

# Pure water crisis across half of Pirojpur district

## Arsenic, salinity and iron wreak havoc

HABIBUR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Every morning Sabita Rani Mandal, 45, of Paschim Baniary village of Matibhanga union in Pirojpur's Nazirpur upazila, collects three jars of tube well water for her household. But the water must be stored for three days before being fit to drink. Like all families in the area, hers will have to wait for the iron content of the water to settle in the bottom of the jar.

With no deep tube wells in the area there is no way around the problem. According to public health engineering department officials, the Bangladesh standard for iron that is acceptable for human consumption is up to 1 milligram per litre; but in shallow tube well water from across Nazirpur, Mathbaria, Zianagar and Pirojpur Sadar upazilas iron content as high as 8.80 milligrams per litre has been detected.

Indeed water from deep tube wells is also often tainted. A deep tube well sample from Belua village in Nazirpur was found by public health engineering officials to contain 1.1 milligrams of iron per litre.

"Excessive iron consumption over a long period will result in health problems," says Zianagar upazila's health and family planning officer Dr. Sankar Kumar Gosh. "Iron increases acidity and harms kidneys. It makes teeth and nails black and weak and causes hair to become sticky, skin to become rough." A further difficulty with iron-heavy water is that it does not react well with soap, making general cleanliness a challenge.

Iron may be bad news but for Pirojpur's people the worse news is that arsenic and high salinity also contaminate water supplies.

According to public health engineering officials, arsenic contamination is to be found in water supplies in all seven of Pirojpur's



PHOTO: STAR

Hardly aware of the health hazard posed by arsenic, salinity and iron contamination, a woman collects drinking water from a tube-well at Madhya Joypur village in Nazirpur upazila under Pirojpur district.

upazilas, affecting from 15% of shallow tube wells in Mathbaria to 36% of shallow tube wells in Bhandaria.

Many tube wells exceed the 0.03 milligrams per litre in arsenic content limit for drinking water. "If we find arsenic content as high as that," says Md Rustum Ali, sub-engineer in Pirojpur Sadar upazila, "we forbid people to draw the water." In Pirojpur Sadar's Kadamtala union, one tube well recorded 0.07 milligrams per litre of arsenic, he adds.

Aware that arsenic is a health hazard which in the long term causes damage to lungs, kidneys, skin and liver, and may cause heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes, villagers in many arsenic affected areas use shallow tube well water only for household work. As a result, some homes have no choice but to rely on pond water, often without pursuing the basic health precaution of boiling it first, for drinking.

"Our tube wells contain high levels of arsenic," says Sarmin Sultan, 38, a housewife of Kadamtala village in

Pirojpur Sadar upazila. "Therefore we collect drinking water from a nearby canal in the dry season when pond water levels are low."

The salinity problem meanwhile is prevalent in five of the seven upazilas and particularly acute in Mathbaria, Zianagar and Nazirpur. "People cannot drink the deep tube well water in many areas due to salinity," says Ali.

With the highest level of acceptable salinity set at 1000 milligrams per litre, wells in Pirojpur Sadar with up to 2600 milligrams per litre and wells in Mathbaria with as much as 5,000 milligrams per litre offer significant health risk. Consuming saline water over a long period can cause kidney damage, and health problems like hypertension and diabetes.

"From childhood I have been drinking tube well water," says Bidhan Chandro Biswas, 55, of Nazirpur's Baniary village. He currently suffers high blood pressure and other physical problems.

In many areas of Pirojpur district the only safe drink-

ing water is rainwater, which cannot be stored to cover the whole year. "In rainy season we get pure water," says Md Hafizur Rahman from Jankhali village in Mathbaria. "We try to store it but in the dry season we still face a crisis."

"From about February to July saline water fills rivers and canals," says Hazrat Ali, a local of the same village. "The situation only improves after the rain begins."

"Within 6 months wells of maximum depth often draw saline water," says Pirojpur's executive engineer Md Yasin Arafat. "Deep tube wells are not the full solution. It's really an emergency to establish a desalination water purification plant and parallel infrastructure to remove the arsenic and iron. Such systems can prove effective, but are costly to implement."

In the meantime the local government, rural development and cooperative ministry plans to improve reserved drinking water supplies sourced from rain water, systems that should be effective soon, adds Arafat.

# Ex-Jubo League leader murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The body of a former Jubo League leader was found with marks of stab injuries at Nishipur village in Gangni upazila of Meherpur district yesterday.

The deceased, Shukur Ali, 47, former publicity secretary of Bamundi union unit of Jubo League, youth front of ruling Awami League, was a resident of the village.

Quoting victim's family members, police said Shukur went out of his house on Friday afternoon and did not return home since then.

Locals found the body floating in a ditch of the village around 7:30am and informed the police who went to the spot and recovered the body. Officer-in-Charge Akram Hossain of Gangni Police Station said.

Shukur was accused in two extortion cases filed with the police station, the OC said.

The body bore several stab injuries, he added.

# Lalmonirhat Ijtema ends

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A three-day long Ijtema, an Islamic congregation in Lalmonirhat town, ended yesterday with the Akheri Munajat joined by thousand of Muslims from home and abroad.

The devotees sought forgiveness and blessings from Allah for Muslims around the world and the entire mankind.

Arranged by the district Tabligh Jammaat, the congregation began at the Collectorate Playground in the town on Thursday afternoon, where several thousand devotees gathered.

# 1 killed, 50 houses gutted, 30 injured in Habiganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A youth was killed, 50 houses were torched and around 30 people injured in clashes between groups of villagers in two upazilas of Habiganj district.

In Bahubal upazila, police and witnesses said there was a longstanding dispute between Tobarak Miah, 45, of Noyo village and Khurshed Miah of nearby Mudaharpur village over a piece of land.

As a sequel to the dispute, the two groups engaged in a clash at around 11:00am yesterday, in which around 30 people were injured.

Of them, 15 were rushed to Bahubal Upazila Health Complex while seven were sent to Habiganj Sadar

Hospital in critical condition.

"We rushed to the spot and fired rubber bullets to bring the situation under control," said Mossaraf Hosain, officer-in-charge of Bahubal Police Station.

In Habiganj Sadar upazila, at least 50 houses were torched over the death of a youth at Chotto Bahula village in the upazila on Friday.

According to eyewitnesses and police sources, an altercation broke out between supporters of one Altaf Miah, 34, of Chotto Bahula village and Kutub Uddin, 45, of the same village over a land dispute in the morning.

Police and locals said there had been a longstanding dispute between the two

groups over the matter.

One ear of Kutub Uddin was severed by the rivals two months ago, locals said.

In retaliation, Kutub Uddin's group cut off an ear and a hand of Abdul Aziz, a supporter of Altaf Miah, on February 19. Aziz succumbed to his injuries at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital on Friday.

Outraged by the death of Aziz, his group went berserk and set fire to 50 houses belonging to the rivals in the evening.

Nazim Uddin, officer-in-charge of Habiganj Police Station, said, on information, Habiganj and Shayestaganj fire-fighting units rushed to the spot and doused the blaze in three hours.



PHOTO: STAR

A scene of destruction caused by arsonists in Habiganj Sadar upazila on Friday evening.

# Labourers resume work at BCIC godown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Labourers at Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) fertiliser godown at Mahendranagar area in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila called off their indefinite strike after 30 hours on Friday.

The labourers withdrew the strike as they were assured that they would get their arrear wages of the last seven months and also an increase in their wage by the BCIC authorities, fertiliser dealers' association and labourer handling contractor, labourers said. The indefinite strike was called on Thursday morning, they said, adding that 90 labourers work in the godown.

"We joined work as our demand was taken positively by BCIC authorities," said labourer Maminul Islam Babu, also the president of the labourers' union. "We have been living in hard-

ship because we did not get wages for the last seven months," he said, hoping that they will get their arrears very soon.

Sumon Sawdagar, general secretary of the labourers' union, said labourers will go for tougher programme if their demand is not met soon.

Maniruzzaman Manir, general secretary of district unit of Bangladesh Sangjukt Sramik Federation, said the labourers get only Tk 18 for loading one tonne of fertiliser. They demand Tk 40- Tk 45 for loading one tonne, he said, urging the BCIC authorities to take steps to finalise the wages.

Abdul Hanif, in-charge of BCIC fertiliser godown at Mahendranagar, said labourers of the godown will be paid their arrear wages by the first week of March this year. "Demand of increasing wage of the labourers will depend on the rate given by the labourers' handling contractor," he said.

# SNIPPETS

## 24 Jamaat-Shibir men held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Police in separate drives arrested 24 activists of Jamaat-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir from five upazilas of the district in the last two days. Of them, 12 are from Sadar upazila, five from Kaliganj, three from Shaillakupa, one from Kotchandpur and three others from Maheshpur upazila. They were arrested on charge of planning subversive activities, said Additional Superintendent of Police Ajbahar Ali Sheikh.

## BAU student stabbed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A student of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) was stabbed by drug addicts on the campus in the district on Friday. The injured is Rezwana Hasan Rashik, 20, a 3rd year student of Food Engineering and Rural Development Department of the university. He was admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. Prof Md Zakir Hossain, proctor of the university, said Rashik was on his way to his hall on the campus around 7:30pm. When he reached Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Energy (BINA) area, two drug addicts waylaid Rashik and demanded money from him, said the proctor. On refusal, they stabbed him, leaving him injured. Police arrested four people in this connection.

## Mosquito killing drive begins

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A month-long mosquito killing drive began in the district yesterday. Manikganj municipality mayor Gazi Kamrul Huda Selim inaugurated the drive by using a fogger machine in a canal near Manikganj Bazar around 10:00am.

## UP chairman hacked

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A union parishad chairman was hacked allegedly by his wife following a family feud at Pachar village in Gouripur upazila of the district yesterday. The injured is Dulal Ahmed, 45, chairman of Sahanati Union Parishad. He has three wives. Quoting family members, Akhter Morshed, officer-in-charge of Gouripur Police Station, said in the morning, Dulal was hacked by his second wife Sumi following an altercation over a family matter. Critically injured Dulal was rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. Police arrested Sumi from the spot, said the OC.

## Woman commits 'suicide'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A woman allegedly committed suicide at Dhankora village in Saturia upazila of the district on Friday. The deceased is Laily Begum, 60, of the village. She was mentally sick, said her son Saiful Islam. Laily took pesticide at night. She was rushed to Manikganj Sadar Hospital where she died later, said Habibullah Sarker, officer-in-charge of Saturia Police Station.

## 2 fined for taking drug

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

A mobile court here yesterday fined a schoolteacher and his associate Tk 5000 each for taking drug. The convicts are Ferdous Alam, 40, assistant teacher of Rabeya Balika Bidya Niketon of the district town, and his associate Abdur Razzaque, 45, son of late Sirajul Islam of the town, said Inspector of district drug control directorate Zahedul Islam.

# 10 injured in clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

At least 10 people were injured as two groups of Awami League men clashed on Friday evening over controlling sand lifting at Najirganj in Sujanagar upazila of the district.

Police and locals said men of the president of upazila unit of AL Abul Kashem, and secretary of upazila unit of AL Abdul Wahab have been trying to take control of the sand field at Najirganj.

Both groups, armed with lethal weapons, confronted each other in Najirganj ferry ghat area at about 7:00pm and locked in a clash that left 10 people injured.

Of the injured, Amirul Islam, 35, Abul Pasha, 29, Mostafa Kamal, 34, Sayed Rahman, 35, and Nazir Khan, 40, have been admitted to Sujanagar Upazila Health Complex.

Md Shakil Uddin, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sujanagar Police Station, said, "We are

investigating the incident. The case will be recorded after investigation."

## 2 bodies found

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police recovered the body of a day labourer from Bathulee village in Delduar upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased, Shaktiranjana Mondal, 50, was a resident of the village.

Quoting victim's daughter Mukta Begum, police said Shaktiranjana went missing while he on his way home from Tangail town on Friday.

Villagers spotted his body at a field near his house in the morning and informed the police, OC Mosharraf Hossain of Delduar Police Station said.

Away in Naogaon, Jahurul Khan, 35, a rickshaw-puller, was found dead at Bankan village in Atrai upazila yesterday, reports our Chapainawabganj correspondent.

# Students protest attack on fellows in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Teachers and students of Char Chaplee Islamia High school in Kalapara upazila of the district formed a human chain on the school premises yesterday, demanding exemplary punishment of the culprits who attacked three fellow students of the institution the day before.

The injured are Md Sohag and Shahin, SSC examinees of the school, and Sahin, a Class X student of the institution.

Of them, seriously injured Shahin was admitted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Police and locals said an altercation took place between two groups of

students over taking control of a club named 'Joybanga Club' in the area on Friday morning.

At one stage, rival group

allegedly led by Tariqul Mridha attacked the three with lethal weapons, leaving them injured.

Punitive action will be



PHOTO: STAR

Students of Char Chaplee High School in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district form a human chain in front of the school yesterday demanding punishment to the criminals who injured three students of the school the day before.