and also their insecurity arising out of the situation.

2 brothers killed in Sylhet clashes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two brothers were killed and five others sustained critical injuries in a clash between rival groups of villagers over a occupying a haor in Companiganj upazila in Sylhet yesterday.

A group of about 10 to 15 led by the Chhatrak upazila BNP leader MA Shahid went to Halukuri haor on the border of Chhatrak and Companiganj upazilas at about 11:00am while their rivals led by Khalilur Rahman Manik reached the spot shortly.

Following exchange of heated words over catching fish there, the rival groups got locked into a clash with lethal weapons.

Akol Miah, 50, and his brother Faruque Ahmed, 40, died on the spot. The injured were admitted to Chhatrak Upazila Hospital and MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in Sylhet.

Police later caught four on charge of their complicity with the incident. Khalilur Rahman Manik, brother of the deceased, filed a case with Companiganj Police Station accusing Chhatrak upazila BNP chief MA Shahid and 34 others.



PHOTO: STAR

Wearing black badges, barefooted students of Rajshahi University (RU) march campus streets yesterday demanding release of RU teachers and students.

UNO jailed for ignoring HC order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A Bogra court yesterday jailed two persons including a former Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) for six months and fined them Tk 1 lakh for constructing a public toilet on a disputed land at Shajahanpur upazila despite a High Court stay order.

The two former UNO of Shajahanpur Abu Bakr Siddiq and Abdus Salam Khandoker, chairman of Majhira Union Parishad -- will have to serve one month more jail term if they fail to pay the fine.

First Senior Assistant Judge Shawkat Ali also ordered relocating the public toilet in 10 days.

Court sources said late Isahaq Uddin Mondol bought 47 decimal land from a former jamindar. After a dispute with one Rohitullah Pramanik, the family of Isahaq filed a case. The High Court passed a stay order on any construction on the land.

While the stay was in force, the UNO started construction of public toilet on April 4, 2004.

Isahaq's daughter Rahila Khatun filed a case with the court of the First Senior Assistant Judge.

ARMY CHIEF'S INITIATIVE Knitting training centre to open in Nilphamari next month

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

At the initiative of Army chief General Moeen U Ahmed, a sweater knitting and linking training centre will be opened here next month.

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) will provide all sorts of co-operation including logistic and technical support in this regard.

With a view to combating 'monga' (near famine situation) by providing employment to youths in the district, every year 1,000 youths would get training on knitting and linking of sweater here.

BGMEA would provide their employment in various garments factories under their association in Dhaka and other big cities.

BGMEA sweater standing committee chairman Nazmul Hasan Bhuiyan revealed this at a meeting with the local administration, joint forces and local journalists at the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) conference room here Saturday evening.

Youth Development Directorate would help BGMEA in the training programme while the unused Nursing Institute building would be used as the training center.

Presided by the Additional DC (Revenue) of Nilphamari, Moloy Kumar Roy, the meeting was addressed by, among others, the commander of the district army camp, Lt Col Abu Naser Md Toha and the director (training) of Youth Development Directorate, K M Asadur Rahman.

Earlier, two such centres were opened in Gaibandha and Kurigram districts.

Nilphamari lawyers join court after 106 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Lawyers joined the Women and Children Repression Prevention Court here yesterday after 106 days of boycott following transfer of a judge.

The Lawyers' Association of Nilphamari started this boycott on September 28 demanding his transfer for alleged irregularity.

The Lawyers' Association also met the chief justice in Dhaka in November last year.

ALTAF MURDER CASE IN SATKHIRA

Ex-BNP MP Habib, 14 others charge-sheeted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Investigation authorities yesterday pressed charges against 15 people including former BNP lawmaker Habibul Islam Habib, in the sensational case for killing Tala upazila BNP president ABM Altaf Hossain.

Habib, who is also the president of Satkhira district BNP, was elected lawmaker from Satkhira-1 (Tala-Kalaroa) constituency as a BNP-led four-party alliance candidate in 2001.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case, assistant superintendent of police (ASP) Sukha Ranjan Samaddar of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) submitted two separate charge sheets against them before Judge Ranu Bilkis Banu of the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court at Satkhira yesterday, over four years of the incident.

Ten people, who were either implicated or arrested suspecting their involvement in the case, were dropped from the charge sheet as the charges against them were not proved, sources said, adding that a few of them are leaders and activists of Awami League and its front



HABIBUL ISLAM HABIB

organizations.

The other charge sheeted accused are Kumira Union Parishad chairman and Tala upazila Krishak Dal president Golam Mostafa, Tala upazila Jubo Dal president Hafizul Islam, former Tala upazila BNP joint secretary Rasheduzzaman Raju, Khalinagar UP chairman and Tala upazila Workers Party secretary Pranab Chosh Bablu, Shib Pada Sarkar, Ahmad Ali, Ashrafal Haque, Shahidul Islam, Tushar Kumar Pal, Prakash Sarkar, Badruzzaman, Mostafa, Kobat Ali, Abu Hena

Alam, Debendra Nath Biswas -- all from different villages in Tala upazila.

Prakash Sarkar, who was arrested soon after the incident, is now in jail while Badruzzaman Mostafa, Abu Hena Alam and Debendra Nath Biswas were released on bail granted by the court, sources said. The other charge sheeted accused including former BNP lawmaker Habibul Islam Habib are now absconding, court sources said.

Satkhira district BNP vice president and Tala upazila BNP president ABM Altaf Hossain was killed as criminals threw bombs on him at Panchrasta intersection at Patkelghata Bazar in Tala upazila on May 4 in 2004 when he was going to his village home on a motorcycle, goes the prosecution. Another BNP worker Habibur Rahman was also killed in the attack.

Soon after the incident, local Jubo Dal leader Abdur Rahman of Senpur village in Tala upazila filed a case with Tala Police Station accusing a few Awami League and Jubo League leaders and activists.

Shortly afterwards, the case was transferred to the CID for investigation.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

After a respite for several months, hill cutting has started at Dakshin Hangar in Bandarban, allegedly for a housing project backed by local influential people.

Include food issue in talks with parties: Menon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Urging immediate loan and fertilizer supply to Sidr-affected people, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon yesterday said the government's proposed dialogues with political parties should include discussions about food crisis and economic stagnancy.

As a part of three-day visits in Sidr-affected areas in Uzirpur, Babuganj and Banaripara upazilas of Barisal district, Menon addressed gatherings in Jalla and Barakotha unions of Uzirpur upazila yesterday and distributed house reconstruction materials and relief to the affected people.

Menon said Sidr affected people need food, employment and easy-term loan for post Sidr rehabilitation and restart of economic activities.

Referring to the chief adviser's

address on Saturday, Menon said situation at the field level and public opinion are not supporting the government's claim of successful disaster management.

The government showed lack of foresight by not importing food after the last flood. As in the solving of political crisis, united and coordinated national efforts are needed in disaster and economic managements.

During the government proposed dialogues with the political parties, solving food crisis and removing economic stagnancy should be discussed along with the issues of election and democracy, Menon said.

Leaders of Workers Party, Chhatra Moitri and Jubo Moitri accompanied Menon during his visits.

Menon will visit Sidr affected areas of Babuganj upazila today and Banaripara upazila tomorrow.

Sarbahara leader Himu sent to jail in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Sarbahara leader Kamrul Ahsan alias Himu Khan was sent to jail after police produced him before the court yesterday.

Rapid Action Battalion arrested Kamrul Ahsan, 38, a daring Sarbahara leader of Zia group and former chairman of Agorpur union parishad, was arrested with a pipe gun and two bullets from a secret meeting of armed Sarbahara cadres at his den in Agorpur Bazar early Saturday. Babuganj police station Officer-in-Charge Ali Haider quoted Rab official Shariful Islam assaying.

The Rab official filed an arms case with the police station, the OC said, adding that Himu is also accused in five other cases for murder and extortion.