

'Revive flow of Buri Teesta'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

People of Ulipur upazila yesterday demanded revival of the flow of water in the dried Buri Teesta river through construction of a new sluice gate to replace the one that collapsed in 1988. They also demanded dredging of the river bed and removal of illegal structures on the dried river.

The people have been making the demand for the last two months with the slogan 'Save Buri Teesta, Save Ulipur.' Around 4,000 people carrying water bottles and pitchers brought out a procession from Ulipur central Shaheed Minar premises and went to Khearpar Bridge over the Buri Teesta. They poured water in the river, in a symbolic move to recreate the flow of water.

The processionists submitted memorandums to the local administration and the departments concerned.

The upazila Rail, Waterways Communication and Environment Development Committee, along with Ulipur Press Club, organised the programme.

Drawing the attention of the prime minister, Ulipur municipality mayor Tarique Abu Ala Choudhury said, "Branch river Buri Teesta will get water if the Teesta river regains its normal flow. Only then the Buri Teesta will become alive and so will the environment in the area."

Eighty-year-old Rajakini Majumdar pouring water in the Buri Teesta said she saw boats and people catching fish in the river about 30 years ago. Now the river is dead, she said.

The Buri Teesta was created from the Teesta river at Arjun village and flowed into the Brahmaputra river at Kachkol village of Chilmari upazila.

Executive Engineer of Kurigram WDB Shafiqul Islam said digging of ditches in eight kilometres in Kurigram will be started in the coming year.



Hundreds of people of Ulipur upazila of Kurigram pouring water on the dried Buri Teesta river at Khearpar village under Ulipur municipality, symbolically recreating the flow of water. Inset, 80-year-old Rajakini Majumdar of Dayalpar village also joins the programme.

PHOTO: ABDUL WAHED

LIMESTONE FACTORY WORKERS DYING FOR LACK OF MASKS, GLOVES No protection from deadly silicosis

BY S DILIP ROY with ANDREW EAGLE

In the Burimari land port area of Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila there are around thirty limestone grinding factories producing lime powder for use as poultry feed. These factories provide thousands of jobs, mostly to young men who work dawn to dusk for an income of up to Tk 350 per day. The pay isn't much but for many families it's an economic lifeline. Without safety equipment for workers however, it can also be a death sentence.

The incurable lung disease silicosis is caused by exposure to the silica dust commonly present in limestone. Symptoms can present themselves within only a few months of regular exposure.

In Burimari many have died. Many others are ill. The risk of silicosis is high since factory workers are not provided with the basic masks and gloves that might offer protection. Nor, on their modest incomes, can they easily afford to buy their own.

"Doctors warn us that silica dust is the main cause of silicosis," says worker Manjum Ali, 38, from Burimari village. "But we have no alternative to working in the factories. We can't avoid inhaling the dust. In order to secure a livelihood we must face this risk."

"In and around the factories a dense fog of white limestone dust hangs in the air," says another worker, Nazrul Islam, 32, from nearby Islampur village. "Except for our bloodshot eyes, from head to toe we are covered in white."

"The factory owners never provide protective equipment like face masks and gloves," notes worker Nabrul Islam, 48, from Burimari. "We never use these essential items."

According to Burimari union chairman Abu Sayeed Newaz Nishat, at least 63 people in the area have died from silicosis in the last seven years. "Many other labourers are already suffering the disease," he says.

"In the primary stage the disease is called 'simple silicosis' says Patgram upazila's residential medical officer Dr Rafiqul Islam. "If the

patient refrains from further exposure to silica dust, their health will not deteriorate further. But if the silicosis reaches the second stage, the prognosis is likely fatal. The condition will gradually worsen until the patient dies."

Safor Uddin, the Burimari land port unit president of the Sangjukta Sramik Federation told The Daily Star that their organisation has urged factory owners to implement safety measures, especially masks and gloves. "They are yet to reply to our demands," he says.

One factory owner, Manowar Hossain, claims that he and some others have previously provided face masks to the workers but they don't use them because the masks cause the workers to feel hot while working.

"All the factory owners have been asked to ensure worker safety measures are in place by this April," says Patgram upazila nirbahi officer Noor Qutubul Alam. "With the help of the union chairman and local council, we are also campaigning to build awareness of the risks to encourage workers to use the safety equipment."

Extortion rampant in Kushtia brick kilns

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Extortion from brick kilns by organised local gangs is rampant in Meherpur and Chuadanga.

The extortionists, most of them former members of outlawed parties, often beat up the labourers and vandalise brick kilns if they do not get the demanded money, kiln owners said.

A gang mercilessly beat up 12 labourers when they resisted illegal toll collection from two kilns of Panna Bricks, two of SAB Bricks and Doyel Bricks in Hariadah village of Gangni upazila. They also snatched 12 mobile phones from the labourers. The attackers took away labourer Torikul Islam from Panna Bricks, but released him after one hour.

Around 15 to 20 extortionists took part in the incident, labourers said.

"The extortionists had firearms and threatened us to leave the kilns," said Ziaur Rahman, a labourer who was injured in Friday's attack and is undergoing treatment

at Kushtia Medical College Hospital.

Brick kiln owners alleged that the police remained inactive despite their repeated requests for security.

"They threaten the owners in the name of outlawed parties," said Abdul Motaleb, general secretary of Brick Kiln Owners Association in Chuadanga.

He said the extortionists left handwritten slips in the brick kilns they attacked. The slips said ML in English and Janajuddho in Bangla. They gave a mobile-phone number and asked the owners to contact them.

"The criminals also threatened to attack vehicles carrying wood for the kilns if their demands are not met," Motaleb said.

Owners of Astha and Bulbul Bricks in Alamdanga of Chuadanga have been forced to stop production due to extortion.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Gangni Police Station said there are no members of any outlawed party in the area. "Local gangs are doing this in the name of outlaws," the OC said.



PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

With hardly any safety measure, workers grind limestone in Burimari land port area of Patgram upazila in Lalmonirhat, thanks to the callousness of the authorities concerned.

Jubo League man shot dead in Satkhira

Father, former local AL leader, was gunned down in 2013

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A Jubo League leader was shot dead in Rajarbagan area of Satkhira town on Monday. His father, who was a local Awami League leader, was killed in the same way in 2013.

Three people were arrested in connection with the killing of Jubo League leader Kabirul. The arrestees are Yakub Ali, 50, Iqbal Hossain, 42, and Imam Hossain, 32, of Sadar upazila.

Kabirul's mother filed a case in connection with the killing, said Feroz Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

The case mentioned 17 unnamed people belonging to Jamaat-Shibir as suspects, he said.

Son of late Sirajul Islam of Kuchpukur village, Kabirul Islam alias Russell, 38, was organising secretary of Agordari union Jubo League.

The victim's wife Muktamoni said she along with her husband on a motorbike

went to the town's Post Office intersection around 8:00pm.

Keeping her there, he went to the police station. After completion of work at the PS, they returned to their rented house in the area around 9:30pm.

As soon as he reached the gate of their house, some people got off from a motorcycle, shot him and fled the scene.

Kabirul was rushed to Satkhira Sadar Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

The OC said Kabirul's father Sirajul was a leader of Agordari union AL. Miscrants shot him dead inside his house on December 12 in 2013. Of the accused, Akhter Hossain and Hazrat Ali are now serving jail terms while others are on the run.

The fugitive accused might have been involved in Kabirul murder, said the OC, adding that a gang tried to kill Kabirul in a bomb blast in front of his house on March 24.

Domestic help found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A domestic help was found dead in the town on Monday.

The deceased was Dulali Begum, 14, daughter of Raza Mia of Katla village in Birampur upazila of the district.

She worked at the house of Anisur Rahman, a teacher of Dinajpur Zila School, as the domestic help.

Dulali collapsed on the floor at night and sustained injuries, said her employer.

She succumbed to her injuries before reaching M Abdur Rahmi Medical College Hospital, said Anisur.

Redwanur Rahim, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station, confirmed the incident.

Bamboo bridge only means for villagers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

People of 20 villages in Baliakandi upazila of Rajbari have been facing immense sufferings for years for want of a concrete bridge over the Chondona river.

They go to their destinations by crossing the river over a 250-foot-long bamboo bridge that connects Narayanpur village of Islampur union and Gangchar village of Nawabpur union.

Some sections of the bridge have also broken down and the villagers are crossing it at great risk.

The villagers built the bridge on self-help basis, spending about Tk 70,000 in order to facilitate communication, locals said, adding that the people's representatives joined them only before the elections.

Battery-run auto-bike driver Tokon Mollik said hundreds of people cross the risky bamboo bridge every day and children and women suffer a lot, but none comes to help them.

Nazir Sheikh said they sometimes see some people measuring the area, but no bridge has been built.

School student Riaje Mondol said hundreds of students cross the bamboo bridge at great risk everyday, especially in the rainy season. Sometimes, they fall into the water while crossing the bridge.

Hafizur Rahman said as schools, colleges, banks, offices and Baharpur bazar are on the other side of the river, they cross the bridge at risk of accidents.

Abdul Khalek Sheikh said, "The suffering becomes worse during the rainy season, as we have to walk a long distance to reach our destinations."

Islampur Union Parishad Chairman Abul Hossain said he has informed the authorities concerned about the matter, but no steps have been taken yet.

Baliakandi upazila Engineer Bazul Haque Khan said they have no plan to build any bridge there.

Boisabi begins today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

'Boisabi Utsab' is a symbol of unity among the Paharis (indigenous) and Bangalee people living in the region. The festival is widely called Boisabi although the indigenous people have different regional names like -- Boishu of the Tripuras, Sangrai of the Marmas, Sankran of the Mros and Biju of the Chakmas.

Local lawmaker Kujendra Lal Tripura said this while inaugurating a rally in Khagrachhari town yesterday on the occasion of Boisabi, the biggest festival of the indigenous people of three hill districts in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

Organised by Khagrachhari Hill District Council (KHDC), people from different indigenous communities, wearing traditional dresses, brought out a colourful procession in the district town where a number of Bangalee people also took part.

Khagrachhari Deputy Commissioner Rashedul Islam, Superintendent of Police Ali Ahmed Khan, members of the district council, government officials, students and activists of different social-cultural organisations also joined the rally.

The indigenous communities in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts celebrate the festival to leave behind the sorrows of the previous year and welcome the Bangla New Year.



Indigenous people of different communities, wearing their traditional dresses, bring out a colourful procession in Khagrachhari town yesterday marking their biggest traditional festival 'Boisabi Utsab' in three hill districts starting today.

PHOTO: STA