



The pond and sand filter (PSF) set beside a pond at Afra village in Kachua upazila of Bagerhat remains inoperative while poor people drink and use for cooking the water of the pond, which is also used for bathing and other purpose.

PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTY

Drinking water crisis hits five Bagerhat upazilas

Pond sand filters (PSFs) installed by the government remain inoperative

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY, Bagerhat

People of five upazilas of the coastal district are facing acute drinking water crisis as most of the pond sand filters (PSFs) installed by the government remained inoperative for various reasons.

PSFs have been the major source of pure drinking water of the district's Mongla, Rampal, Morrelganj, Kachua and Chitalmari upazilas, where underground drinking water level could not be found due to salinity and excessive presence of arsenic.

As deep tube wells do not work there, water from ponds and rain serve as the only source of drinking water for the residents of the vast areas.

And with most of the PSFs inactive, they have to buy drinking water every day or drink the contaminated water of the pond, people told this correspondent during a recent visit to the area.

They also said that water crisis turns acute at this time of the year when mercury soars and the rain stays away.

"We have no pure drinking water in our village. The only PSF has gone out of order. So, I have to buy 20 litres of water from a

container for Tk 40. It is not possible for me to buy water every day," Pobitra Das, a resident of Sangdia village of Kachua upazila, told this correspondent.

The people of Sangdia, Afra and Kalmibuniya villages of Badhal union has to collect water from places three to six kilometers away," said Monoranjon, adding that PSF at the nearby Afra village was also not working.

The canals and private ponds are filled with saline water and impossible to drink, he added.

Similar situations prevail in Bhojpatia and Parikhali, Sadar, Mallikerber and Bastoli unions and some parts Hurka union of Rampal upazila, said Bhojpatia union parishad Chairman Nurul Amin.

"We have only one government PSF that is undergoing re-digging now. This caused acute water crisis. We have to buy 30 litres of water for Tk 70," said Amin, adding that most people can't afford to buy water every day.

Most people use contaminated pond water, which causes various waterborne diseases, he said, adding that children, women and aged people are suffering

most.

The same problem is prevailing in Mongla municipality and rural areas of Chitalmari and Morrelganj upazilas.

Prashanta Saha, a hotel owner at Chitalmari Sadar Bazar, said there are 100 to 150 restaurants and food shops as well as 200 tea stalls at different markets and most of them use pond water for cooking.

"I used to pay Tk 70-90 for every drum of drinking water, but it has gone up to Tk 100-120 as the suppliers now have to fetch water from longer distances," Saha said.

The Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) has so far installed 2257 PSFs in nine upazilas of the districts since 1984. But when contacted, the executive engineer of the district's PHED SM Shamim Ahmed said he has no update of how many of them are functional now.

"We have no authentic information about how many of the PSFs are inactive, said Ahmed.

He however said that some PSFs in Mongla, Rampal and Morrelganj have been contaminated with saline water.

Once saline water enters into a PSF

pond, it is not possible to drink the water again as the PSF has no capacity to covert the saline water into sweet water, he added.

He also said that they are trying to install some ROs (reverse osmosis) system, an advanced water purifying technology, in those areas.

Ahmed said that they were working on to dig deep to find underground drinkable water level in those five upazilas.

"We have tried up to one thousand feet below the earth for installing deep tube well about three years ago but did not get preferred water level. Now we have another project to search the water level in 1500 feet. If we get sweet water there then it would be an epoch-making event to solve the water crisis," he said, adding that until then pond or rain water would be the only source of drinking water for the people of those areas.

Asked how they were going to solve the present crisis of water, he said, "The government has arranged digging of 106 ponds at the cost of around Tk 30 crore under two projects. The work will be completed soon."

2 killed, 20 hurt in clashes

STAR COUNTRY Desk

Two men were killed in separate incidents of clashes over land dispute in Habiganj and Lalmonirhat on Friday and the day before.

A man was killed and 20 others, including a policeman, were injured in a clash between two rival groups over a piece of disputed land at Ruhitonsree village in Habiganj's Lakhai upazila on Friday, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The deceased was identified as Zahirul Islam, 35, son of Samad Mia of the village.

Of the injured, two were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital and 10, including the police constable, to Habiganj Sadar Hospital while the rest given first aid.

Md Emran Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Lakhai Police Station, said there was a longstanding conflict between one Aminul Islam and Sharif Talukder of the village over the land.

As a sequel to the conflict, the men of the two rivals attacked each other with lethal weapons on Friday night, leaving Zahirul dead on the spot and at least 20 people from both sides injured.

On information, police rushed to the spot and fired 18 rubber bullets and 13 teargas shells to bring the situation under control, said the OC.

Contacted, Aminul Islam and Sharif Talukder blamed each other for the incident.

Additional police personnel have been deployed in the area to avert any further untoward incident, said the police official.

In Lalmonirhat, a man was stabbed to death over erecting a boundary wall on a dispute land at Megharam village in Sadar upazila on Thursday, reports our correspondent.

The deceased was Manju Miah alias Pedda, 50, son of late Azgar Ali of the village, and also the vice president of Mogholhat union unit of BNP.

Two youths were arrested in this connection. The arrestees are Tapu Roy, 20, son of Sachin Roy, and Nitai Chandra Roy, 18, son of Profullo Chandra Roy of the village.

OC Mahfuz Alam of Sadar Police Station said there was a longstanding conflict between Manju Miah and Sachin Roy over the land.

On Thursday noon, an altercation took place between the men of the two rivals over the issue.

At one stage, Sachin's son Tapu stabbed Manju. Later, critically injured Manju died on way to a hospital.

A murder case was filed, said the police official.

Labourer killed as iron sheets fall on him

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A labourer was killed when a heap of corrugated iron sheets fell on him in Thakurgaon Bus Stand area of the town yesterday afternoon.

The victim was Abu Sayeed, 25, son of Enamul Haque of Jamurpara village in Sadar upazila.

The incident took place when Sayeed was working at a godown of corrugated iron sheets of Farhad Traders around 2:00pm.

Baddruddoja Nayan, owner of the trading house, said the accident occurred due to the worker's negligence.

They will extend financial support to the victim's family, he said.

Officer in Charge of Thakurgaon Police Station Ashikur Rahman said action will be taken after getting complaint in this regard.

Teachers of 210 schools unpaid since 2015

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

As many as 840 teachers of 210 nationalised government primary schools in Chattogram hill tracts (CHT) have remained unpaid since 2015, teacher representatives from the schools said yesterday at a press conference.

Urging the government to nationalise their jobs, the teacher representatives at the press conference, organised at Rangamati Reporters Unity, said they had been serving the schools where around 12,000 students are enrolled.

The teachers of the schools, operated by Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban zila parishads, received salary under a project financed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from 2008.

Until UNDP stopped financing the project in 2015, three teachers including headteacher of each school used to be paid monthly salaries -- Tk 3,000 for each assistant teacher and Tk 5,000 for each headteacher, the teachers said at the conference.

In 2017, the government in a gazette notification nationalised the schools. But the jobs of the teachers of the schools remained out of the umbrella of nationalisation, they added.

Among others, Arun Kumar Tanchangya of Jamuchhara Govt Primary School and Prashanta Tripura of Alutilla Govt Primary School spoke at the press conference.

Kuakata beach abuzz with Eid holidaymakers

Tourists complain of getting ripped off by hotels and other local businesses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Despite rough weather, a large number of tourists from across the country thronged Kuakata beach to enjoy their vacation during this Eid.

Many tourists however complained that different local businesses and service providers saw the huge tourist turn up as an opportunity to make a quick buck by overcharging for various services, especially for hotels rooms and beach chairs.

Yesterday, three days after the Eid was celebrated, this correspondent during a visit to the beach area found a good crowd of tourists still enjoying activities at the beach, while many others hopping around popular tourist attractions such as Zero Point, Eco-park, Gongamoti Char of red crabs, Lembur Char, Hilsha Park, market of Rakhine women, Kuakata and Mishripara Rakhine temples, and Rakhine weaver village.

Khulna resident Abdur Razzak and his four other family members came to Kuakata to have a good time together during the Eid holidays.

Even though it had been raining over the past three days, large waves and mesmerising scenic views made their visit worthwhile, he said.

Nausin Jahan, a student at Patuakhali Science and Technology University

(PSTU), was seen visiting the beach with her family members.

She frustratingly said the local beach chair rental businesses were ripping off tourists by overcharging.

She also said rental of a beach chair usually runs for Tk 20 an hour, but during this Eid holidays, the tourists were being charged Tk 40 an hour.

When asked for the reason behind the steep charge, a beach chair businessowner, seeking anonymity, said they wait all year long for time such as this, when the demand is high and they can do brisk business.

Hotel fares in the beach town also shot through the roof as hotel owners were also taking advantage of the higher demand, said Wahidul Islam, who came from Barishal.

For a double bed non-AC room, he paid Tk 5,000 for a day, as opposed to its usual fare of Tk 2,000 to 2,500, added Wahidul.

Abdul Motaleb Sharif, secretary of Kuakata Hotel Motel Owners Association, said it is good for local businesses that more tourists are choosing Kuakata as their preferred destination during the Eid holidays.

Kuakata municipality Mayor Abdul Bareq Mollah said they installed security lights on the beach to better serve tourists during the holidays.



Amid complaints of overcharging by beach chair rental businesses and hotels, holidaymakers pour in at Kuakata sea beach during Eid holidays. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN



Like many other embankments in four upazilas of Pirojpur, the poorly built protection embankment on the Kacha river at Togra village in Indurkani upazila is prone to erosion.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

IMPACT OF CYCLONE SIDR Villages under erosion threat as dykes too weak

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Devastating cyclone Sidr that hit the southern districts of the country, including Pirojpur, on November 15 in 2007, had damaged unlimited properties and caused loss of many lives as well.

Local people alleged that the number of loss had increased in the district because of not having enough flood control embankments along the rivers.

Riverside people have been demanding construction of embankments since the cyclone hit the coastal areas over 11 years ago.

After a long wait of over 11 years, repair work of 23 kilometre embankments under Pirojpur Sadar, Indurkani, Bhandaria and Kawkhali upazilas started last year, Pirojpur Water Development Board (WDB)

Executive Engineer Sayeed Ahammad said.

WDB started the construction work at a cost of Tk 13.61 crore last year and expected to complete the work by June this year.

Of the 23 kilometre embankments, 11 kilometre is in Indurkani upazila, which is encircled by three rivers -- Kacha, Baleswar and Panguchi.

Meanwhile, locals alleged that the newly constructed embankment will bring no benefit to the riverside people as it is being built with riverside soil, which will surely wash away in flood or tidal surges.

"Every time a strong wave of the Kacha river hit the shore, it washes away some soil of the newly constructed dyke," Enayet Hossain of Togra village in Indurkani upazila said.

Besides, a huge quantity of aquatic

plants have also been damaged by excavators during construction of the embankment, using excavator machines, locals alleged.

Shamim Howlader, another resident of the village, said strong waves of the river directly hit the embankment and wash away its soil.

"The embankment has been constructed in such a way that it cannot be used for even a walk," another villager Sanaullah said.

If geo textile bags are dumped along the embankments, it will last long, Engineer Sayeed said, adding that they will send proposal to the higher authorities in this regard.

According to WDB, there are a total of 230 kilometre embankments in seven upazilas of the district. Of the length, a stretch of 51 kilometres is in Indurkani upazila.