



Influential locals encroached on both sides of a canal in Botiaghata upazila of Khulna under the guise of fish enclosures. They also placed a net across the canal. The photo was taken recently.

BOTIAGHATA UPAZILA

Fish enclosures now grabbers' favourite tool

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Building of fish enclosures as a means to encroach on canals, waterbodies and even rivers is plaguing the country in recent times. The plague has almost reached epidemic proportions in Khulna's Botiaghata upazila. The farmers, for whom the canals were primarily built, now face scarcity of irrigation water as flow of water in all 10 canals in the upazila are constricted by either the enclosures or by illegal structures. Influential locals built at least 90 such fish enclosures in six-kilometre-long Daskatia canal alone, depriving hundreds of farmers in Khalashibunia, Hatbati, Hogolbunia, Pathoriaghata, Baroiabad, Hatalbunia and Dakkhin Sailmari villages. Prasad Roy, a farmer in Khalashibunia village, told this correspondent that over two hundred farmers rely on the canal round the year. But lately, especially during dry season, the canal is drying up. "It's all because the enclosures are obstructing its water flow at various points [of the canal]," he said. Dhirito Sundar Roy, a resident of the same village, said they raised the issue of illegal encroachment to upazila nirbahi officer (UNO),

upazila agriculture officer and chairman of union parishad several times, but all to no avail. The number of enclosures on the canal continue to rise instead, he added. This correspondent during a visit to Daskatia canal last week noticed almost two thirds of the canal's both banks in Kacharibari area were occupied by a local by the name of Krishna Biswas. Krishna Biswas however refused to respond to the correspondent's query over the illegal structures he made on the canal. Similar to the fate of Daskatia, around 50 enclosures are causing obstruction to water flow of Botiaghata-Hatalbunia canal. In Jalma union, most canals are suffering from poor water flow due to setting up of various structures on its sides by locals. Speaking with this correspondent, Khokon Golder from Jharbhanga village said water flow in Putimari canal is being obstructed by a number of enclosures and dams. A group of influential locals leased the canal by showing it as cultivable khas land, he alleged. "We've been urging the authorities concerned to free the canal by cancelling the lease in the greater interest of farmers, but no one is listening to us," Khokon said frustratingly.

Acknowledging the alarming trend, Botiaghata Union Parishad Chairman Manoranjan Mondal said farmers are being unable to irrigate their agricultural land in time as most of the canals are encroached on by influential people under the guise of fish cultivation. In Jalma union, locals alleged that UP Chairman Ashiqur Rahman, also a real estate businessman, illegally took possession of a large portion of Mohammad Nagar canal. During a visit to the area, this correspondent saw concrete structures built on two thirds of the canal. The correspondent was unable to take photographs of the illegal structures due to objections raised by followers and accomplices of the chairman. Chairman Ashiqur, however, said, "I bought the land for a housing project. I didn't encroach on the canal." Botiaghata UNO Ahmed Ziaur Rahman told this correspondent that he would make visits to the area and remove the enclosures and other illegal structures from government canals in the upazila. Any lease being used to occupy any canal will also be cancelled, assured the UNO.

Nor'wester damages 1,000 houses in Moulvibazar

Lightning kills two in Habiganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Around 1,000 dwelling houses were damaged as nor'wester lashed three upazilas in Moulvibazar on Sunday. The affected upazilas are Kamalganj, Kulaura and Rajnagar. The storm, which started around 5:00pm and lasted for about 30 minutes, destroyed crops, houses and shops and uprooted hundreds of trees, said locals. In the storm, roads and rail lines were also damaged. Apart from this, electricity supply remained snapped. Sima Begum, a resident of Potonusar area in Kamalganj upazila, said nor'wester swept through the area in the afternoon, flattening her house. "The storm damaged my house badly and I'm now living in misery," said Imam Ali of the same area. Jewel Ahmed, mayor of Kamalganj municipality, said over 500 homesteads in the area have been destroyed in the storm. Local administration along with the villagers has been working to normalize the road and rail communications. Mobarak Hossain Sarkar, deputy general manager of Kamalganj Zonal office in the district rural power association, said in the storm, electricity lines got damaged at hundreds of spots. It will take several hours to repair the power lines. Narayon Mallik, panel chairman

of Potonusar Union Parishad (UP) in Kamalganj upazila, said the storm damaged 200 houses fully and 300 houses partially. At the time, a buffalo also died. Kulaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abul Layaes said the storm damaged around 100 houses in the area. Najmul Haque, assistant stationmaster of Shamshearnagar Railway Station, said a large number of trees fell on rail lines. Due to this, train service was suspended for four hours. After cleaning the rail lines, intercity train services resumed. Public representatives and government officials visited the storm-hit upazilas to estimate the loss, said AKM Shafi Ahmed Salma, chairman of Kulaura Upazila Parishad. Deputy Commissioner Tofail Islam said Kamalganj has been badly affected in the storm. They have already allocated 30 bundles of tin, Tk 1.30 lakh and 10 tonnes of rice for the upazila. Meanwhile, two people were killed and three others injured in separate lightning strikes of Habiganj the same day. The deceased were farmer Dengu Mia, 50, of Habiganj Sadar upazila, and Salma Akhter, 8, of Baniachang upazila. The injured are the sons of Dengu Mia. They were admitted to Habiganj Sadar Hospital, said Moinul Haque Arif, chairman of Pail UP. Salma was injured when a thunderbolt struck her. The incident took place when she was playing at her courtyard. Critically injured Salma later died at the hospital.

CONSTABLE'S DEATH Two cops closed

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

Two policemen of Haimchar Police Station were closed to the police lines yesterday for negligence of duty, following the death of a fellow police constable during a drive against illegal fishing. Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Suman Sarkar and Constable Shahadat Hossain of Haimchar Police station were closed to Chandpur Police Lines. Mosharraf Hossain, 32, a constable at Haimchar Police Station, fell into the Meghna river and went missing during a dash between a police team and a group of fishermen on Friday night. Later, police recovered his body from Hizla upazila of Barishal on Sunday morning. A three-member police team conducted a drive in the river to arrest a wanted criminal on Friday night when Mosharraf and his team members noticed that some fishermen were illegally catching jatka (hilsa fry less than 10 inches long). While conducting another drive against the illegal fishing the fishermen, sensing the presence of the police team, attacked them with their oars, triggering a clash between them. At one stage, Mosharraf fell into the river and went missing. Meanwhile, Mosharraf's wife Shamima Akhter filed a case with Haimchar Police Station accusing 16 named and 30 to 30 other unnamed fishermen on Sunday. A departmental probe committee, led by Chandpur Additional Superintendent of Police Mizanur Rahman, was formed to investigate the case.

Youth electrocuted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A battery-run easy-bike driver was electrocuted at Darkhor Maddhyapara village in Atwary upazila of Panchagarh yesterday. The victim was identified as Arefin Islam, 33, son of Anwarul Islam of the village. Quoting family members, Officer in Charge (OC) of Atwary Police Station Md Abdur Razzak said Arefin came in contact with a live electric wire when he went to disconnect his vehicle from charging. Another villager Dabirul, 30, sustained injuries from electrocution as he went to rescue Arefin, said the OC. Critically injured Arefin was rushed to Atwary Upazila Health Complex where on duty doctor declared him dead, said the police official.

JMB suspect arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members arrested a suspected operative of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) from Chirirbandar upazila on Sunday night. The arrestee is Harun Ur Rashid alias Harun Munsif, 39, son of Abdul Hakim of Dakkhin Sukhdebpur village in the upazila. On secret information, the elite force raided Nashratpur village and arrested Harun. They also seized books on jihad from his possession, said ASP ANM Imran Khan of Rab-13 in Rangpur.

IRREGULARITIES IN NALDANGA ASHRAYAN-2 Probe committee formed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Amid allegations of irregularities in Ashrayan-2 project of the government in Natore's Naldanga upazila, the upazila administration on April 24 formed a committee to probe into the claims. On April 18, The Daily Star in a report headlined "Irregularities tarnish Ashrayan project in Naldanga" shed light on the allegations. A number of beneficiaries of Ashrayan-2, undertaken to build houses for insolvent land owners, alleged that they had to bribe local public representatives or people affiliated with the ruling party to enlist their names in the project in Naldanga upazila. Speaking with this correspondent, Naldanga Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Sakib Al Rabbi said the probe committee

he formed has four members and it is headed by Amirul Islam, agriculture officer of the upazila. He said Akbar Ali, an elderly panhandler from Biprobeldhorria union, submitted a written complaint to him against Union Parishad (UP) Member Bebi Begum. Furthermore, upon receiving proof of irregularities on the Ashrayan project, he asked Piprul UP chairman to suspend Delwar, member of the union parishad. "He [the UP chairman] will take action at the meeting of the union parishad and later he will provide copies [of the action in writing] to me and the deputy director of Local Government Division in Natore," UNO Sakib said. Several of the complainants including Biprobeldhorria's Akbar Ali said they were receiving threats for filing corruption complaints with the UNO's office.



Dr Rashid, upazila health and family planning officer, holds an infant in his arms when he went to treat the ailing child at Hajirhat union in Bhola's Monpura upazila recently.

PHOTO: M JAHIRUL ISLAM

Dr Rashid, a friend of Monpura people

The doctor's phone number is found written on doors of many houses

M JAHIRUL ISLAM, Jhalakathi

People in Bhola's Monpura upazila, especially pregnant women, consider Dr Mahmudur Rashid to be a blessing. The upazila health and family planning officer goes door to door and provide the residents of the remote island upazila with health care services. He also makes them aware about different health issues. Rashid visits the houses at night after wrapping up his daily duties at the local health complex. "The literacy rate is very poor here. The residents are superstitious and still prefer local quacks rather than the doctors. So I took the services to their doorsteps," Rashid told The Daily Star recently. "Pregnant women, children and elderly people are my main concern as they need special attention," he said. There are nearly 1,25,000 people in 38 villages of the upazila. During a visit to the area recently, this correspondent found Rashid visiting homes and holding discussions at the local bazaar.

He also sang songs in public spots to spread awareness about different health issues and the available related medical facilities. Surprisingly, the doctor's contact number was found written on doors of many houses in the island upazila. Local residents told this correspondent that Rashid was always available for them, not only as a physician but also as a genuine friend. Mamun Hossain, a local journalist, said many government health officers (doctors) were unwilling to stay at Monpura as it was a remote island. "Previously, doctors used to drop by at the health complex just once or twice a week but this officer has set an example," he said. Sathi Akhter, a housewife of Sakuchia village, said, "Sir [Dr Rashid] has arrived as a blessing for us. He often comes to my house as I am pregnant and he is doing all these free of cost." While sitting at the upazila health complex, Nilufar, another expecting lady who was from Shamsuddin

char, said, "I came to the hospital for a safe delivery. We believe sir would arrange everything necessary." Rashid said, "People hardly came to the health complex when I joined. Now we see huge crowd every day." As for what drives him, Rashid said it was simply his duty. "A doctor is meant to serve the people and I do that. I hear about manpower shortages and limitations but I don't believe those should stop doctors." His dedication has inspired his peers and also the locals. "He is not only a friend to the people but an inspiration to all other doctors," said Dr Shafiqul Islam, resident medical officer at Monpura Upazila Health Complex. Hajirhat Union Parishad Chairman Shahrir Chowdhury Dipok said, "Dr Rashid is a friend to all of us in this area. We are really lucky to have him as our health officer." In terms of challenges, Rashid said they still needed a proper lab and urged the authorities concerned to arrange blood transfusion facilities at the health complex.



Law Minister Anisul Huq speaks at the inauguration programme of four-storied academic building of Chargas NI Bhuiyan Degree College, run by Uttara Groups of Companies, in Brahmanbaria's Kasba upazila on Friday.

PHOTO: COURTESY