

Sluice gates for whom?

Irrigation by farmers hampered as influential people in Patuakhali use the canals for fish cultivation, keeping the gates closed

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Sluice gates meant for controlling water flow and facilitating irrigation in agricultural lands through canals in the coastal district are becoming virtually useless for crop farmers as influential people use the canals for fish cultivation, often keeping the gates closed.

Sluice gates control committees, dominated by the local union parishad chairmen, Water Development Board (WDB) officials, and ruling party men, often ignore the

requirement of the farmers, depriving them of irrigation water in time of necessity.

According to WDB office in Patuakhali, 1,209 kilometres flood control embankments were built in 60s in seven upazilas of the districts to protect agricultural land from saline water from the Bay. The department also built 412 sluice gates, 612 inlets to control water flow and facilitate agricultural activities. To operate the sluice gates smoothly, the WDB appointed a worker called *khalashi* for each gate.

But during early 90s, new appointment to the post of *khalashi* stopped and nine-member sluice gate operating committees comprising concerned UP chairman, section officer of WDB, among others, started controlling the gates. There are also farmers' representatives in the committees but their opinions are hardly considered.

Often ruling party men involved in fish cultivation manage to enter the committees and control operation of the sluice gates as they cultivate fishes in the

canals by closing its gates, local farmers said.

Control of the profitable fish cultivation also leads to clashes between influential groups.

In early August, a clash between men of Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League over controlling the sluice at Dabluganj village under Kalapara upazila left at least 30 people injured.

During recent visits to Anantapara, Nayakata, Chapli Bazar, Bablatata, Chardhulashar, Pakkhiapara, Safakhali, Londa, Patua, Devpur, Gazir Khal, Fetahpur, Baintala under Kalapara upazila, this correspondent found sluice gates closed for fish cultivation.

Several farmers seeking anonymity said influential people cultivate fish in the canals and they draw saline water through sluice gates for the purpose, causing harm to crop cultivation.

"The committee men lift water through the sluice gate considering interest of fish cultivation, not agricultural purpose," said Shah Alam Matubbar, a farmer of Chanpara village in Nilganj union under Kalapara upazila.

"Sumon, a union unit leader of BCL, cultivates fish in the canal. In last month, he attacked me when I demanded drawing water by opening the sluice gate for irrigating the crop fields," he said.

Many other farmers did not agree to make any comments due to 'fear' of local influential people.

AKM Abul Basar, sub divisional engineer for WDB in Kalapara, said, "Allegations against some sluice gate committees were discussed in the upazila parishad's meeting in last month. There all the UP chairmen and/or secretaries were asked to submit report over the matter as soon as possible. We will take necessary step after getting the

Sharankhola upazila on Friday.

Members of 'Sirsha Bahini', a notorious gang, kidnapped the fishermen along with three trawlers.

They also looted fishes, nets and other valuables worth Tk 20 lakh from 25 fishing trawlers in the area, leaving eight fishermen injured.

The gang demanded Tk 50,000 as ransom for release of each fisherman. They also threatened to kill the fishermen if the demand was not met within seven days.



PHOTO: STAR

Irrigation canals become virtually unusable for the purpose, as influential people often enforce closure of sluice gates, like this one in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district, to cultivate fish in the water bodies.

JOINT DRIVE NEAR KATAKHALI

13 of 38 kidnapped fishermen rescued

UNB, Bagerhat

A joint team of Bangladesh Coastguard and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday rescued 13 of the 38 fishermen, who were kidnapped on Friday, from the deep forest near Katakali of the Sundarbans under Mongla upazila.

M Saidur Rahman, zonal commander of Coastguard Mongla west zone, told the news agency that they along with members of Rab-6 jointly launched a drive around 2pm in the deep forest and rescued the 13

fishermen.

Manzurul Quader Khan, Commander of Rab-6 Khulna Zone, said they also destroyed some dens and watch towers of the forest robbers.

The robbers released the fishermen and fled away when the members of the law enforcing agencies launched drive in the forest, he said.

Earlier, on Sunday, the joint team launched a drive in the Sundarbans to rescue the 38 fishermen kidnapped by forest robbers near Fairway Buoy of the Bay in



PHOTO: STAR

Narail-Jessore highway saw a three-kilometre-long tailback yesterday, as three loaded trucks got stuck in a large pothole at Tularampur in Narail Sadar upazila. Commuters badly suffer as 14-kilometre portion of the important road has remained in a deplorable condition for a couple of years.

BNP man killed in bomb attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

A BNP man was killed and another injured in a bomb attack at Duttapara Bazar in Jessore Sadar upazila on Sunday night.

The dead, Zihadul Islam Zia, 42, was a member BNP Deyara union unit. The injured, Mohammad Ali, 43, hails from Deyara village.

Police quoted locals as saying that a gang of 10/12 hurled a bomb targeting Zia and Ali while they were sitting at a tea stall at Duttapara Bazar at around 11:30pm. The gang also hit Zia and Ali with sharp weapons and left the scene.

Critically injured Zia died on way to

Jessore Medical College Hospital. Ali was admitted to the hospital and then sent to Dhaka for better treatment.

Saberul Haque Sabu, general secretary of BNP Jessore district unit, demanded immediate arrest of the killers of Zia.

Golam Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Jessore Kotwali Police Station, said Zia might have been killed as a sequel to a previous enmity. "We have launched a drive to arrest the persons involved," the OC added.

Zia's brother Imadul Islam filed a murder case with Sadar Police Station yesterday morning. No one was arrested in connection with the incident as of filing of this report at 5:00pm yesterday.

LIVING BY PLUCKING WATER LILIES



PHOTO: STAR

Collection of water lily, available in ponds and canals during the rainy season, serves as an earning source for poor people. A child holds bunches of the beautiful plant, also a favourite vegetable of rural people, in a water body of Paba upazila in Rajshahi district yesterday.

CHAPAINAWABGANJ

Police file case against 169 Jamaat-Shibir men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Police on Sunday evening filed a case against 169 Jamaat-Shibir men of Shibganj upazila unit with Shibganj police station on charge of attacking police-men.

Of the accused, 19 were named while the rest 150 remained unidentified. Ameer Younus Ali of Shibganj upazila unit of Jamaat, its general secretary Sadekul Islam are among the accused.

Earlier, police arrested 15 Jamaat-Shibir men from their party office at Selimabad in Shibganj municipal area on Sunday evening. The arrestees were identified as Abdul Aziz, Ben zir Ahmed, Shahabuddin, Tipu Sultan, Ripon, Khairul, Mostaque Ahmed, Zahidul Islam, Golam Azam, Monirul Islam,

Abdul Gaffar, Alauddin, Shahidur Rahman, Nurul Islam and Sanaullah.

SI Dulal Uddin of Shibganj police station said, a procession was brought out by Jamaat and Shibir men from Jamaat office at Selimabad on Sunday afternoon without any permission from local administration.

When police tried to stop the procession, the processionists attacked them with brickbats and sticks. Police fired six rounds of tear shells and charged baton on them, triggering a clash. At least 20 people were injured including constables Nurul Islam, Abdur Razzak, Shariful Islam and Shawkatul during a clash between police and Jamaat-Shibir men.

Later, Sub Inspector Dulal Uddin of Shibganj police station filed the case with the police station at around 6:45pm, accusing 169 Jamaat-Shibir men.

AL ACTIVIST KILLING

22 Jubo Dal men sued in Magura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Twenty-two Jubo Dal men, including former joint secretary of Magura municipality unit Jihad Hossain Tikka, have been sued on charge of killing Jubo League (AJL) activist Bachchu Sheikh on Saturday.

Sharifa Begum, wife of Bachchu Sheikh, filed a case with Magura Sadar Police Station at around 9:00 pm on Sunday.

In the case statement, the plaintiff stated that Tofazzel of Atharokhada area in the municipality called her husband out of their house at around 1:00pm and took him to Hazrapur union Parishad (UP) office in Ichhakhada

area under Magura Sadar upazila.

After a few minutes, a group of Jubo Dal men from Niznanduali and Bhaina areas of Magura town reached there, hit Bachchu with sharp weapons and severed tendons of legs, the complainant said, adding that Bachchu died instantly.

Hearing the news, local people rushed to the spot and caught a youth named Shariful Islam, 22, son of Shamsuddin Ahmed of Bhaina area, from there. They later handed him over to the police.

Bachchu, 40, son of late Khorshed Ali Sheikh of Niznanduali area in Magura town, was a member of Jubo League Magura municipality unit.



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