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POLLUTION

Livelihood withers as rivers die

HELEMUL ALAM

Pollution and loss of navigability in the Buriganga and other rivers surrounding the capital are forcing thousands of people to change their livelihoods.

Many of the fishermen and boatmen who would once depend on these rivers for a living have switched to other professions as the rivers have become too polluted and in places dried up.

Suvadda jelepura (fishermen's quarter) in Keraniganj, a village that would seethe and teem with life even a decade ago, now exists in name only. Once home to nearly 400 fishing families, it currently has only one family continuing fishing as a source of income.

Swapan Das, the lone fisherman at Suvadda, has been in fishing for the last 15 years. Talking to The Daily Star, he said it is quite hard to find fish in the Buriganga these days as the fish population has been severely depleted for pollution in the river.

Fishing in jheels (waterbody) in the area nearby too has become difficult because of pollution. "I'm still in this profession as I did not learn any other skills," he added.

Dhiren Babu of Suvadda, who has been a street vendor since leaving fishing a couple of years back, said many like him had to switch to other professions because of scarcity of fish in the Buriganga and other waterbodies.

"Around 20 years ago, we used to have a boatful of catch from the river every day. Now one can only dream about that," said Dulal Chandra Barman.

"We stopped fishing two years ago. It was a painful decision but we had no alternative. We were already having a hard time due to shrinking quantity of the catch. Things became even worse with the influential locals forcing us to pay for fishing in the jheels."

Left without a fixed job for a long time, Dulal said, "Since I'm not good at other work, hardship has become a permanent feature of my life."

According to a recent study by the Water Resources Department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), the level of pollution in the Buriganga and in most parts of Turag and Norai is so high that no living organism can survive there.

The three-year research also found that the level of oxygen in the water of Buriganga, Turag and parts of Norai is less than one per microgram while the fish need at least four level of oxygen per microgram to stay alive.

Out of 100 families at jelepura of Basila, only 20 are still involved in fishing.

Bikram Chandra Das, 55, who has been a fisher for a living since boyhood said he can fish only for seven months in the Buriganga while he is jobless for the rest of the year.

"My two sons also do not have any job during the lean season, and I have to hawk fish to run my family," he said.

Dayal Rajbangshi of Basila said discouraged by the dwindling fish stock, two of his three sons have taken jobs at an automobile works.

Shahin, who lives near Kaliganj ghat in Keraniganj, said two decades back, there used to be thousands of boats running between ghats (quay) along the Buriganga. But that number, he fears, has come down by at least two-thirds.

Decreasing navigability in the Buriganga has impacts on the canals and other waterbodies connected to the river as well. During the winter, the water in some of them is reduced to a trickle while navigability in the others falls so much that boats become of no use as a means of transport.

Over the years, a good number of canals have dried up leaving no trace. For instance, Mirerbagh canal of Keraniganj that would once link the Dhaleshwari and Buriganga is now a road.

The washermen too are having

SIPHONING OFF

Recovered money to be returned

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Bank is set to return the money, which was reported to have been siphoned off, deposited with the bank during the massive anti-corruption drive as the government initiated a process in this regard.

"We have been asked to do so,"

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PRESIDENT'S WIFE

CA asks for details of canal lease

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday asked the land ministry to send him the details about leasing out of a canal to British Colombia School President Dr

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Khaleda's release stuck in conditions

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Release of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is being delayed as she and the authorities have yet to reach a consensus on the conditions, party sources said.

In response to the strings attached to her release, the former prime minister has come up with counter-conditions, they added.

She has demanded that her elder son Tarique Rahman and the other detained party leaders who are not convicted yet must be freed before her release.

BNP insiders said the authorities have laid down a number of conditions for her release. They want her to go to a particular country for treatment and refrain from politics for a certain period of time (minimum five years).

She has also been requested to pass the chairperson's responsibility to someone else before going abroad after release. But as of now,

Khaleda has not agreed to leave the country, they added.

Meanwhile, sources close to the administration said there are strong reservations in the government about releasing Tarique as it might give a wrong signal to the people about its sincerity in the anti-graft drive.

Earlier, the advisers have denied setting any condition for Khaleda's release.

Talking to reporters after a cabinet meeting at the Sylhet circuit house Monday, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed spoke of his government's intention of freeing her for treatment.

"The process is on. Everything is on track and it [release] is possible," he observed, adding that she can be released by striking a balance between the legal aspects and humanitarian grounds.

Meanwhile, a BNP leader seeking anonymity told The Daily Star that all obstacles to her release

might be cleared soon. However, he added, the situation might become even more complicated if the negotiations continue to drag on.

The rank and file of the party hope that the ongoing negotiations with the authorities would eventually translate into the release of their chairperson and her son.

Khaleda's lawyers expect that like Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami, the mother and son would be let out on bail unconditionally.

Nizami, also former minister, was set free on July 15 after obtaining a two-month ad interim bail from the High Court (HC).

One of the BNP chief's counsels however said the Jamaat chief managed to come out of prison because the government delayed filing an appeal against the HC order.

"The government can follow the same in the case of Khaleda Zia if it really is that sincere," he added.



PHOTO STAR

Slicks blanket the Buriganga on the other side of Sadarghat as launches dump used engine oil into the water without thinking of the environmental cost.

EC moves to make voters 1.6 lakh Urdu speakers

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) has moved to register the 1.6 lakh Urdu-speaking stranded Pakistanis living in different camps in Bangladesh in the fresh electoral roll, allowing them to cast votes in the upcoming national and local polls.

But registering Bangladeshi citizens living abroad before the next parliamentary election still remains uncertain as the commission's move to amend the electoral roll ordinance for this purpose remains stalled, sources in the EC Secretariat said.

The EC initiated the move to register the Urdu-speaking people as voters following a High Court verdict that granted Bangladeshi citizenship to the Biharis living in different camps for 37 years and asked the commission to register them in the electoral roll.

According to the commission's decision, the EC Secretariat in a circular on Monday asked district election officers, who are working as registration officers for voter

listing, to initiate necessary arrangements for the task, sources said.

Copies of the circular were also sent to the military secretary to Dhaka Cantonment and the director of the voter list preparation project.

The circular said the list of camps where Urdu-speaking people live would be collected from the home ministry and sent to the registration officers soon.

Sources said the EC Secretariat has recently asked the home ministry to send the list of these camps to it.

According to information available, Urdu-speaking stranded Pakistanis have been living at 116 camps in different parts of the country since 1972 with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

About 3 lakh Urdu-speaking people are living in Bangladesh at present and of them 1.6 lakh live in the camps set up by the ICRC. Many of them were born after 1971 or were minor at that time.

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FAKE ORPHANAGE IN BOGRA

Khaleda, Tarique interrogated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday separately quizzed detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia and her eldest son and BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman in connection with the embezzlement of over Tk 2.10 crore of Zia Orphanage Trust.

The ACC team led by Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Harunur Rashid interrogated Khaleda at the gate of makeshift jail on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises from 5:45pm to 7:30pm. They quizzed Tarique at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital cabin from 4:15pm to 5:30pm.

Their lawyers barrister Nowshad Zamir, advocate Mahub Uddin Khokan and advocate Shimul Biswas were present during interrogation.

Advocate Shimul Biswas, another lawyer of Khaleda and Tarique, told The Daily Star that during the interrogation Khaleda asked the ACC interrogators if they found her signatures in the documents of the orphanage trust and

withdrawal of the money. Claiming Tarique innocent, he said the money was withdrawn on March 28 last year and Tarique was arrested on March 7, three weeks before that incident.

Talking to The Daily Star, DAD Harunur Rashid said, "I have asked the former prime minister if she had spent the money from the PM's fund according to the law."

"When I asked her on which purposes she had spent the amount, she said she cannot recall it," he said.

In reply to a question, he said, "It is true that the money was withdrawn after the Tarique Rahman's arrest but that does not prove him innocent because he had transferred the money to other persons before his arrest."

The ACC filed the case with Ramna Police Station on July 3 accusing Khaleda, Tarique and five others for embezzling over Tk 2.10 crore by forming an eyewash establishment named Zia Orphanage Trust.

The other accused are former BNP lawmaker Kazi Saleemul Haq, Syed Ahmed alias Sayeed Ahmed,

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GP to raise \$300m from IPO, pre-IPO

MD HASAN

Grameenphone, the country's largest mobile phone operator, has finalised its plan to raise \$300 million (Tk 2,058 crore) -- \$150 million from the stock market and the rest through private placement or pre-IPO.

Grameenphone yesterday said a formal application for the IPO with expected gross proceeds of up to \$150 million is expected to be filed with the SEC and other authorities by the end of this month.

The company also said it intends to conduct a pre-public offer of its shares with expected gross proceeds of up to \$150 million prior to the IPO.

FULL STORY STAR BUSINESS B-1

IRREGULARITIES

Bogra power plant gets free gas

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

The Pashchimanchal Gas Company Ltd (PGCL) has been supplying gas to the private power plant company GBB Power Ltd in Bogra without taking any security deposit and gas bills since the latter began power generation last April.

Admitting the matter to The Daily Star over cellphone on Tuesday, Petrobangla Chairman Jalal Ahmed said a letter was sent to the energy secretary on July 14 seeking permission to cut off the gas line but they had not yet received any reply.

GBB Executive Director Mamun Haider also admitted that the company has not yet deposited the security money and paid the gas bills so far.

Meanwhile, the government has been purchasing electricity from the GBB at a loss of about Tk 3 crore a month, said Rustom Ali, superintendent engineer of Power Development Board in Bogra, over phone on Tuesday.

Sources said Power Secretary Faizul Kabir Khan requested the PGCL authority in writing on March 23 to connect gas line to the rental power plant.

A PGCL senior official said as per rules the GBB was supposed to deposit over Tk 2.53 crore before one month of commencing power generation. It has not also paid gas bills worth Tk 2.41 crore for April-June.

The plant consumes 4 million cubic feet gas a day.

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Gas line blast causes fire at Bangla Motor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Flames spouted out of a defective underground pipeline of Titas Gas, causing panic and disruption to vehicular movement on the busy Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near Bangla Motor intersection yesterday afternoon.

The surrounding roads experienced a massive gridlock for over three hours as the sudden incident forced the traffic authorities to block portion of the road for about half an hour.

Meanwhile, four female workers were taken to hospital suffering from gas inhalation following a gas pipeline explosion inside Igloo Ice Cream factory at Shyampur in the city.

As the flames at Bangla Motor shot up about ten feet into the air, panic-stricken pedestrians, locals and passengers from hundreds of

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PHOTO STAR

Fire burns at Bangla Motor on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in Dhaka yesterday following explosion of a gas pipeline underneath the busy thoroughfare.

Top criminal Anar snatched from police by his aides

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

The henchmen of an Interpol-listed criminal, Anwarul Islam Anar, snatched him from police soon after his arrest in Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila yesterday.

Police arrested three of his accomplices following the incident, identified as Nayan, son of late Mosharraf Hossain, Toli Khatun, wife of Enamul Haq, and Zohra Khatun, wife of Obaidul Haq.

Police said they arrested Anar, an arms and drugs dealer accused in nine cases including murder and extortion, at a mango plot behind his home at Nishchintapur village at about 11:30am. He was holding a meeting with his accomplices at the time.

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Truth Commission starts working in 7-10 days

UNB, Dhaka

The Truth and Accountability Commission will start functioning within next seven to 10 days, mainly to deal with the clemency matter of high-profile corruption suspects, according to Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif.

"We hope the functioning of the Truth and Accountability Commission will begin within seven to 10 days," he told reporters at secretariat yesterday.

Asked who would be appointed chairman of the commission, Hassan Arif said, "The issue is now

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CHAPAINAWABGANJ BORDER BDR-BSF gunfight stalls trade thru' land port

One more killed by BSF at Chuadanga

STAR REPORT

Border security forces of Bangladesh and India exchanged gunfire on Shibganj border in Chapainawabganj yesterday morning, halting cross-border trade and immigration activities through the Sona Masjid land port.

Panic gripped the locals when volleys of gunfire broke out at around 6:00am, half-an-hour after Indian Border Security Force (BSF)

gunned down a Bangladeshi cattle trader on Nimtola border in Chuadanga, according to our correspondents.

With this latest killing, BSF men shot dead six Bangladeshis including two Bangladeshi Rifles (BDR) personnel since Friday.

The deputy director general (DDG)-level border conference that is presently being held in Kolkata failed to defuse the tension

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DOCTOR'S WIFE Suspect reveals account of grisly murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One of the suspects in Fahmida Akhter Nazma murder case in a confessional statement before a magistrate has described how Dr Tozammel Hossain killed his wife at their Mirpur house on July 6.

Admitting to her involvement in the murder, Shamsunnahar Nargis said Tozammel first banged Nazma's head on the wall of a room and started punching her in the face as she fell on the floor.

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