

DOUBLE BLOW IN HAORS

Paddy gone, now fish

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Fish in Hakaluki Haor have started dying since Sunday as half-ripe paddy submerged under flashfloods continues to rot and pollute its water.

It is a double blow to the livelihoods of people dependent on the waterbody after the flashfloods damaged hundreds of acres of Boro paddy just weeks ahead of harvest.

Rotting fish are spreading an unbearable stench and posing health hazards.

"I lost my Boro crop. I thought we could survive with the fish in the haor. But now, all the fish are dying," said Rahim Uddin, a fisherman from Bhuksimul union in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila.

People in the haor areas under Sylhet division are going through a similar situation due to the flashfloods late March caused by incessant rain and the onrush of water from



upstream.

Different species of fish -- puti, tengra, bheda, baila, pabda and ruhi -- are dying in Hakaluki Haor, one of the country's largest haors, and have started rotting, said Sultan Mahmud, senior fisheries officer of Kulaura.

Acidity in the haor water has also risen. A pH level of 7.5 to 8.5 indicates

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Dead fish float on the water of Hakaluki Haor in Moulvibazar. Fish started dying on Sunday, as half-ripe rotting paddy continues to pollute the water.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Minor house help found dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the body of a minor house help from a flat in the capital's Niketon yesterday.

Deceased, Munna, 11, from Brahmanbaria, used to work as a house help for an elderly couple, also the owners of the flat, Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Munna's body was found hanging from the grille of the veranda on the 6th floor of the eight-storey building in Niketon's Block-A around 12:45pm, the OC said.

Siddique said the couple was busy with one of their guests. At one stage,

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3 Myanmarese 'smugglers' held after 'gunfight' with BGB

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Three Myanmar nationals were caught and 1.5 lakh yaba tablets and two bullets seized by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) following an alleged gunfight on the Naf river in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila early yesterday.

Meanwhile, in another tip-off-based drive, BGB seized five lakh yaba tablets abandoned in the upazila's Joillar Dwip, 2 BGB Battalion Commanding Officer Lt Col Abujar Al Jahid told The Daily Star.

Lance Naik Jahirul Islam, habildar Md Ashraful Islam and sepoy Md Shamim suffered wrist injuries while their boatman nearly lost a finger in the first incident, he said. They were treated at Teknaf Sadar Hospital.

Of the detainees, Yunus, 45, son of Rahmat Ali, was shot in the throat and was sent to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital.

He and the other two, Nurul Haque, 30, and Anowar, 27, are all from Sudhapara in Sittwe.

A four-member BGB team hid inside a mangrove bush near a forest office in Netong Para and signalled a boat coming from Myanmar to stop when the latter took a u-turn on seeing them around 5:00am, said the official.

Three shots were fired from the boat at the BGB men, prompting the latter to fire back 10 rounds, he said, adding that one man jumped into the river and swam away before the BGB

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Man killed in 'gunfight'

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Sohel phoned his sister Minara Akter early Friday to inform her that he was in the custody of the Detective Brach of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

"My brother called from his mobile phone and asked us not to worry about him. The conversation lasted for only a few seconds," Minara told The Daily Star.

Talking to this correspondent at his house at Bhashantek slum, Sohel's father Manju Sheikh alleged that DB officials "cooked up the story of shootout after killing his son in custody".

DB FILES CASE

DB Sub-Inspector Mofidul Islam Akanda filed a case with Bhashantek Police Station following the "shoot-out" incident.

According to the First Information Report (FIR) of the case, a team of detectives, led by Senior Assistant Commissioner Shahadat Hossain, rushed near Lohar Bridge area around 1:30am on Monday on information that five to six unidentified men were moving around suspiciously.

"They fired shots indiscriminately at us, forcing us to retaliate in self-defence and protection of state property," Mofidul said in the FIR.

Later, Sohel was found injured by bullets at the spot. However, his cohorts managed to flee the scene.

Doctors at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) declared Sohel dead around 3:00am, police said.

Law enforcers claimed to have recovered three firearms and seven

bullets from the spot.

The plaintiff in the case statement said the criminal group fired 20-25 shots while police fired 17. He identified Sohel as one of the "killers" of a criminal gang, led by Ibrahim, from Bhashantek.

Sohel along with Rony, Babu, Shamim and others allegedly shot Chiku Jamal on April 11 in Bhashantek area, leaving him injured. Chiku died of his wounds at the DMCH on Saturday, added the case statement.

Sohel's wife Shantona Akter Jhuma, a garment worker, said they moved to Ashulia from Bhashantek as Sohel wanted to lead a normal life after coming out of jail around a year ago.

Bhashantek police sent the body to the Dhaka Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

Hefajat hails PM

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condemn them," the Hefajat leader said at a press conference at Jamiyatul Ullum Al Islamia Madrasa in the port city.

Izharul also stressed that there was no scope for being "affected by secular cultural thoughts" and diverting the "revolutionary step in a different direction through illogical propaganda."

Opponents of the government decision have been pointing out that Qawmi madrasas run without any government monitoring, supervision or support and they are mostly dependent on private donations.

The critics have also been saying that the madrasas don't teach science, social science, maths and literature. Only a handful of Qawmi madrasas teach Bangla and English up to class-

VIII.

"We thank the government," Izharul said at yesterday's press conference. He, however, added: "There is no scope for falling victim to political interests of the ruling party."

The government on April 14 issued a circular, recognising Dawra degree of Qawmi madrasa as equivalent to Master's degree in Islamic Studies or Arabic.

The circular was issued two days after Hasina announced the recognition of the certificate of the highest degree awarded by Qawmi madrasas.

The recognition of Qawmi certificates is, in fact, "recognising the largest social force of the country," Izharul said.

He also expressed concern that religious studies in the Aliya madrasas,

which were registered with and supervised by Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board, were "shrinking" in the name of modernisation of that education system.

There are almost 85 lakh students in the country's 48,000 Qawmi madrasas, he said, claiming that India and Pakistan governments recognised Qawmi certificates long ago.

However, according to last year's report of Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, some 14 lakh students studied in about 14,000 Qawmi madrasas.

In a statement issued yesterday evening, Hefajat Secretary General Junaid Babunagari reiterated his demand for immediate removal of a sculpture installed in front of the country's apex court.

Sweepers grow old, too

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Indeed for female sweepers harassment is not the only additional difficulty. "For the last five years I have worked as a sweeper," says Dolna Khatun, 25. "It's so hard to leave my children at home alone from late at night. But we need this work so that we can eat. Even though our work is hard the authorities do not offer us any employment permanency."

Rubbish truck driver for Faridpur Municipality Ripon Sheikh, 30, worries about his life and his job security. "If the authority decides any day that we are no longer required we'll be unemployed. We have raised the issue with the authorities but no change has been forthcoming."

"I started this job when I was 15 years old," says Sojibur Rahman, 20. "It's five

years later but I am still a temporary employee."

"The female workers earn Tk 3,000 per month and the male workers Tk 6,000," explains the colony's leader, Rafiq Sheikh, 66. "I myself have been working for 30 years and do not take any extra benefit from my service. Actually, for the last three days I was unable to work due to cold and fever, so I will not get my full month's salary this month. We have no security: not in our jobs nor in our lives."

Faridpur's mayor Sheikh Mahatab Ali says it is a rule that all sweepers work as day labourers only. "Here I have nothing to do," he says. "It would be possible to address their concerns only if our government changes the rule."

Growers now buyers

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corruption in the construction and repairing works of the embankment surrounding the haor areas.

According to the Sunamganj district administration, 300 tonnes of rice has been arranged for relief distribution among flood victims.

However, it is not clear as to how much of that has been distributed as queues for OMS rice and flour are getting longer by days. This is happening when consumers in Sunamganj are rushing to hoard rice fearing imminent shortage due to the damage of crops, and as a result rice price has gone up in the local market.

Talking on phone, district Food Controller Abdur Rouf said that prior to the flashfloods in late March, nine

plained of fish dying at places.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said the government had already decided to waive interests on credits taken for farming in the affected areas.

"Besides, we're also planning strategies to help affected farmers of the haor region."

Experts said flashfloods usually wreak havoc on haors in April but this time crops went under water on March 27. They blamed the new phenomenon on climate change.

Losing the only crop of the year, many farmers in Sunamganj, Kishoreganj, Netrakona, Habiganj and in some other northeastern districts sold their cattle and other valuables

while many others left their homes for nearby towns to find manual work.

Director General of the Department of Agriculture Extension Manzurul Hannan earlier said farmers cultivated Boro rice on 4.5 lakh hectares of haor land this year and an estimated 1.41 lakh hectares went under water.

However, the data collected by our correspondents from the district agricultural offices shows that around 2.5 lakh hectares were submerged with crops getting damaged partially or fully.

Boro makes up 55 percent of the annual rice output and it is cultivated on 48 lakh hectares of land. Last year, the country saw production of 1 crore and 89 lakh tonnes of Boro rice.

Our Sylhet and Moulvibazar correspondents contributed to this report.

BNP's rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1

2004 where many AL leaders and workers were killed. We strongly condemn the motive of this feature to link BNP and its leaders. BNP is a liberal, democratic political party. It has no connection with any sort of militancy or militants. Mr. Shariful Islam and Shakhawat Liton have deliberately tried to malign the image of BNP on the basis of a supplementary charge sheet which was filed by CID only to frame the BNP leaders with the heinous crime that took place on August 24, 2004.

2. In order to disgrace the BNP leaders they brought the issue of grenade attack and linked BNP leaders with Mufti Hannan. We would like to mention that Mufti Hannan was awarded a plot of land in state-run Gopalganj BSCIC by the then Awami League government where he set up a factory named 'Sonar Bangla Chemical' which was producing explosives. It is alleged that Mufti Hannan organized a militant group to establish Islam in Bangladesh during Awami League regime. Mufti Hannan was charged with allegation that he planted a bomb in a field where Sheikh Hasina was scheduled to address. Awami League government did not arrest him neither banned his party HUIJI-Bangladesh.

On the other hand they framed charges against Mr. Tariqul Islam, a former minister of BNP, and Taimur Alam Khandakar, a senior leader of BNP, in that case. Mufti Hannan later claimed that two Awami League leaders AL's Religious Affairs Secretary Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Gopalganj District unit's Joint General Secretary Mahub Ali Khan-before a crowd of journalists who were waiting at the premises of Gopalganj district court and alleged that duo were the mastermind behind the plot to kill Sheikh Hasina at Kotalipara in 1999. This news was published on May 14, 2010 in The Daily Star. It was not AL but BNP banned HUIJI. Mufti Hannan was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2003 in absentia.

Later, Mufti Hannan was arrested by RAB officials during the BNP rule in October 2005.

3. As regards the grenade attack on 21 August 2004 case, we would like to remind the writers of the feature that the BNP leaders were inducted in the case through a supplementary charge sheet after long time on the basis of a confessional statement made by Mufti Hannan after 120 days of remand by police. After the remand Mufti Hannan stated in the court that he was severely tortured while in remand and forced to make that statement. This news was published in many newspapers at that time.

4. We reiterate to mention that BNP and BNP leaders had no link with Mufti Hannan or any other militant organisation. The story to link BNP leaders with Mufti Hannan is totally untrue, baseless and motivated.

We hope that The Daily Star would publish our rejoinder to remove misunderstanding among the people. Thanking you in anticipation of your highest cooperation. Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir Secretary General Bangladesh Nationalist Party-BNP

OUR REPLY

1. First, we thank the BNP, as the party itself cited the supplementary charge sheet of the August 21 grenade attack case as the source of parts of our report that the party objected to.

The supplementary charge sheet said the August 21 grenade attack was the outcome of a collaboration between Huji men, influential leaders of the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami, and some officials of the home ministry, police, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, National Security Intelligence and Prime Minister's Office.

The names of some BNP and Jamaat leaders and ex-top police and intelligence officials were included in the supplementary charge sheet submitted by the CID.

In our report, we just reproduced some information from the charge sheet.

In addition, we used the statement Mufti Hannan made before a court after his arrest in 2005. Hannan claimed that law enforcers were not supposed to arrest him since some influential ministers of the BNP-led government had assured him that he would be exempted from the August 21 grenade attack case.

2. The claims the BNP made in paragraph-2 were not part of our report.

However, we checked the claims. Talking to The Daily Star on Sunday, the BSCIC officials in Gopalganj said Mufti Hannan was never allocated any plot. His brother Munshi Anisul Alam was given a plot where he set up a factory to produce candles. The allocation of the plot was cancelled after the incident of planting a bomb near Sheikh Hasina's rally venue in Kotalipara in July 2000.

The BNP's another claim that Hannan said some local AL leaders in Gopalganj were behind the plot to kill Hasina in 2000 was correct. We checked it and found Hannan, who was sentenced to life term in absentia in 2003 in the case over planting the bomb, made the accusation in May 2010.

3. What the BNP said in paragraph-3 of the rejoinder was also not part of our report.

However, we checked the party's claim. On behalf of Hannan, a petition was filed with a court in September 2011 for withdrawing his additional confessional statement in the August 21 grenade attack case, alleging that he gave the statement under duress.

He gave the additional statement in April 2011. Later, the CID submitted the supplementary charge sheet in the case.

Hannan only sought to withdraw his additional confessional statement, not his first confessional statement. In his first confessional statement in 2007, he confessed that he and his aides carried out the grenade attack.

However, the petition was flawed. It was submitted without any authorisation from the jail authorities. Hannan didn't even seek permission from the court for submitting the petition. It was found that Hannan himself didn't put his signature on the petition.

4. Our report didn't say anything about the BNP's or its leaders' links with other militant organisations.

Lone accused indicted

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Hailing from Miradangi village in Birganj upazila of Dinajpur, he used to work at a tailoring shop in the city.

Ali Hossain, an inspector of the police station, submitted the charge

sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

In the charge sheet, he said he had found proof of the murder charge brought against Obaidul while investigating the case, and so the accused should be tried.