



PHOTO: STAR

Small dams like this one have divided Chalitabunia irrigation canal in coastal island Chalitabunia under Rangabali upazila of Patuakhali district into over a hundred ponds, making the eight-kilometre-long canal virtually unfit for irrigational purposes. Right, marks of digging on the canal embankment bear testimony to the callous act for fish cultivation at the cost of water supply to vast agricultural lands in the island.

Irrigation hampered as canal turned into 'ponds'

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

An eight-kilometre irrigation canal in a remote coastal island under newly formed Rangabali upazila in the district has remained virtually unusable for the purpose for the last 15 years as unscrupulous people have divided it into over 100 ponds for fish cultivation.

Gazi Hafizur Rahman, former UP chairman of Chalitabunia union parishad (UP), is a lessee of around one-kilometre portion of the canal but he allegedly closed the whole canal and verbally leased portions of it to locals who dug ponds for fish cultivation there.

The canal flowing through Chalitabunia union is linked with the Decree River in the east and Darchira River in the west.

Most of the 10,000 people living in the coastal island are dependent on agriculture and there are over 10,000 acres of agri land inside flood control embankment being built around the island by the Water Development Board, local UP sources said.

Earlier local farmers used sweet water of Chalitabunia canal in their farmlands for better production of crops including aus and aman paddy but now they are deprived of the benefit due to closure of the canal, said Fazlur Rahman Howlader, chairman of Chalitabunia UP.

"Our agricultural lands are drying as we cannot lift water from the canal for irrigation in proper time. Former UP chairman Gazi Hafizur Rahman closed the canal. Our domestic animals like cows and buffalos also suffer for want of

sweet water," said Md Helal, 50, a local farmer.

Litu Mia, another farmer said their agricultural lands get waterlogged during the rainy season in absence of drainage facilities due to closure of the canal.

Several other farmers made similar allegations but they requested anonymity in fear of the former UP chairman Gazi Hafizur Rahman, also president of union unit of BNP.

Noni Mufti, organising secretary of union unit of ruling Awami League, said, "I took lease of the canal from Jubo Unnayan office in 1994 for five years to cultivate fish. But in 1998 Gazi Hafizur Rahman took possession of the canal illegally although my lease period did not expire."

Then Gazi started realising money from locals by giving lease verbally for fish cultivation and the so-called lessees built dams and made ponds there, he added.

"I dug the pond after receiving lease from Gazi Hafizur Rahman," said local farmer Abdur Rahman, who made a personal pond by grabbing the canal in front of his house.

Al Amin, 40, UP member for ward No 8, is cultivating fishes in about one acre area of the canal in front of his house.

Declining to say how much money he paid for the portion, he said, "Gazi Hafiz is my uncle and I supervise all his activities in the area as he lives in Galachipa upazila headquarters."

When contacted, Gazi Hafizur

Rahman said, "I leased the canal from the district fisheries office to cultivate fish and over 100 beneficiaries have been involved in the cultivation."

Denying the allegation of verbally leasing the canal portions in exchange of money, he said every beneficiary built dams on their own portions and are cultivating fish there.

He could not reply when this correspondent asked him whether the lease contract allows building over 100 dams that totally closed the canal.

A source of district fisheries office said Gazi Hafizur Rahman took lease of one km of the canal covering 7.50 acres of land from Fazil Madrasa to Sarder Bari in Chalitabunia in 2004 to cultivate fish under Flood Control Development Irrigation project by paying Tk 1,150 for per acre a year.

The lease contract does not allow him do anything that is harmful to agricultural activities.

Locals, however, alleged that Gazi grabbed the whole of eight-kilometre canal and turned it unusable for irrigational purpose.

When contacted, Iqbal Hossain, district Fisheries officer (DFO) of Patuakhali said, "It is illegal to receive money by giving lease verbally. If anybody submits complaint to my office about the alleged anti-lease contract activities, I will arrange proper investigation. I will take lawful action including cancellation of the lease if the leaseholder is found guilty."

Rangamati Sadar Hospital limps for shortage of doctors, drugs

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

Health services at Rangamati Sadar Hospital are being hampered due to shortage of medicines, doctors and staffs, much to the sufferings of the patients.

A number of patients and their relatives alleged that they had to buy most of the drugs prescribed by the physicians from local shops as those were not available at the hospital.

Doctors do not come timely and regularly to the hospital as most of them are engaged in private practice, they said.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found the atmosphere at the hospital very unhygienic with its wards and toilets dirty and stinky.

Lalit Chakma, 41, who was admitted to the hospital a few days ago, said "Most of the doctors here seem indifferent to the patients as they come only once a day and visit them for a while."

Medicines prescribed by the doctors are often bought from shops outside the hospital, he alleged.

Shanti Priya Chakma and Pushpo Dhan Chakma, who were admitted with appendicitis, said the hospital did not supply them most drugs prescribed by doctors.

Another patient Korichoga Chakma, 60, made similar

allegation against the hospital authorities.

According to officials, at least 134 types of medicines are supposed to be available for the patients at the hospital.

Civil surgeon office sources said 20 posts out of 33 are lying vacant for long at the hospital.

The vacant posts include that of residential medical officer, senior consultants for medicine and surgery, senior consultants for orthopaedic surgery, junior consultants for infant and eye diseases.

But at present there are only specialist physicians for ear, nose and throat (ENT), gynaecology and radiology, the sources said.

Dr Nikhil Barua, superintendent of the hospital, said senior positions of physicians have been lying vacant for over a decade while there is no residential medical officer at the hospital for about one year.

"A doctor is now working as residential medical officer," Nikhil said, adding "We are facing manifold problems for want of manpower."

We informed higher authorities about the matter, but to no effect as yet, he said.

Although Mustafizur Rahman, deputy civil surgeon (CS), admitted to shortage of manpower, he refuted the allegation of the scarcity of medicines at the hospital.

SNIPPETS

Tiger kills fisherman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Tiger killed a fisherman at Kewratali Canal in Mamundo River in the Sundarbans early yesterday. The dead was identified as Israfil Hossain, 42, son of Daud Gazi of Tengrakhal village in Shyamnagar upazila. Alamgir Hossain, officer in-charge of Shyamnagar police station, said a tiger attacked Israfil while he was fishing in the canal at about 3:30am and dragged him into deep forest. Later, forest guards with the help of local honey collectors recovered the body from the spot.

Port workers' strike on

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Loading and unloading of goods at Benapole land port remained suspended yesterday as workers continued their indefinite strike for the second consecutive day. They brought out a procession in the morning, demanding implementation of the government-declared minimum wages for them. Benapole Port-handling Workers' Union enforced the strike on Saturday. Jahangir Hossain Lal, president of the union, at the programme said they had earlier demanded implementation of the wage before the appointment of four new contractors, but the authorities did not pay heed to the demand. He also threatened to continue their movement if the demand was not met immediately.

48 excavators destroyed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A taskforce, comprising officials of administration, environment and police, in separate drives destroyed 48 mechanised excavators, locally called 'boma machine', in Bholaganj Stone Quarry area on Saturday. These illegally run machines were being used by a few organised groups led by local influential for digging stones, from the country's biggest stone quarry, located on the bordering areas of Companiganj upazila. The taskforce also asked all concerned to withdraw such excavators immediately. Otherwise, those would be burnt and destroyed without further warning, said upazila nirbahi officer Md Saiful Islam.

Paddy, rice procurement

A CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

The official boro paddy and rice procurement drive has begun in Pirganj upazila yesterday noon. Sources said, the government set a target to purchase 1033 metric tones of paddy from the farmers directly and 5803 metric tones of rice from the millers of the upazila during the current boro season. Reazul Haque, upazila food controller inaugurated the procurement drive at the local food godown as the chief guest. Each kilogram paddy from the farmers and rice from 153 millers was being purchased at Tk.18 and Tk. 28 respectively, the sources said.

19 robbers held in 2 dists

UNB, Bogra

Police arrested 19 members of an inter-district robber gang along with looted valuables from separate places in Bogra and Naogaon districts. Police disclosed it at a press briefing at police superintendent's office here on Saturday. Acting on secret information, the law enforcers arrested 11 robbers from separate places in Bogra and Naogaon districts for committing robbery at Kusumbi village in Adamdighi upazila. Meanwhile, 8 robbers were also arrested along with an electric wire-laden truck at Phultola in Shahjahanpur upazila. The arrestees are -- Khokon, Selim, Momin, Pintu, Nayan Chandra, Kamal Moksed, Mizanur, Babu, Faizul, Aminul, Parvez, Palash, Nannu, Alamgir Hossain, Abdul Karim, Mostu, Saidul Islam and Alamgir. Police said all of them members of inter-district robber gang.

'Currency forger' arrested

UNB, Sylhet

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members arrested a man along with fake currency note making materials from his house at Dampal village in Golapganj upazila on Saturday evening. The arrestee was identified as Gaus Uddin, 55, son of late Monohar Ali of the village. Rab-9 sources said, on secret information, they raided the house at about 6:45pm and arrested him. Later, they seized fake note-making materials, including seven bundles of paper, chemicals and 60 notes of Tk 500 denomination from his house. Rab said Gaus confessed to his involvement in the crime.

People of 30 villages suffer for 40 years just for want of a bridge

QUAMRUL ISLAM RBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

People of 30 villages under two upazilas have been crossing Tironi River by bamboo-made bridge for the last 40 years as no move was taken to set up a concrete bridge there.

The bridge connecting Baliadangi and Ranishankoil, two upazilas of the district, was built by locals.

"There was a wooden bridge over the river but it was damaged during the Liberation War. Unfortunately, the authorities did not build any concrete bridge after the independence," Jamiuruddin, a local deed writer, told this correspondent during a visit to Baliganj recently.

Villagers alleged that candidates of different political parties during campaigns before the parliamentary elections assured local people several times of constructing a bridge across the river but they forgot their promises after the polls.

People of Bara Palashbari union under Baliadangi upazila upto the north of Tironi River face great difficulty during the rainy season, as they have to use alternative routes and travel additional 40 kilometres to go to the Nekmarad Haat for trading, said locals.

Besides, a large number of school and madrasa children of Kashipur union under Ranishankoil upazila, living on the southern bank also suffer the same problem while going to Bara Palashbari High School and Beltala Islamic Alim



PHOTO: STAR

People of 30 villages in Baliadangi and Ranishankoil upazilas of Thakurgaon district have to walk on this shabby bamboo-made bridge to cross Tironi River. The villagers have been demanding a concrete bridge there for the last 40 years but the authorities concerned have not taken any step yet.

Madrasha on the opposite side of the river.

Headmaster Nagen Chandra said during the rainy season, the students have to use two sets of dresses. "One for crossing river and the another for attending school", he added.

Madrasa superintendent Md Kushum Uddin told this correspondent that during monsoon, they set up a sub-centre on the southern bank of the river for taking examinations as over 200 students reside there.

Jesmin Akhtar, 14, a student of class-VII, said she often failed to attend the school timely during heavy rain as she had to swim across the river.

The affected villages include Jele Bosti, Dharia Bosti, Kodamtoli, Bragochia, Chochopara, Dhuliavita,

Dalal Bosti, Uzirmoni, Dakhin Duari and Polashbari village under Baliadangi and Laksham, Jhabortola, Choybhagia, Kashipur, Gurbari, Jogdal, Moharaja, Patagora, Kadihat, and Nuntor under Ranishankoil upazilas.

Farmer Khabir Uddin, 50, of Bara Palashbari under Baliadangi said they cannot bring their agriculture items to the haat (local market) by a tractor or a trolley for want of a permanent bridge.

Monsur Ali, chairman of Bara Palashbari union parishad, said people of the area have demanded construction of a concrete bridge for long but to no effect as yet.

"We wrote to the authorities several times for constructing a bridge but it all went unheeded."

Demanding immediate construction of the bridge, Jyotish Chandra Roy, Kashipur UP chairman of Ranishankoil, said thousands of people are facing manifold problems just for want of a permanent bridge.

LGED engineer of Baliadangi upazila Monirul Hossain said at present they were not able to build the bridge there as they had already submitted a proposal to the authorities with the recommendation of the local lawmaker for the construction of five other significant bridges.

Contacted, lawmaker Dabirul Islam said he plans to build a bridge-cum-rubber dam across the river "during the tenure of the present government".

Acid attack on 4 of a family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Jessore

Criminals threw acid on four members of a family at Dattagati village in Abhoynagar upazila on Saturday night.

The injured victims were identified as Champa Begum, 28, daughter of Abdullah

Molla, her sister Achhia Khatun, 15, brothers Hasib Hossain 7, and Sakib Hossain, 6, of the village.

OC of Abhoynagar police station Ahsan Habib said Mamun Hossain, son of Imdadul Huq of Tala upazila in Satkhira had been working as domestic help at the house of Abdullah Molla for the last 3 years. He recently gave a proposal to marry Achhia which his master refused and drove him out of his house.

Later, angry Mamun along with his accomplices, entered the house at dead of night and threw acid at Achhia and other members of the family while they were asleep.

The victims were rushed to a local hospital and later shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital as their condition deteriorated.

Two siblings get life for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Panchagarh court yesterday afternoon sentenced two siblings to life-term rigorous imprisonment (RI) for killing a man in 2009.

The convicts are Md. Moslemuddin, 50, son of late Boshiruddin of Bodapara village in Panchagarh Sadar upazila and his elder brother Md. Toslimuddin, 56.

District and Sessions Judge Md. Mahabub-Ul-Alam handed down the verdict in a crowded courtroom in presence of the convicts after examining records and witnesses of the case.

The court also fined them Tk 10,000 each, in default, to suffer four months more in jail.

According to the prosecution, Moslemuddin and Toslimuddin of Bodapara village in Panchagarh Sadar upazila beat up Razibul Islam, 40, son of late Askar Ali of the same village mercilessly on 12 September in 2009 due to previous enmity leaving him seriously injured.

Next day he was admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital in critical state, where he died on 18 September.

Sarovar SAREES EXCLUSIVE

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