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Saline creeping into croplands

Study reveals 100 rivers, 15pc farmlands already affected; 18 coastal districts in jeopardy

As fresh water flow has tapered off on the upper stream of rivers over the last four decades, due to human intervention mainly in neighbouring India, salinity has intruded into 100 rivers and affected 15 percent of the country's total cropland in the south-western coastal districts.

This was revealed in a study, Soil Salinity Map, by Soil Resource and Development Institute (SRDI) based on data from 2009.

The coastal region had always been saline naturally and now it has become even worse. Back in 1973, as much as 0.83 million hectares of land was saline. The area has now increased to 1.05 million hectares in 93 upazilas, which makes up more than half the coastal land mass in the Ganges floodplain.

Salinity, said the study, has put the health, livelihood and food security of millions of people in 18 coastal districts in jeopardy.

Experts faulted the death of the Garai due to periodic stoppage of water supply by India's Farakka barrage for decades, leading to receding groundwater level, extensive shrimp farming and sea level rise triggered by global warming.

Records of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) show that the water level of the Passur river has increased by 5.6 mm between 1977 and 2009 at Hiron Point of the Sundarbans. Experts attributed this rise to an intrusion by salt water, weakening the flow of fresh water.

The salt water was gradually intruding into the rivers and affecting over 6,200 hectares of farmland (equivalent to 7,140 football fields) on an average annually, the study found.

Published last year, the salinity map was prepared after analysing 2,500 soil and water samples, collected in April-May, 2009 from the entire coast of the country stretching 720 kilometres.

Water in all the rivers in the country's southwest (in the Ganges flood plain) was extremely saline. The salt water had intruded over 100-km on

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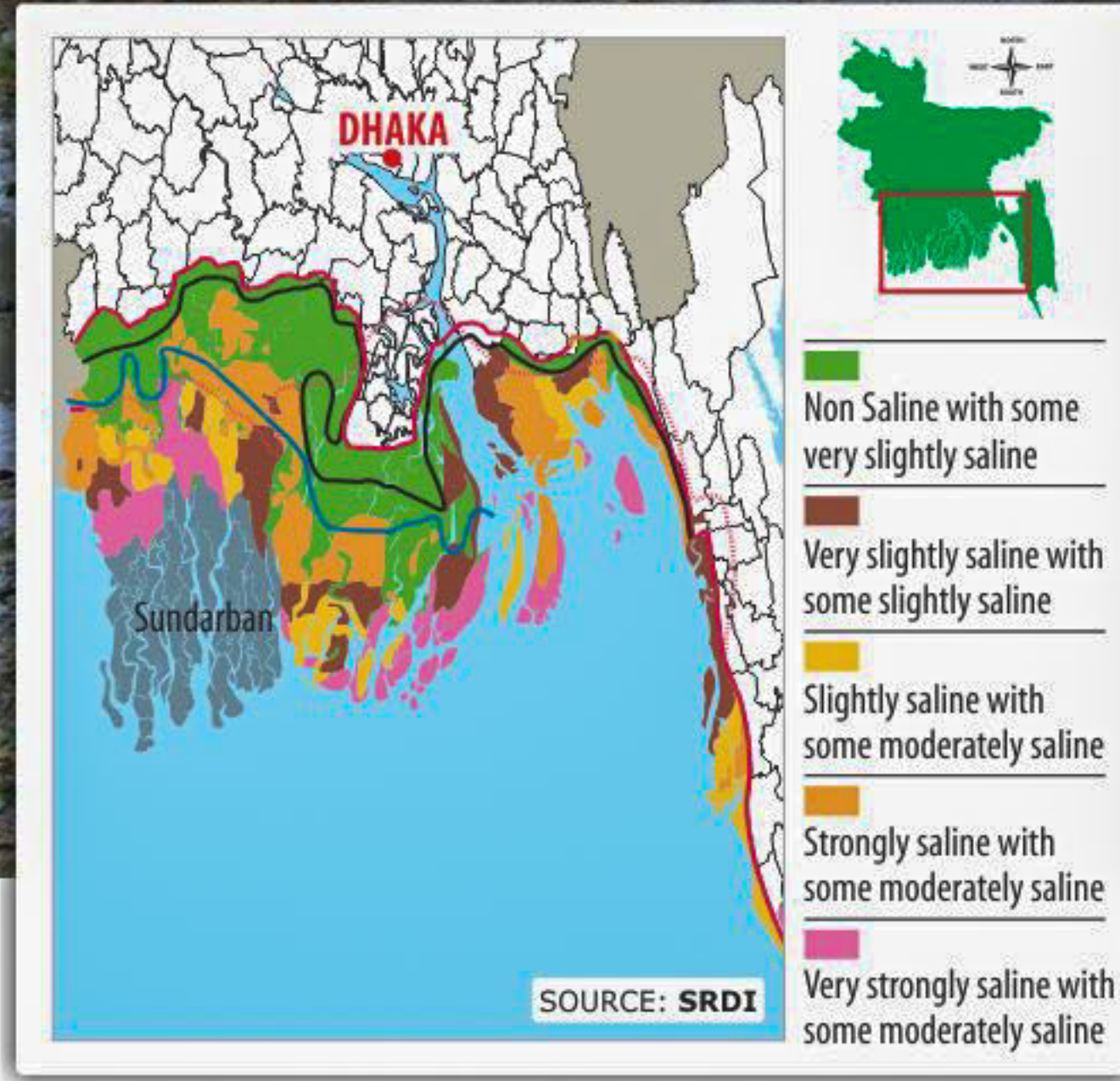
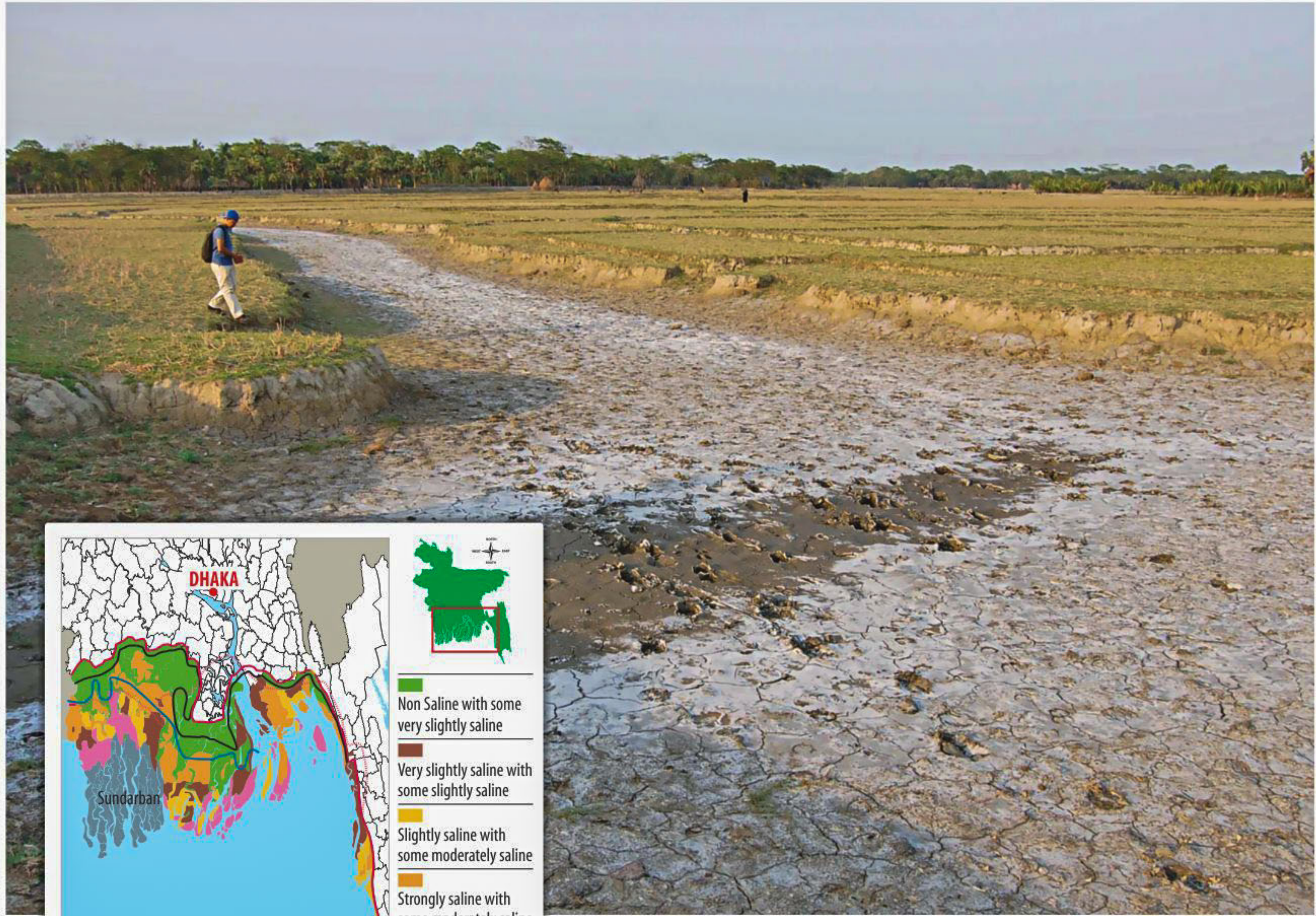


PHOTO: ARIF RAHOMAN
A layer of salt has covered this dried up canal in Pakhimara village of Kalapara, Patuakhali—a mark of salinity intrusion in the coastal belt. The photo was taken in the first week of May.



GMG not clearing Tk 150cr in dues

8 cases filed against it

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

An international aircraft leasing firm and Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh have filed eight cases against GMG Airlines in connection with around Tk 150 crore the carrier owes them.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) lodged seven suits with lower courts while the Los Angeles-based International Lease Finance Corporation (ILFC) filed one with the High Court.

GMG Airlines, which stopped flying on March 30 last year, owes Caab Tk 134.42 crore in charges like landing fees, gate fees, navigation, cargo handling, refuelling, and security fees, Caab officials said.

Of the Tk 134.42 crore, GMG owes Shahjalal International Airport Tk 120.39 crore and Shah Amanat International

Airport in Chittagong Tk 9.47 crore.

The ILFC in its case documents said the airline owes it Tk 14.18 crore for terminating the lease contract for an aircraft ahead of time.

A top Caab official said, "We had repeatedly asked the GMG to pay the dues, but the airline did not pay heed to it. So, we had no choice but to seek legal means to realise the money."

On the Tk 134.42 crore it owes to Caab, GMG Managing Director Shahab Sattar said the principal amount was Tk 48 crore. "The amount the Caab is showing is surcharge and interest accumulated with the principal amount."

On the ILFC case, he said they had paid all the dues until the lease deal was terminated in February, 2012, and that GMG even

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JS POLLS IN FOCUS

Now BNP goes for 'changes'

SHAKHAWAT LITON

BNP plans to come up with some big promises ahead of the next parliamentary polls to bring qualitative change in the country's confrontational political culture as well as the system of governance to free it from corruption.

The ruling Awami League made similar pledges before the 2008 parliamentary election, and those contributed greatly to the party's overwhelming victory in that election. But the AL-led government has failed to deliver on the promises.

Now, BNP is considering these pledges as a means to rebuild its image that had been tainted by unbridled corruption and misrule while the party was in power between 2001 and 2006, a number of BNP policymakers told The Daily Star.

If voted to power, BNP would free the administration from corruption and politicisation, make parliament functional, honour the opposition parties, and their views will be given importance in running the House, they said.

The party would also strengthen the local government system and bring an end to the politics of vengeance.

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I don't want Modi as PM

Says Amartya Sen

TNN, New Delhi

Coming out strongly against Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen yesterday said he does not want him to become India's prime minister as he does not have secular credentials.

The prominent economist also criticised Modi's model of governance saying he did not approve of it.

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Workers busy in giving this old launch a facelift to make it attractive to passengers leaving the capital to enjoy the Eid holidays. The photo was taken at Telghat in Keraniganj, Dhaka, yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

REGAINING GSP Govt to step up factory watch

Four inspectors appointed, another 23 to be recruited

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Appointment of 23 factory inspectors is underway as part of the roadmap for regaining the GSP status in the US market.

The move followed the Obama administration's suspension of the trade benefit on June 27 over poor labour rights and working conditions.

The labour and employment ministry has already appointed four inspectors to fulfil the US government's conditions for reinstatement of the privilege. The conditions were published on Friday by the USTR (United States Trade Representative).

At the moment, only 51 inspectors are tasked with overseeing more than 2 lakh factories across the country.

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Labour law falls short of int'l standards: ILO

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) yesterday expressed discontent over the limited scope for trade unionism and collective bargaining in the amended labour law.

It particularly raised objections to the government's persistence with the 30 percent membership requirement to form a union and failure to extend freedom of association and collective bargaining rights to workers in export processing zones.

The United States, too, made the same observations, demanding that those be addressed should the country want to win back trade facilities worth \$34.7 million a year.

The United Nations agency for labour issues yesterday released a statement conveying its observations on the amended Bangladesh Labour Act passed in parliament on July 15.

The conformity of the revised legislation with international labour standards, however, will be reviewed by the ILO supervisory machinery later in the year, the statement added.

"The amendments did not prohibit discrimination in employment or remuneration, as called for by the ILO supervisory system."

It also expressed disappointment that the law was not amended to prohibit debt bondage by children, to ensure that compulsory labour was not used as punishment for breaches of labour discipline or violations of provisions

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