

DIMLA IN NILPHAMARI

Thousands at health risk as rock crushers pollute air

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

A staggering 300 rock crushing machines are operating round the clock in Dimla upazila under the district, putting around 50 thousand people of ten villages at serious health hazard due to air and sound pollution.

On a visit to the area, it was noticed that people of Sutibari, Dakkhin Kharibari, Dalia, Motir Bazar, Kalirdanga, Chowdhury Para, Khaga Kharibari, Tunir Haat, Purbo Satnai Colony, and Tepa Kharibari villages are highly affected due to operation of unauthorised rock crushing machines.

Ten to twenty workers are engaged for each machine, working hard from 8:00am to 6:00pm for daily wage of Tk 200.

These people, many of whom are women, work

without wearing safety equipment like masks, spectacles, gloves, shoes, and special dresses.

Female workers Zohura Khatun, 40, and Naila Begum, 35, of Purbo Satnai village said they are suffering from respiratory and hearing problems but they have to work there due to scarcity of job in Teesta char area from where they come.

"I spend Tk 50 to 60 to buy medicines for my treatment," said Shamsheer Ali of Dakkhin Kharibari village.

Local residents are also badly suffering as they have to inhale the polluted air mixed with dust and bear with continuous thundering sound of the machines.

"Even floating rock dust gets mixed with our foods, making them disgusting," said housewife Arjina Begum, who lives with family near rock crushing

machines at Sutibari village.

Civil surgeon of Nilphamari Dr Abdur Rashid said rock dust floating in the air enters into lungs, causing deadly asthma, tuberculosis, cancer and silicosis diseases and eye irritation leading to blindness while continuous high frequency sound harms the hearing system.

"According to our information, over 300 machines are engaged in crushing rocks extracted illegally from the Teesta River, causing air and sound pollution. On several occasions we submitted memorandum to the upazila nirbahi officer but to no effect," said Golam Mostofa, Dimla upazila convener of 'Save Teesta, Save Environment', movement.

Noor Islam, headmaster of Jatua Khata High School in Dakkhin Kharibari

village, said students and teachers of the school are badly affected by rock dust and harsh sound of machines.

"Following my complaint, the local union parishad chairman issued an order not to run the machines during school hours. But the order was followed for only a few days," he added.

Admitting the problem of the pollution due to stone crushing, Ziaul Islam, owner of a rock crushing machine at Tunirhat village, said they would shift the machines if the administration makes a separate crushing zone on empty khas land away from any locality.

Rezaul Karim, UNO of Dimla, said, "I have directed the machine owners to ensure workers' safety. We are looking for khas lands to set up a



PHOTO: STAR

Dust from rock crushing machines in Dimla upazila under Nilphamari district poses serious health hazard for workers as well as people of nearby areas.

A painful goodbye to Jhalakathi's natural canals

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL with ANDREW EAGLE

As in neighbouring Barisal, canals have been a defining part of Jhalakathi's landscape for centuries. Being the principle source of irrigation water and a nursery for various fish species, canals have had such an impact on local life that they have earned cultural significance as well. For many, a Jhalakathi without canals could barely be Jhalakathi.

Yet within the last decade the district has lost about half of its 489 canals due to land grabbing. It's a destructive process that continues.

"Canals are the soul of Jhalakathi's agriculture," says Md. Riyaq Bahadur, upazila agriculture officer in Rajapur. "They provide most water to farmland during the dry season; but these days our farmers are not getting enough water and many are unable to grow any kind of crop."

According to the agriculture department all of Jhalakathi's canals are under threat of being grabbed by locals.

"The land-filling of canals has already affected around 19,990

hectares of agricultural land," says Sheikh Abu Bakar, deputy director of the district agriculture office.

"With the canals no longer available for irrigation farming becomes difficult," Abu Bakar continues, "especially because by tradition Jhalakathi's farmers don't tap into underground supplies with pumps. They've never needed to."

"I used to grow watermelon," says Putiakhal village farmer Hemayet Uddin, "but for the last three seasons I couldn't grow anything because canal water for irrigation was no longer available."

In addition to the lack of irrigation water, when canals are lost the benefit of easy water transport is lost; and other areas of land become waterlogged due to the absence of the previous drainage channels.

Moreover the encroachment seriously impacts indigenous fish. "These canals are the breeding site for many fish species, and for others their natural habitat," says Pritish Kumar Mallick, Jhalakathi's deputy director of fisheries.

"Destroying canals means destroying fish stocks," he says.

A local fisherman, Masum, agrees that the number of fish has fallen drastically over the last few years.

Yet according to locals responsible government agencies are yet to take any action regarding the filling of canals. They hope the grabbed canals can be re-excavated in the nearest future.

In the meantime it seems as if land grabbing canals has the green light. "I find no fault in filling a canal," says one local, Ali Hossen from Rajapur, a landholder who has encroached on part of an adjoining canal, "because many other people are doing the same." He says he is unaware of any adverse consequences from filling waterways.

In response to the issue, Jhalakathi's deputy commissioner Md. Mizanul Haque Choudhury says all the canals will be freed from land grabbing very soon. "We will run eviction drives against it," he says, "We will write to higher authorities for instruction to re-excavate Jhalakathi's canals."

Relying on the district's canals for their livelihoods, many local fishermen, farmers and boat operators



PHOTO: STAR

Grabbing of canal lands through mindless construction and earth filling is a common sight in different areas of Jhalakathi district. The photo was taken from Kathalia-Awra canal in Kathalia upazila under Jhalakathi district.

21 illegal returnees arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) arrested 21 Bangladeshi nationals while they were illegally entering the country through Shikri border area under Benapole Police Station yesterday morning.

Lt Colonel Jahangir Hossain, commanding officer of BGB 26-Battalion, said, acting on secret information, a team of BGB conducted a drive in the area and arrested 11 men, eight women and two children while they were illegally entering Bangladesh from India.

Later, BGB handed them over to Benapole Police Station.

A case was filed in this connection.

Forest robber arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police arrested three alleged forest robbers from Padma Sluice Ghat area in Pathorghata upazila of Barguna district early yesterday.

The arrestees are Abdul Halim Khan, 35, Md Sahid Mollah, 36, and Md Rubel, 32, of Padma village in the upazila. They are the active members of Master Bahini, a Sundarbans-based robber gang.

The law enforcers arrested the three when they were selling token among fishermen, said SM Ziaul Haque, officer-in-charge of Pathorghata Police Station.

The gang introduced a token and sold it to fishermen for Tk 25,000 to Tk 50,000, assuring them of safety.



PHOTO: STAR

Ali Ahmed's left eye and his wife's hand got infected with anthrax at Koira Soratol village in Sirajganj district. Inset, doctors treat an anthrax infected kid at the village yesterday.



SIRAJGANJ VILLAGE

5 more anthrax infected, IEDCR team visits spot

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Five more anthrax infected patients have been identified in Koira Soratol village under Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj district, bringing the number of such patients in the village to 45 in the last two days.

Forty people had been identified as having anthrax infection on Monday. The number may increase as many people have reportedly come in contact with infected animals or contaminated meat, health officials say.

"We have identified 45 patients in the village in the last two days. All the patients are being given

treatment. A special medical team is working in the area from a medical camp in a primary school," said Dr Sukumar Roy, Ullapara upazila health and family planning officer.

A team of high officials from the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) arrived at the affected village to examine the patients yesterday afternoon, Dr Roy said, adding that the team will stay in the village for two days.

The 12-member team of IEDCR experts, headed by Dr Ismail Faruk, has formed five groups for examining the patients, said Md Mohabbat Ali, a

health assistant working in the village.

The IEDCR team members have collected samples of blood from the affected patients and the animals in the village for medical examination. The samples will be taken to Mohakhali IEDCR laboratory, he added.

A team of high officials of the livestock department has also gone to the village, according to the district livestock office. Separate meetings were held by the upazila administration, health department and livestock department for finding out ways to tackle the recent outbreak of anthrax, sources said.

SNIPPETS

Missing boy's body found

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Fire service and civil defense recovered the body of a minor schoolboy from the Bhairab River at Nawapara industrial town in Jessore district on Monday night. The deceased is Masud Rana, 6, a Class I student of Ahmad Ali Sarder Primary School, and son of Mozzamel Hossain of Masharhati village. Police said the boy went missing when he went to take a dip in the river near Nawapara Jute Mills Ltd on Friday.

UP chairman lands in jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A Jessore court sent a newly elected union parishad chairman to jail, rejecting his bail prayer in an arms case. Judge Ismail Hossain passed the order when Paritosh Kumar Mondal, chairman of Sundali Union Parishad in Abhoyagar upazila, surrendered to his court. Paritosh is a charge-sheeted accused in the arms case filed over the murder of Oliar Rahman, joint secretary of the upazila unit of Awami League. Oliar was killed on November 23 in 2014.

Man held with firearm

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested a young man with a revolver and two bullets from Ketra village in Birampur upazila of the district early yesterday. The arrestee is Tajul Islam, 32, son Momtaj Mondal of Shibapur village in the upazila. On secret information, the elite force raided the area and arrested Tajul with the firearm and bullets, said Major Abdullah Al Mahmud Raju, commander of Rab-5. The arrestee was later handed over to Birampur police, said the major.

Child marriage bid foiled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A madrasa girl was saved from child marriage at Kishamat Kheju village in Sadullapur upazila of the district on Monday. Police said marriage of the eighth grader was arranged at night. On information, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abu Raihan Dollan rushed to the spot and foiled the marriage. However, the bridegroom and his family members managed to flee the scene.

Lightning kills 3 cows

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Three cows were killed by lightning in Dhamoirhat upazila of Naogaon district on Monday evening. Locals said a thunderbolt struck the cows when they were being taken home from a grazing field during a storm. The cattle died on the spot.

Indian sarees seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized huge quantity of smuggled sarees from a truck in Kashobpur upazila of Jessore district on Monday night. Lt Col Jahangir Hossain, commanding officer of BGB-26 Battalion, said on secret information, the border guards raided the area around 10:30pm and seized a truck carrying Indian sarees worth about Tk 65 lakh. A case was filed with Jessore Kotwali Police Station in this connection.

Limbs for the needy

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minibus ran over her, causing her to lose a leg from below the knee down.

The driver got away with inflicting the irreparable damage on her just by paying her Tk 15,000 in compensation.

Having been born to underprivileged parents, she had already gotten used to her necessities not being met often. But the life as an amputee was no less than a nightmare.

Nevertheless, she continued her studies at Firoza Ideal Academy in Mohammadpur.

"I feel bad when I can't play with my friends, go out with them and do things a normal person does," Kulsum said at Nitor, the camp venue.

Authentic Method of Alternative Learning (AMAL), an organisation that works for development of marginalised children, approached her as part of gathering patients for the camp this year, which is organised and sponsored by Moyeen Foundation, a non-profit institution.

"Last year, we provided treatment to more than 600 people. This time, the number would be at least 500," said Sadia Moyeen, a director of Moyeen Foundation.

The camp that was made possible by a diverse group of organisations will continue for at least 20 days.

Dow Chemical, a co-sponsor of this camp, is an old and renowned chemical company. Among its products is Polyurethane (PU), one of the substances needed to make prosthetic limbs.

Another organisation is Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti (BMVSS) that works on a project known as Jaipur Foot, which involves making prosthetic limbs and providing those to amputees.

Dow provides PU to BMVSS along with the technical expertise.

Jaipur Foot is one of the largest and most reputed initiatives when it comes to providing free prosthetic limbs. Its lightweight limbs are cost efficient and help amputees move with much ease and flexibility.

In Bangladesh, Nitor and Bangladesh Orthopaedic Society are giving the medical facilities needed during

the camp. A team of BMVSS is in the country to assist.

Upon receiving prosthetic limbs, the patients are then offered vocational training by Underprivileged Children's Educational Programmes, Bangladesh to complete the rehabilitation process.

Kulsum, as she was getting her prosthetic limb fixed, said, "My family and friends are very excited. I hope it really works out and that I can begin living a normal life."

The medical team helped her walk for a while with the prosthetic limb on as she had not walked for many years.

A few days later she sounded very euphoric as she spoke over the phone.

"My school takes children to picnics. Previously I could not join my friends.... This time I went and had a really good time."

By this time, she informed that she had participated in drama and dance performances at her school.

The childhood memories would surely live with her forever but life has offered her a chance she so deserves to look forward to a better future.

She indeed seemed to have moved on as she said, "I want to be a doctor one day and help people like me."

FROM PAGE 16

It has been noticed that the areas where litchi trees are planted are widening every year, said Golam Mostafa, deputy director of Department of Agricultural Extension in Dinajpur.

"You can find litchis at many places of Bangladesh but those of Dinajpur are something different. They have an exceptional taste and shape," said Golam Mostafa, a fruit trader who went to the wholesale market from Chittagong.

He already sent four trucks loaded with the mouth-watering fruit to the port city.

Litchis are grown almost everywhere in Dinajpur. However, the litchis of Mashimpur in Dinajpur Sadar upazila and Madhabati and Robipur in Biral upazila are extremely tasty, said Imrul Ahsan, a horticulture expert who works at the agricultural extension department.

He also said the department trained 810 litchi farmers how to grow the fruit without using pesticides.