

Boral river in its death throes

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Once a lifeline, the river Boral in the northern region has lost its water flow in the absence of much-needed dredging work.

The cross dams and sluice gates built on the river in the name of fishing projects in the 1980s virtually turned it into a dying river, killing 30 other tributaries connected to it on its way through Chalan Beel, the largest marshland in the country.

"The Boral was a major source of irrigation and fish resources for people in the region even 30 years ago," Md Mizanur Rahman, secretary of Boral River Movement and a resident of Chatmohar upazila in Pabna, told The Daily Star.

The river is not only losing its navigability but also its breadth. These days, the width has reduced to 200 feet from around 500 feet, as the encroachers have grabbed significant portions of land inside the river in the last three decades.

Earlier on October 6, 2013, a technical committee on Boral River dredging visited four districts in the region along the river. Originating from the river Padma in Rajshahi, it ends up in Jamuna, touching Natore, Pabna and Sirajganj.

After the visit, the committee headed by AKM Mozammel Haque, the then chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on land, placed seven recommendations to the 'River Taskforce' on October 22 last year on bringing back navigability to the river.

The recommendations included the removal of four embankments at Mothura, Natunbazar, Bothor and Ramnagar points in Chatmohar upazila; removal of obstacles between Boral and Gumani rivers; stopping the initiative to set up new sluice gate at Nazirpur point; dredging the rivers and canals connected to the Boral for smooth water flow.

Dr. Abdul Matin, secretary of the Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) and a member of the river taskforce, on Wednesday said the

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It is hard to imagine that this water hyacinth infested water body is the Boral river that flows between the mighty Padma and Jamuna rivers through Chalanbeel. Encroachment, inset, and poorly placed sluice gates and dams on the river are now choking Chalanbeel as well as the river. The photos were taken from Chatmohar upazila in Pabna.

PHOTO: STAR



ENCROACHING BORAL Politicians blamed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a programme yesterday said successive governments had failed to protect the country's rivers as the political will was lacking.

They came up with the observation at a meeting on saving the river Boral at the auditorium of Bangladesh Economic Society in the capital.

With support of the Oxfam Bangladesh, the Riverine People organised the event chaired by Dr Abdul Matin, secretary general of the Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA).

A researcher on the river Boral, Mahbub Siddiq, said leaders and activists of two main political parties had been grabbing the river and turning it into ponds of stagnant water.

Dr Qazi Khaliqzaman, chairman of Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), said there were plenty of laws, rules and guidelines for the protection of rivers.

But it was likely that the river grabbers would be above the law due to their political connections, he added.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA), said the politicians had lavished a lot of words for the river

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Jamaat man shot in Ctg gunfight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Jamaat-e-Islami cadre was shot and injured in a "gunfight" between party activists and policemen in Satkania upazila of Chittagong early yesterday.

Mohammad Nasiruddin, 40, of Alinagar village in the upazila, was first taken to Satkania Upazila Health Complex from where he was shifted to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH).

Shahida Siddiqua, a physician at the upazila health complex, confirmed that Nasir and three policemen, who had sustained minor injuries, had been brought to the hospital.

Since Nasir had a bullet in the right leg, he was referred to CMCH but the others were given treatment

and released, Shahida said.

Nasiruddin is an accused in three cases -- one filed with Satkania Police Station for attacking police during a Jamaat-called countrywide hartal on September 18 and two others for vandalism during hartal hours, said Khaled Hossain, officer-in-charge of Satkania Police Station.

Police arrested Nasiruddin at his residence around 12:30 am. According to the information extracted from him, a team of Satkania police then went to raid Dubipara village adjacent to Alinagar to recover firearms, the OC said.

As soon as the law enforcers along with Nasiruddin reached a pond close to a hideout of Jamaat-Shibir men around 4:00 am, his

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14 confined workers

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Bengal Overseas and Idea International -- charged each of them Tk 4 lakh for the overseas recruitment.

However, upon their arrival in Iraq, the employers could not provide them with jobs and kept them confined to the accommodation facility. Though they can use telephones, they are not allowed to step outside the facility.

Two of the migrants managed to escape the confinement. They, however, did not return home and nobody knows their current whereabouts.

Following a series of demonstrations and pleas of the families and relatives of the migrants in Dhaka since July last year, M Kodia Co General Trading sent 11 workers home on November 30 last year.

Upon return, they filed a human trafficking case the next day, which led to the arrests of Joynal Abedin, chairman of Bangladesh Migrants' Foundation for its involvement in the

migration process and Nasir Khan of Meghna Trade International.

The returnees staged demonstrations in Dhaka on December 14 last year and January 22 this year demanding immediate repatriation of the 14 stranded workers.

After failing to press the government through the demonstrations, Shaon Ali, one of the returnees, managed to hold a meeting with Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain on January 22.

"The minister had ordered the officials concerned to repatriate the 14 workers in four days. He also had said if the employer does not provide them with tickets, the government will do that for them," Shaon told The Daily Star.

Ten days have passed since the assurance of the minister and the stranded workers are yet to be brought home.

Dr Zafar Ahmed Khan, secretary to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, said the repatriation process requires some time.

"We cannot do everything so quickly even if we want," he told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that it had taken a month for the government to bring the 14 workers back home.

While talking to this correspondent over the phone, Shafiqul Islam also said all of the workers there were getting weak -- both physically and mentally. Some of them even had fallen sick and no medical care was available.

"None would care if we die here. So, we stopped eating," Shafiqul said from Najaf.

Meanwhile, one Haider, who works with M Kodia Co General Trading, yesterday visited them yesterday and said he would provide air tickets to them a month later, Shafiqul added.

Akheri Munajat

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Some 107 marriages were completed through a similar ceremony during the first phase of the Ijtema held between January 24 and 26.

Engineer Giasuddin, one of the organisers of the congregation, said they had arranged the dowry-free marriages as brides and bridegrooms showed interests in such marriages.

On the second day of the gathering, a large number of devotees from home and abroad attended the prayers on the 160-acre land on the bank of the river Turag.

The second day's programme started with the delivery of sermons, prayer for exaltation and welfare of the Muslim Ummah, and recitation from the holy Quran and Hadith.

Maulana Abdul Wahab of Pakistan began the day's sermons after Fajr prayers.

There is a restriction on the participation of women in the Ijtema. However, hundreds of women from across the country have rented rooms of houses adjacent to the Ijtema ground to listen to sermons. Meanwhile, three more devotees

died on the second day. With these deaths, eight devotees died at the Ijtema venue since Thursday.

Nur Mohammad, 70, of Sonaimuri upazila in Noakhali, and Mujibur Rahman, 55, of Mirpur-2 in the capital, died of cardiac arrest.

Another devotee, Abdur Rahman, 60, of Chapainawabganj, was killed in a road accident at Tongi Bazar yesterday morning.

Sakhawat Hossain, assistant superintendent of Gazipur traffic police, said to facilitate the Akheri Munajat, the vehicular movement will be restricted at Bhogra bypass point on Dhaka- Mymensingh highway, at Mirer Bazar point on Dhaka-Tongi-Narsingdi-Sylhet highway and at Ashulia bridge point on Baribadh road from 5:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Several mobile courts filed six cases and fined different restaurants adjoining the Ijtema ground Tk 30,000 for selling adulterated food and for the unhygienic conditions of the restaurants.

At a press briefing yesterday, organisers of the Ijtema demanded permanent allotment of the 160-acre land to hold the yearly congregation.

Violence rocks Thailand

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At least two explosions were heard in the area before the firing began.

"The clash point is the intersection, gun shots seemed to be fired from both sides," said Sunai Phasuk, a senior researcher with New York-based Human Rights Watch, who was at the scene.

He said a reporter was among the injured.

The firing started after talks between the rival groups broke down in the area, which is roughly split between Yingluck's supporters and those backing the opposition protests, Sunai added.

"This is what we forecast for tomorrow. The unrest could flare up into violence very easily," he told AFP, adding that protesters had been evacuated and tensions appeared to have calmed after nightfall.

At least 10 people have been killed and hundreds injured in clashes, grenade attacks and drive-by shootings since the opposition rallies began three months ago.

The unrest is the latest round of political instability to hit Thailand since royalist generals ousted Thaksin

seven years ago, unleashing a cycle of sporadically-violent street protests.

In 2010 clashes and a military crackdown on pro-Thaksin Red Shirts demonstrating against the previous government left more than 90 people dead and nearly 1,900 injured.

The backdrop to the protests is a years-long political struggle pitting the kingdom's royalist establishment -- backed by the courts and the military -- against Thaksin, a billionaire tycoon-turned-politician.

The current protesters are mainly made up of Thaksin's foes in the Bangkok middle classes and southerners, backed by factions in the elite.

They are demanding Yingluck's elected government step down to make way for an unelected "people's council" that would oversee loosely defined reforms to tackle corruption and alleged vote-buying.

"The government is corrupt. If we let the vote go on then they will come back, so we should not hold the election," said opposition protester Sirames, who gave only one name, at the Lak Si office before the violence broke out.

Yingluck's opponents say she is a

puppet for her elder brother Thaksin Shinawatra, who lives in Dubai to avoid a prison term for graft.

The protests were initially triggered by a failed amnesty bill that could have allowed Thaksin to return without going to jail.

Around 130,000 police are set to protect 93,000 polling stations across the country today.

Yingluck is likely to win the poll, helped by strong support in Thaksin's north and northeastern heartlands.

But uncertainty hangs over the results, with unrest threatening polling and several constituencies without a candidate.

Authorities yesterday said protesters were also blocking ballot boxes being delivered to polling stations across southern Thailand -- the stronghold of the opposition Democrat Party.

The elite-backed Democrats -- which has not won an elected majority in around two decades -- is boycotting the election.

Advance voting was blocked in several parts of the capital last Sunday and some 440,000 people were prevented from casting ballots. They are due to vote on February 23.

Dhirendranath

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Bangalee, who first demonstrated the sagacity to ask that Bangla be adopted as one more language in the conduct of parliamentary proceedings. He went further, to demand that Bangla be the lingua franca of the state of Pakistan. His reasoning was based on the reality on the ground. Bangla, he reminded the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on February 25, 1948 was the language of the majority component of Pakistan's population. While submitting his motion in the assembly,

Dhirendranath made it clear that he was not approaching the question from a provincial point of view. And then he moved on:

"Out of six crores and ninety lakhs of people inhabiting this state, four crores and forty lakhs of people speak the Bengali language. So, Sir, what should be the state language of the state? The state language of the state should be the language which is used by the majority of the people of the state, and for that, Sir, I consider that the Bengali language is a lingua franca of our state..."

Jamaat's hartal

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A Chittagong court on Thursday handed down the capital punishment on 14 people, including ex-ministers Lutfozzaman Babar and Nizami and former top intelligence officials, for smuggling 10 truckloads of arms into the port city in 2004 in the last BNP-led government's tenure.

The 14 convicts were also given life sentences for possessing illegal firearms and ammunition in another case filed over the arms haul.

return to their destinations and the Hindu community could observe the Puj.

It, however, will stage peaceful demonstrations across the country on Monday protesting what the party says is the government's conspiracy to kill Jamaat ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami.

The hartal was called on Friday in protest at the death penalty of Nizami in the 10-truck arms haul case.



A soap factory at Kosaituli in the capital's Armanitola in flames yesterday evening. It took 10 fire engines to contain the blaze close to a residential area. No casualties have been reported.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

BNP focuses

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Before waging the movement, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and other top brass of the party will also visit different parts of the country to mobilise public support in favour of their demand.

Mahbubur Rahman said through these visits will give the party grassroots new directions and spur them to forge a peaceful movement to "restore democracy in the country".

"The council will also give us a scope to examine our previous actions and correct the past mistakes that may have been made," he added.

Insiders, however, said the party fears that infighting might take hold like it did before the last central council in 2009.

Intra-party feuds and conflicts had marred a number of councils of the grassroots committees of the BNP.

Leaders and activists hope the tested and dedicated people will be evaluated and picked for different important posts through the councils this time.