



A vast stretch of water covers many villages in Kalapara and Mirzaganj upazilas of Patuakhali.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Eid joy remains elusive for villagers

19 Patuakhali villages go under water due to tidal surge and embankment collapse

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Several thousand families in 19 villages under Kalapara and Mirzaganj upazilas will not be able to feel the joy of Eid as their villages have been submerged by water from nearby rivers for around two weeks. Charipara, Poshuribunia, Nawapara, Choudhuripara, Munshipara, Boropachnong, Chotopachnong, Banatipara, Burajalia and Nayakata villages in Lalua union have been inundated by the Ramnabad river, while Nizampur, Sudhirpur, Char Dhulashar, Yusufpur and Hajipur villages in Mohipur union have been submerged by the Andharmanik river.

They are all under Kalapara upazila. Mahendiabad, Piprakhal, Rampur and Sundra Kalikapur villages in Subidkhali union under Mirzaganj upazila have been flooded by tidal water from nearby Payra river. Mojibur Rahman of Charipara village in Lalua union said they cannot celebrate Eid as everything is under water. "We cannot cultivate our land that has been inundated for weeks due to the collapse of the dyke on the Ramnabad river bank two years back," he said. The situation is the same in four villages under Mohipur union as the dyke on the Andharmanik river also collapsed

about five years back, and tidal water has been entering the villages in the rainy season since then. Newly-elected Lalua Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Shawkat Hossain Biswas said immediate steps should be taken to repair the dyke to save people from tidal water of the Ramnabad river. Mohipur UP Chairman Abdus Salam Akon said repair works will be started as soon as the water recedes. Around 600 feet area of the dyke at Mehendiabad village on Payra river collapsed last year, and tidal water enters villages through the damaged parts every year.

Nargis Begum, a housewife, said, "How can we celebrate Eid when even the earthen wovens are submerged?" "I cooked food three days ago after making a temporary oven with bricks," she added. Subidkhali UP member Md Shahidul Islam said villagers cannot cultivate their land. The authorities concerned should take immediate steps to repair the dyke, he added. Kalapara Circle Water Development Board Executive Engineer Aboul Khayer said they informed the higher authorities about the bad situation of people on Ramnabad and Andharmanik rivers banks.

Return train tickets pricey

Rampant black marketing in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Joypurhat

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Getting return tickets of Bangladesh Railway (BR) has become difficult for Eid holidaymakers in Dinajpur, Rangpur and Joypurhat as most tickets goes to the black marketers allegedly in collusion with some dishonest officials and staff. Sale of return tickets started on Friday, said officials. During a visit to Dinajpur Railway Station on Sunday and Monday, this correspondent found several hundred people waiting in queues in front of the ticket counters. But, only a few of them were seen getting the tickets there while many others had to collect it from black marketers for much higher than the actual prices. "I had to give Tk 7,000 to a black marketer for two tickets while its actual price is Tk 1,800," said Shamim Ahmed, who came to Dinajpur from Sylhet for celebrating Eid with his family members. "Train tickets are available at different shops in the station area as most of the tickets are sold to black marketers," he said. "You have to pay three times higher to get the tickets. To get two tickets for going to Dhaka on August 28, I stood in queues for the second consecutive day today but failed," said Abul Kalam Azad, waiting at Dinajpur Railway Station yesterday. A group of people are seen collecting tickets every day, he said. Several ticket seekers said they could not lodge any complaint to Md Abdul Zabbar, station super of Dinajpur Railway Station, as his room is always found closed. The room remains open only during departure of trains. Six trains ply Dinajpur-Dhaka route daily. There are allegations that two syndicates backed by the station super and Anwar Hossain Manju, a stationmaster, control the black market. This correspondent tried to reach the two officials for their comments, but none of them was available at their office during a two-hour-long wait at the station on Monday. They could not be reached through their mobile phones too. Similar problems are reported from other stations including Chirirbandar, Parbatipur, Phulbari and Birampur in Dinajpur, Sadar and Akkelpur in Joypurhat, and in Rangpur. Contacted, Sovon Roy, station super of Rangpur Railway Station, refuted the allegation of ticket black marketing.

Save waterlogged Bhabadah

Water Mitigation Movement Committee urges govt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Bhabadah Water Mitigation Movement Committee yesterday submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner of Jessore with a call to the government to implement tidal river management (TRM) immediately to save the people of Bhabadah from waterlogging. The affected areas are Abhaynagar, Monirampur, Keshabpur and Jessore Sadar upazilas and Phultala and Dumuria in Khulna and Tala of Satkhira. At least 10 lakh people of 200 villages will be directly affected due to the waterlogging. Croplands and schools, colleges and madrasas will go under water if TRM is not implemented immediately, said Ranjit Bawali, convener of the committee. Earlier, the committee announced an agitation programme from July 25 to August 20 to press its demand. As part of the agitation programme, the committee yesterday submitted the memorandum. People, living in the waterlogged Bhabadah area, continued agitation for long to press home their five-point demand. The demands include dredging at Bhabadah point, re-excavation of Amdanga canal, opening Bhabadah sluice gate and making it fully functional, implementation of Tidal River Management (TRM) Project in Beel Kapalia area and renovation of damaged roads, educational institutions and different religious establishments. Bhabadah's water-logging problem began in the early 1980s when all its rivers started drying up, after the construction of embankments and sluice gates in the region. The embankments and sluice gates were built to prevent saline water from intruding into the beels. The saline water stopped, and so did the natural flow of currents in the process. Successive governments have taken up various projects worth hundreds of crore of taka to solve this, but they only brought brief relief.

Teacher held for attempt to rape 4th grader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Members of the elite force on Sunday arrested a teacher, on charge of attempting to rape a primary school girl, from Chandpur area in Gobindaganj upazila. Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-13) Camp Commander ASP Habibur Rahman said the elite force arrested Saju Mia, headmaster of Singa Government Primary School. He said Saju called the girl, a student of Class IV, on July 31 to his house near the school and attempted to rape her. Hearing the girl's screams, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her, he added. The teacher, however, managed to flee. Local people staged demonstration demanding arrest and punishment of the culprit. The girl's father filed a case with Gobindaganj Police Station the next day, accusing the headmaster. Rab arrested the accused teacher from his relative's house at Chandpur village. Later, they handed him over to police.

Fishes from natural resources disappearing in Bagerhat

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY with ANDREW EAGLE

With increased salinity in many waterways, following more-than-usual evaporation during last dry season, around 49 of the fish species that naturally occur in Bagerhat and the Sundarbans are struggling to maintain their numbers. The illegal use of current nets and using poison as a fishing technique are adding to the degradation in fish biodiversity. Locals and experts alike are worried that if the trend continues, some species may be lost entirely. "My father was a fisher," says Shahidul Sheikh from Afra village in Kachua upazila. "He made a decent living from fishing local canals and rivers. But now the situation has changed. Influential people have encroached upon rivers in many places. Marshes and canals are often dotted with shrimp and carp enclosures. There is increased salinity too. I could not follow in my father's footsteps. After his death I became a rickshaw van puller." "I have been catching fish in the local canal with homemade traps for twenty years," says Shahidul's neighbour Sangdia Mrinal Das. "But for the last six years or so, the catch has been steadily decreasing. This year it was even worse. I caught hardly any fish. In the last two weeks I only managed to catch 250 grams of fish." Many other fishers from Afra have similar stories to tell. From climbing perch to boal fish, they can readily list around twenty species that were once common but are now rare. "Some wild species like Thai koi, Asian stingray and walking catfish, and the Bengal parshley are also being pond-farmed these days," observes



A man gets only 250 grams of fish in two weeks after setting a large trap in a canal at Sangdia in Bagerhat's Kachua upazila. With increased salinity in the area near the Bay of Bengal, fishes of various species see serious depletion.

PHOTO: STAR

Narayan Chandra Mondal, the fisheries officer for Gopalganj who lives in Bagerhat's Chitalmari upazila. "But the pond fish are often fed with poor quality feed containing high levels of chromium. Fish produced in this way don't taste so good. Meanwhile, the use of illegal nets in rivers like the Daratana is widespread, to the detriment of the natural breeding cycles of many species." His Bagerhat colleague Zia Hyder Chowdhury said, "The main reasons behind extinction of local fish species are the use of banned current nets and

poison in waterways. Farming also contributes due to the run-off of insecticides which can kill fish larvae," he says. "But we are trying to protect native freshwater fish. The department has declared six breeding sanctuaries to this end." Yet, according to others, the department itself is at times a part of the problem. "It isn't only a question of dishonest fishers," says Sheikh Idris Ali, Bagerhat Coastal Fisheries Association president. "Their activities are only possible because of some dishonest officials."



A farmer washes jute fibre after separating it from stalks at Doshokia village in Delduar upazila of Tangail. Inset: a worker carries harvested jute for rotting in a water body at Gomjani village in the upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Jute farming in decline

Unfavourable weather blamed in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Jute cultivation in the district has been reduced by about 40 percent this year compared to last year, mostly due to unfavourable weather condition. Jute was cultivated on 20,228 hectares of land last year, producing 2,01,890 bales of fibre, said Shariful Islam, a sub-assistant agriculture officer at the district Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE). The target was 19,980 hectares of land this year with a production target of 2,12,652 bales of fibre, he said, adding that it was, however, cultivated on only 12,498 hectares. Of these, 2,550 hectares are in Sadar upazila, 595 hectares in Kalihati, 3,762 hectares in Bhupur, 1,225 hectares in Delduar, 995 hectares in Nagarpur, 121 hectares in Madhupur, 140 hectares in Sakhipur, 840 hectares in Mirzapur, 1,310 hectares in Gopalpur, 168 hectares in Dhanbari, 290 hectares in Basail and 502 hectares in Ghatail upazilas, he added. Farmer Zakir Hossain in Sadar upazila said he had cultivated jute on 66 decimals of land last year. However, he could cultivate it on only 16 decimals this year due to heavy rain during the time of sowing the seeds, he added.

DAE Deputy Director Md Abdur Razzak said many farmers in the district could not cultivate jute this year mainly due to incessant rain during the Bangla month of Chaitra, the sowing season of jute seeds. Increasing Boro paddy cultivation was another reason behind the decline in jute farming, he said. However, the yield and prices of jute were looking better compared to last year, he added. Farmer Jiar Ali in Delduar upazila said he has cultivated jute on two acres of land this year and the yield is looking better than last year. He had got 40 maunds of fibre from the same amount of land last year and sold the fibre at Tk 2,000 per maund at the local market, he said. He has already harvested his jute and is rotting it at the nearby water body, he said. Good quality of jute fibre was selling at Tk 2,200 a maund at local markets, he added. "I have spent Tk 35,000 for the cultivation, including costs for ploughing, fertilisers, insecticides and labourers. I shall have to spend Tk 10,000 more as labour cost for washing the fibre. I expect I can sell my fibre as well as jute sticks for around Tk 1 lakh this year," he added.

Man killed in Habiganj clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A man was killed and three others were stabbed by rivals on Sunday over share of a contract of road repairing work in Habiganj's Bahubal upazila. The deceased, Wahid Miah, 40, was son of Abdullah Miah of Mirer Bazar area. Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Bahubal Police Station Masuk Helal said Wahid recently got the contract of a road repairing work in Mirer Bazar. Shahnaj, who failed to get the contract, had been demanding some shares of the profit from Wahid which the latter refused to give. As a sequel, Shahnaj and his men locked in an altercation with Wahid and at one stage, Shahnaj stabbed Wahid indiscriminately with a sharp weapon. When villagers tried to resist the attacker he also stabbed three of them, the OC said. Locals took them to Bahubal Upazila Health Complex where the doctors declared Wahid dead.