

Safe drinking water crisis in 80 punjee villages

Urgent sinking of tube-wells needed to meet the problem

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

People of around 80 punjee (betel plantations) villages under seven upazilas of Moulvibazar district face acute crisis of safe drinking water as there is no tubewell in those areas.

Indigenous people (Khasi and Garo), mostly betel leaf farmers, have to collect salty water from over 170 wells they dug on the sandy land.

Many people, including children, suffer from various water-borne diseases as they drink impure and salty water, Lari Lamin, 27, a housewife of Nahar punjee, said. "We collect salty water from a well for drinking, cooking and other household works," she told this correspondent during his recent visit to the area.

Thiari Suting, 45, another housewife, said they are suffering from various

water-borne diseases like dysentery and diarrhoea as they have no other alternative but to drink impure and salty water.

Visiting Kukijuri punjee, 70 kilometres from Moulvibazar district town, this correspondent found men and women collecting water from wells for drinking and using for household purposes.

"Finding no way, I and my younger brother dug a 250-foot-deep well to overcome water crisis. But drinking water from wells often causes water-borne diseases, especially among children," said Sefhola Richil, 45, a villager.

Most of the children suffered from diarrhoea and dysentery in the last one month due to drinking salty and impure water from the wells, villager Tomas Suting said, adding that the families could not provide medicines

for their affected children as they live hand-to-mouth.

"We face acute crisis of safe drinking water for want of tubewells. Water that we collect from the wells is unfit to drink," he said.

"Now we find it difficult to take bath and wash our clothes after doing household chores and agricultural works as water level in the wells is low. We are suffering a lot due to the water crisis," said Johninul Kongwang, headman of Choltacherra punjee.

"We are used to struggling for water every season. The hills that we have selected for planting jhum are too far away from the water sources," said Probin Areng, head teacher of Kukijuri Punjee Education Centre of Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar.

Bably Talang, general secretary of KUBORAZ Inter Punjee Development

Association of Khasi people, said around 18 thousand Khasi and Garo indigenous people in 80 punjees under seven upazilas of Moulvibazar district face acute crisis of safe drinking water in the winter as there is no tubewell in those areas.

Bijoy Bunarji, chairman of Rajghat Union Parishad, said people of punjees under the union are facing acute crisis of safe drinking water as there is no tubewell in the area. "We requested the upazila administration several times to ensure safe drinking water for the villagers by sinking tubewells, but to no effect," the chairman told this correspondent. "The water in the wells is unfit for human consumption," he added.

Kamrul Hasan, deputy commissioner of Moulvibazar, did not receive the call when this correspondent tried to contact him.



Houses lie mangled and trees uprooted at Joy Bangla Bazar in Tarati union of Muktagachha upazila under Mymensingh district as a nor'wester lashed the area on Wednesday night.

Minor girl raped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

An eight-year-old girl was allegedly violated by her neighbour at Dilalerpara village under Fulkocha union in Melandah upazila of the district yesterday morning.

The victim is a Class II student at a local government primary school, and daughter of a day-labourer.

Victim's father said he and his wife went out of their house at the village for work at around 6:00am, keeping their daughter alone.

Shahid Miah, 35, a neighbour of the victim, entered the house and raped the girl, who is undergoing treatment at Jamalpur General Hospital, police said.

AL activist killed, 10 hurt in pre-polls clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An Awami League (AL) activist was killed and 10 others were injured in a clash between the supporters of AL nominated and rebel chairman candidates at Dahkula village in Alampur union under Sadar upazila of the district yesterday.

The election to Alampur Union Parishad is scheduled to be held on May 7.

The deceased was identified as Laltu Mollah, 55, a supporter of the rebel candi-

date, police and locals said.

Zoynal Abedin, additional superintendent of police (ASP), said supporters of AL-nominated candidate Akteruzzaman, also general secretary of Kushtia Sadar upazila unit of AL, launched an attack on the men of rebel candidate Serajul Islam, during campaigning at the village at around 10:30am.

Both groups, equipped with lethal weapons locked in a clash, leaving at least 11 people from both sides injured.

Of the injured, Laltu Mollah, a supporter of Serajul Islam, also office secretary of Kushtia Sadar unit of Jubo League, was hit on the head with sharp weapons. He was taken to Kushtia General Hospital where he died at around 11:45am.

On information, police rushed to the spot and dispersed the clashing groups. The other injured were admitted to the hospital.

Police have been deployed in the area to avert further untoward incident, the ASP said.



A visibly shocked Sajal Kumar Das gives a bleak look at his patal field, destroyed by miscreants in the wee hours yesterday, at Bharahat village in Panchbibi upazila under Joypurhat district.

Boy fined for carrying machete in schoolbag

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A mobile court fined a schoolboy Tk 5,000 for carrying a machete in his schoolbag in Sakhipur upazila of the district on Wednesday.

The convict is Manik, a Class IX student of Boali High School, said Abdullah, officer-in-charge of Sakhipur Police Station.

Executive Magistrate Arifa Siddika, who led the court, also fined Manik's classmate Uzzal and Rubel, elder brother of Uzzal, Tk 2,000 each for helping the boy in the crime.

On April 24, Manik had an altercation with his fellow students at the Baishakhi fair on the school premises.

As a sequel to the conflict, Manik entered the classroom with a machete in his bag on Wednesday morning.

Other students of the class then detained Manik and his friend Uzzal and informed the teachers about the matter.

On information, police rushed to the spot and arrested the trio. They were later produced before the court which punished them, said the OC.

Lightning kills 2

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Two people were killed and at least three others injured when a streak of lightning struck their small boat in the middle of the Jamuna River in Fulchhari upazila of the district on Wednesday night.

Quoting the co-passengers of the boat, police said a thunderbolt hit the boat with 10/12 passengers onboard in the middle of the river near Zigabari area around 11:00pm, leaving Golap and Bhikhu dead and three other injured.



Popular summer fruit bangi is on good sale during the ongoing heat wave. The photo was taken from Naldanga Police Station intersection in Natore district yesterday.

Underage girl 'forced' to marry policeman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A policeman of Dinajpur Kotwali Police Station married an underage girl, who appeared at her SSC examinations this year, allegedly through coercion.

Earlier on Tuesday afternoon, Mostafa Kamal, a wireless operator of the police station, allegedly picked up the 16-year-old girl on way to tuition, confined her to a house in Fakirpara area of Dinajpur town, and beat her to make her agree to marry him.

Later Kamal dropped the girl at her home in the evening.

Seeing injury marks and hearing about the torture, her parents admitted her to Dinajpur General Hospital

at 8:00pm on Tuesday.

Her father went to the police station to file a case but police officials created pressure on him to 'settle' the matter, asking him to marry off the daughter to the said policeman, said a relative of the victim girl.

Finding no option, the girl's parents lastly agreed, and the marriage was held against her will at a house of Khetripara area in Dinajpur town on Wednesday night amid secrecy.

"Kamal used to disturb my daughter on the way to and from school and tutors for the last one year," said the father.

Marufa Begum, general secretary of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad's Dinajpur chapter, said it is a serious

offence to conduct the marriage of an underage girl, that too after coercion and torture.

ATM Kalequzzaman, officer in charge of Dinajpur Kotwali Police Station, said, "We did not play any role for the marriage. Rather the parents and relatives of the girl requested me to find out an amicable solution."

"The policeman has been withdrawn from duty over the alleged assault. Legal action will be taken if the parents file any case regarding the incident," he said.

Abdur Rahman, upazila nirbahi officer of Dinajpur Sadar, said, "Arranging marriage of an underage girl is an offence. It is still possible to take action against the wrongdoing."

MYMENSINGH MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL

Lone radiotherapy machine inoperative for months

MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

The lone radiotherapy machine for treating cancer patients at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital has remained out of order for the last eight months, much to the suffering of the patients.

Purchased in 1996, the machine occasionally went out of order from 2002, and was repaired, but it stopped working completely eight months ago.

Karpoor Nahar, 55, a cancer patient, who completed the chemotherapy course at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH), has been waiting for three months for the machine to be repaired.

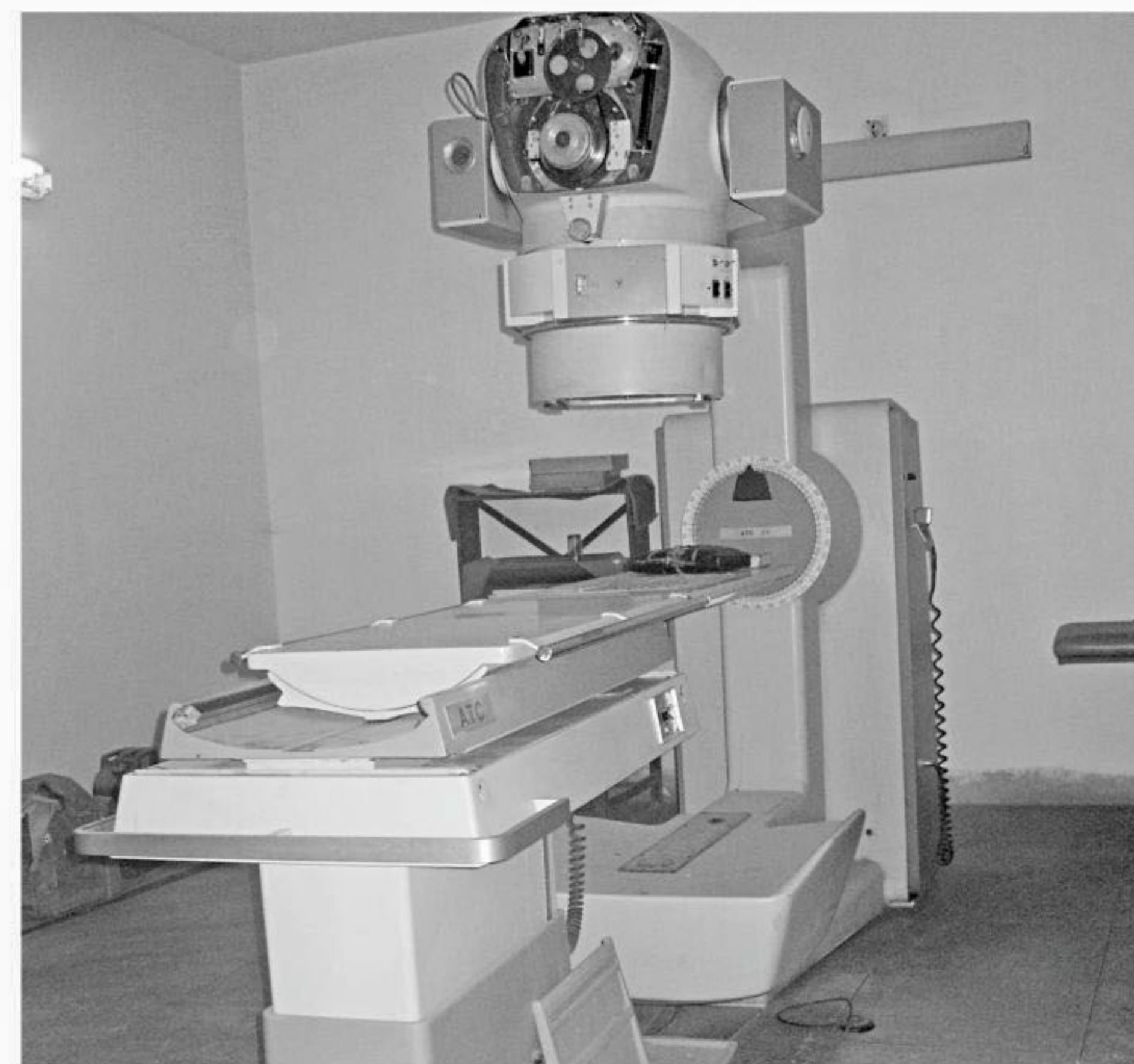
Karpoor, wife of Abdul Jalil of Churkhai in Mymensingh Sadar upazila, said "We were asked to go to Dhaka for radiotherapy three months ago, but we cannot afford to go there," said Jalil.

Mannes Ali, 50, a rickshaw-puller, and Md Mizan, a vegetable vendor from Mymensingh town, were also worried that they would not be able to get treatment because of the inoperative radiotherapy machine.

Dr Md Aminul Islam, a cancer specialist and associate professor of Oncology Department of MMCH, said Tk 30 lakh is needed for servicing the radiotherapy machine.

The money was allocated by the government in the current and previous fiscal years, but the MMCH authorities allegedly did not take initiatives for servicing the machine and the money was returned, Dr Islam added.

Letters were written to the hospital director several



The lone radiology machine at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, lying inoperative for the last six months.

times in the last couple of years, but to no effect, the doctor further said.

Hospital sources said there are two cancer wards at the department with 13-bed facilities, including eight for males, but there is no patient admitted there now as radiotherapy can't be done.

All patients are referred to Dhaka for radiotherapy, but many could not get appointment in time at government hospitals in Dhaka, sources said.

Earlier, at least 60 patients visited the department every day but now the number has reduced sharply. The department has outdoor facilities but there is no medical officer or resident surgeon posted

there.

A cancer patient needs Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000 to undergo month-long radiotherapy at a government hospital, while private hospitals charge around Tk 1 lakh, sources said.

Patients have to pay only Tk 600 per dose in the hospital for chemotherapy, while private clinics take Tk 20,000 to Tk 30,000, they added.

A hospital source also alleged that vested quarters who have nexus with the private clinics and hospitals are also active to keep the machine dysfunctional to enjoy handsome commission.

Prof Dr Saiful Alam, head of Radiotherapy Department, said Prof Dr

Deen Mohammad Nurul Islam, director general of health, visited the hospital on April 10 and assured the authorities that he would arrange a new machine immediately.

"We need three machines -- two Cobalt-60 machines and a Linear Escalator -- to handle the huge pressure of patients from Mymensingh, Sylhet and the northern regions," Dr Saiful said.

Contacted, MMCH Director Brig Gen Nasir Uddin Ahmed said a new radiotherapy machine has already been procured and it would be installed at the hospital within a month.