

Traditional water body clogged

Locals face water crisis, devotees coming to nearby temples in problem

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Kalikatala Doha, a 27-acre water body in Naldanga Rajbari area of Jhenidah Sadar upazila, is heading towards virtual death due to serious pollution and clogging by water hyacinth.

Earlier a large number of people of the surrounding area used its water for bathing, drinking and household work but they are facing problem due to the pollution.

The situation poses added problems for the local Hindu community.

There are seven big ancient Hindu temples around the water body and Durga Puja is observed in the vicinity every year.

There is a cremation ground adjacent to the water body and its water is used for washing the bodies before cremation.

Members of the committee in charge of the seven temples said they had been cultivating fish in the water body for long, giving revenue to the government.

The profit from fish cultivation was used for temple development.

But in September 2009, the district administration declared that the water body would no longer be leased.

In 2012 the temples were acquired by the archeology department and temple committee secretary Atul Adhikary filed a case

against it.

Afterwards, the district administration took control of the water body.

The condition of the water body gradually worsened and it got clogged with water hyacinth due to lack of care.

"The Hindus in eleven villages around the water body are facing problem during funeral of dead bodies for want of clean water. The people are facing water crisis while local varieties of big fishes worth lakhs of taka are dying due to pollution," said Nikhil Datta, general secretary of the local cremation ground committee.

Besides, local Hindus are being deprived of their traditional *Punya Snan* (holy bath) in the water body, he said.

He demanded immediate steps to save the water body.

Temple committee members said they are not getting any positive response from the Jhenidah Deputy Commissioner's office although they have applied for lease of the water body.

Jhenidah Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Khodeza Khatun said, "The temple committee has submitted application for lease. But a case related to the water body is under trial. Necessary steps will be taken when the court issues an order."



Kalikatala Doha, a water body covering 27 acres of land in Naldanga Rajbari area of Sadar upazila, gets dangerously polluted along with clogging by water hyacinth.

PHOTO: STAR



SMART RIDER AT TWELVE: Tasmina Aktar on her running horse at Chak Subolpur village in Naogaon's Dhamoirhat upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

AT HOME IN THE SADDLE

Twelve-year-old Tasmina is a horse racing champion

RABIUL HASAN with ANDREW EAGLE

She's determined and courageous: at the tender age of twelve, Tasmina Aktar from Chak Subolpur village in Naogaon's Dhamoirhat upazila has quite a reputation in horse racing circles. The seventh-grade student is accustomed to placing first or second in any race. As a jockey she's participated in around fifty events. Tasmina is a girl undeterred, happy to compete in a sport usually reserved for men.

"Horse riding is my passion," she says. "When I race, I race to win."

Tasmina's experience with horses began when she was six years old. Her father Obaidul Hossain, a sharecropper who rears horses as a hobby, first asked his daughter to care for the pony they kept in front of their two-storey mud-brick home. Tasmina used to wash and feed the animal daily. Within a year she'd taught herself to ride, something her father couldn't do.

In early 2014 when Obaidul decided to sell the pony, Tasmina insisted on accompanying him to the Gopalpur horse fair in Dinajpur's Ghoraghat. After the pony was sold for Tk 7000, the father and daughter randomly heard an announcement about an upcoming race. Tasmina was adamant: she would participate. But without a horse and given her father's reluctance, it seemed unlikely.

When a friend of her father's offered to loan Tasmina a horse, Obaidul's concerns proved no match for his daughter's ambition. Not yet eight years old, Tasmina sat in the saddle at the start of her first race, one young girl in a field of men. "My father was astonished when I won!" Tasmina laughs to recall that day, when she took home a mobile phone as first prize.

Over the next year she participated in more events. At Kakonhat in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila she also won. But Tasmina still didn't have a horse of her own.

As she could, she made use of Moyna, and sometimes Bizlani, two horses belonging to Mohammad Bhadu, the father of a fellow jockey. But when Bhadu died, his son decided to sell the horses, and to Tasmina's great distress they were too expensive for her father to buy.

Eventually Tasmina's father agreed to take a Tk 10,000 three-month loan and add some savings to purchase a horse at a cost of Tk 20,000. Unfortunately, that

horse wasn't kind of temperament. Tasmina was often thrown to the ground.

They sold it and bought another, Sundori, who shortly died. Then the newspaper Prothom Alo which had taken an interest in Tasmina's story gave her a horse; but that animal was too young to compete. Finally, a female member of the local judiciary found enough sympathy for a young girl without a suitable racehorse that she too, donated one. On the back of this horse, Tasmina's jockey career flourished.

As one might anticipate, the reaction of fellow villagers to Tasmina's outgoing activities hasn't always been positive. Some said the girl who is also adept at riding motorcycles would have great difficulty in finding a husband. But Tasmina doesn't dwell on such opinions.

"Tasmina knows it's meaningless to get upset about negative comments," says her mother, household manager Tohura Bibi. "Tasmina wants to ride horses and win. She won't give up her dream."

Nowadays Tasmina is a regular at racing carnivals across North Bengal. Her determination and self-confidence haven't only drawn criticism, but have also inspired.

"In sports like football and cricket, girls have already achieved some success," says local businessman, Mohammad Mofizuddin. "Tasmina is our only female jockey. With some support she could have a bright future."

"Tasmina is our pride," says Motlebur Rahman, the head teacher of Dhamoirhat Girls High School where Tasmina studies. "If she had proper training, she must go a long way!"

"Girls like Tasmina, from struggling rural families, face numerous obstacles including poverty, a lack of educational opportunity, societal pressure to marry and become mothers, and cultural barriers that can restrict freedom of movement and hamper their ability to pursue dreams," observes Fazlur Rahman, the chairman of the local Amlapur union council. "Tasmina has overcome so much! She's already triumphed."

"One day I'd like to buy a big race-horse," Tasmina says of the future, "but they cost a lot of money. I'd like to race at the international level." It's not her only ambition. "When I complete my education I'd like to join Bangladesh police," she says.

5 school kids hurt in roof collapse

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Five kids were injured as the roof of a primary school collapsed in Barguna's Amtali upazila yesterday.

Injured Usmita, Mariam and Lamia, students of Class III, and Obaidul and Emon, students of Class V of Patakata Nurul Haq Government Primary School, took treatment at a local hospital.

Academic activities of the school have been shifted to nearby Nurul Haq Junior High School after the incident, said Upazila Primary Education Officer Md Mojibur Rahman.

The school kids sustained injuries around 12:00 noon when a portion of the roof of the school building collapsed during tiffin period, said Headmaster Bilkis Nahar.

At the time, a number of students and teachers were outside of the classrooms, he said.

The school building was built in 1998 and it became unfit for use due to lack of renovation, the headmaster said, adding that plaster from the roof and walls had fallen earlier.

They will inform the higher authorities about the matter, said the education officer.

Missing man found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Police recovered the body of a missing man from a pond in Dhuldi area under Sadar upazila on Monday.

The deceased was Sudir Chandra Das, 54, son of late Ramash Chandra Das of the area.

Sudir, who was a caller of Faridpur bus stand, went missing on Friday, said his son Sajal Das.

On Sunday, a general diary was filed with Sadar Police Station in this regard, said Sajal.

Informed, police recovered the body from a pond on Monday morning, said AFM Nasim, OC of the police station.

Suspended govt official among 3 held with Yaba

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police in a drive arrested three people, including a suspended government official and his wife, along with 1,000 pieces of Yaba tablets from Jashore town early yesterday.

The arrestees are SM Farid Ahmed, a suspended official of Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, his wife Tamanna Akter Poly and brother-in-law Al-Amin.

A team of the law enforcers, acting on a tip-off, raided the house of Raju in Jhumjhumur area in the town around 4:00am.

They later detained Raju's three tenants including Farid and seized 1,000 pieces of Yaba from their possession, Officer-in-Charge of Jashore Kotwali Police Station Apurba Hasan said.

Police said during the drive Farid introduced himself as a personal officer at Law and Justice Division at the ministry and showed his ID though he was suspended from the job long ago.

Farid, who visits Cox's Bazar frequently, brings the contraband pills from there and sell those in different areas through Poly and Al-Amin, the OC added.

Karam Puja celebrated in Thakurgaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Karam Puja, a major festival of the Orai community, inhabitants of the plain land in northern districts of Bangladesh, was celebrated in the district on Monday and Tuesday.

To celebrate the festival, Thakurgaon Karam Utshab Udjapan Committee organised different programmes, including discussions, cultural functions and puja.

Superintendent of Police Md Moniruzzaman attended the festival as chief guest on Monday night, while Additional Deputy Commissioner Shilabrata Karmakar and district unit President of Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad Arunangshu Datta Tito were special guests at Pachpirdanga Adivashi village in Sadar upazila.

Convener of Thakurgaon Karam Utshab Udjapan Committee Biswanath Kerketa was in the chair.

Among others, General Secretary of district unit Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad Tapan Kumar Ghosh, district unit General Secretary of Jubo League, also member of Thakurgaon Zila Parishad, Samir Datta, and local Awami League leader Saminur Rahman Joy Chowdhury spoke at the programme.

The speakers at the discussion said indigenous

people are victims of discrimination in different fields in various ways, including filing of false cases against them, and they are always lagging behind as they are being deprived of their rights in all sectors.

The speakers also demanded mother tongue-based primary education for their children and the community's quota in higher education and government service. They demanded allocation of khas land for their proper living.

They said indigenous people played a significant role during the Liberation War in 1971 but they have yet to get constitutional rights.

Replying to their demands, the guests assured them that they would not be harassed through false cases and effective steps will be taken to improve their lives.

Biswanath Kerketa said young Orai girls observed a dawn to dusk fast on the first day of the festival.

On the afternoon of the first day, the young folk went out from the village in a colourful procession to collect branches of the Karam tree from the vicinity. The girls took the branches to their village while boys and girls sang and danced to the beat of drums.

At sunset, an altar was built where they planted the branches of the Karam tree. Young

men and women danced around the altar when the branches were being planted according to ritual. Then the puja began, where the priest recited verses explaining the significance of the festival.

At night, special dishes for guests and kinfolk were served at their homes after offering the food to their deities.

According to researchers, the Karam festival is a way for the indigenous people to express their affinity with nature. They also pray for happy conjugal lives during the festival.

The festival ended yesterday through immersion (bisharjon dewa) of branches of the Karam tree in the Tangon River.

Convener Biswanath said the festival is celebrated in Pachpirdanga, Jagannathpur, Gobindanagarh and Chandipur villages in Sadar upazila, and Boirchuna and Jhongaon villages in Pirganj upazila.

Jakob Kerketa, leader of Orai community of Pachpirdanga village in Sadar upazila, said Karam puja is one of the major festivals celebrated by the fifty indigenous families of the village. "Though our unique culture is likely heading towards extinction, we want to preserve the traditions and heritage for generations to come," he said.



A scene of Karam Puja, a major festival of ethnic Orai community, at Panchpirdanga in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila on Monday night.

PHOTO: STAR