

Fish, water resources decrease in Kaptai Lake

SHYKH SERAJ

Dear readers, few days back I went to Kaptai Lake. This 1,722 square kilometre lake is called the treasure of biodiversity. For a long time, it has been covering a large portion of demand for freshwater fish in Bangladesh. Kaptai Lake has the fame for producing delicious fish. Thousands of fishermen and small traders make their livelihood from this lake. After the establishment of Kaptai dam, the lake has turned into even more precious. This lake is a heaven of natural beauty. However, after 50 years of its establishment, some big changes were noticed.

Rangamati Fish Landing Centre, run by Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation (BFDC), tells the current state of fish diversity in the lake. Some of the fish varieties have already extinct, for example Mohashoal, says a trader at the landing centre. Earlier, there were many fish varieties (especially carp), but we don't see them nowadays, says another fisher.

Some fishers and traders say, there were some varieties of fish which they saw back in 1993 or some back in 1997. So, it's been quite a while.

The landing centre is very busy with vibrant presence of the fish traders and fishers. Strangely, everything here revolves around two fishes only. However, we love these two fishes for both their taste and nutrition. One is



PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

The freshwater body of Kaptai Lake surely can see the golden days again with proper care.

Kachki and the other is Chapila. Currently, no other fish is quite available in Kaptai Lake, say the fishers and traders.

"Once there used to be Rui, Katla, Chital, Mrigal etc. But today we don't get these," says a trader.

"I caught a 17 kilogram Mohashoal and a 20 kilogram Boal, however, today, we the fishers don't say this anymore," a fisherman was sharing his experience with me.

So what's the reason behind the unavailability? Since its inception, people only ate fish from the lake and hardly there were any purification works. It was 60 to 75 feet deep in the past, but now it is only 22 feet deep or perhaps some more.

River dredging and renovation is urgent to bring back life to the lake. It will save the fishermen, traders and above all the precious water resources.

Some fishermen say, the authorities concerned are not working enough and also

not facilitating them or the traders.

An average of 30 tonnes of fish are gathered at the fish landing centre. During winter, the availability rate goes down. Besides during May, June and July, for the sake of carp breeding, fishing is banned in Kaptai Lake. For nine months fishers catch fish and both the lake and the landing centre remain extremely busy. They all come to the lake from different regions for catching fish and fishes get sold at the landing centre while the traders need to pay taxes to BFDC authority. Here for each kilogram of Chapila and Kachki, BFDC is collecting Tk 17.5 (0.20 USD) as tax. Considering this, the price of fish is fixed. The tax varies from one variety to other.

"We pay Tk 17.5 per kg to the government, you know for Chapila, Kachki, Mola and other small fishes," says a trader.

"And for Ail fish we have to pay a tax of Tk 22 (0.26 USD) and for Shing Tk 30 (0.35 USD), per kilogram," the trader added.

As per the government accounts, the area of Kaptai Lake is about 58 thousand and 300 hectares and during the monsoon, it becomes 68 thousand and 800 hectares. The overall depth of the lake is nine metre. The maximum depth is 36 metre. There are 66 varieties of local fishes in the lake. There are six varieties of foreign fishes and two varieties of prawns. Commercially, 36 varieties of fishes are collected from the lake.

But the reality says that the number of fishes available here is not even close to this calculation. Not even 10 varieties of fishes can be found for commercial collection throughout the entire year.

However, the fishermen and traders do remember how greatly the lake was enriched with abundance of different fish varieties. The government is also saying in a year, they have released fries worth Tk 7 lakh. However, fishers say, they didn't get any result for this initiative. BFDC Chairman Dildar Ahmed said they

have built their own hatchery to release fries in the lake and good results will definitely come this year.

Labourers at the landing centre complained about not getting enough ice. They produce the ice here but have to bring a lot more from Chattogram. They also complained about the packaging facility. They believe due to the negligence from the authorities concerned, these anomalies are taking place. The same complain comes from 43 licensed traders at the landing centre.

In May this year, Ashraf Ali Khan Khasru, state minister for Fisheries and Livestock, came here. He witnessed the problems. We also talked to Rangamati Deputy Commissioner (DC) AKM Mamunur Rashid in this regard. DC Mamunur said BFDC is assigned to work for the development of Kaptai Lake. He believes more developments can be made and he is sure that BFDC chairman is working on it.

BFDC Chairman Dildar agrees that carp variety has decreased a lot. Although, the earning per month from the lake is about Tk 1 crore (1,18,273 USD), there is expenditure behind infrastructure and salaries.

He also believes that the tax that BFDC is taking from fishers is not that much and the government is giving a lot of subsidies. When fishers are not authorized to net fish at Kaptai, they are also given food and other supports, says Dildar.

Dear readers, Bangladesh is enriched with extensive potential water resources distributed all over the country and Kaptai Lake is one of the most important freshwater body for the resources.

The falling water level in the largest manmade lake of the country is creating various problems. As you know, Kaptai Lake was created as part of the Kaptai Hydroelectric Power Plant Project, it also became the source of livelihood for locals through fish farming, river communication, irrigation and tourism.

Commercial exploitation of fish from Kaptai Lake started in 1965. At the start, major carp were the dominant fish species but now carp production has decreased. This is where the local fishers and traders have complaints. I believe, with realistic and effective support to bring back the golden days of Kaptai, the authorities concerned will contemplate more. The word, 'abundance' will spread across the lake for sure.

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is an Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.



Parts of earthen roads on both sides of East Hemerkuthi Bridge in Halokhana union under Kurigram Sadar upazila, washed away by flood in August 2017, have not been repaired yet. *Bellow*, this bridge-cum-water outlet at Bujruk Pakuria village in Sadullapur upazila of Gaibandha has remained virtually abandoned since its construction 15 years ago due to lack of approach roads.

PHOTO: STAR

Thousands suffer as three bridges lie without approach roads

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Thousands of villagers are suffering while commuting to destinations as two bridges in Kurigram Sadar upazila and another in Sadullapur upazila of Gaibandha are lying without approach roads.

People of 13 villages of Halokhana union under Kurigram Sadar upazila are facing communication problem due to collapse of earthen roads adjacent to two bridges, reports our Kurigram correspondent.

Two 50-foot-long bridges were built at Hemerkuthi village in Halokhana union under Bridge/Culvert Construction Project of the Department of Disaster Management in fiscal year 2016-17, spending Tk 38.90 lakh for each.

But earthen roads on both sides of West Hemerkuthi Bridge were washed away by floodwater in August 2017 while connecting roads of East Hemerkuthi Bridge collapsed during flood this year.

Consequently, around ten thousand people of Khamar Halokhana, Char Barayebari, Atharo Gharia, Baro Gharia, Laxmikanta, Char Laxmikanta, Jolapara, Mandolpara, Namachar, Barayebari, Char Barayebari, Suverkuthi and Matullapara villages of Halokhana union are suffering.

"Now we can't directly transport our agriculture products to Kanthalbari Bazar



and Kurigram town. Our area is famous for producing potato, banana and sugarcane," said Panir Uddin, 65, a resident of Khamar Halokhan village.

Anisur Rahman, a village physician of Halokhana, said students of 13 villages are facing problems to attend schools and madrasas due to collapse of the earthen parts of the two bridges.

Younus Ali, the concerned ward member of Halokhana union parishad, said, "The chairman of Sadar upazila told me that rebuilding of link roads with two bridges at Hemerkuthi village will be considered when fund becomes available."

Khandaker Md Fizanur Rahman, Project Implementation Officer of Kurigram Sadar upazila, said, "The collapsed parts of earthen roads adjacent to two bridges at Hemerkuthi village of Halokhana union will be filled up with soil in this fiscal year after receiving fund for our ongoing programmes."

Our Gaibandha Correspondent reports: A small bridge, lying without any approach road since its construction 15 years ago, has virtually made unusable a one-kilometre earthen road that connected Bujruk Pakuria village in Sadullapur upazila with Sadullapur-Thutiyapukur paved road for going to upazila headquarters.

Now the villagers have to cover additional three kilometres to reach the paved road.

Students, office-goers, traders and farmers are suffering much due to the situation.

The bridge-cum-outlet was constructed to ease communication as well as outflow of water from the crop fields.

Tk 6 lakh was spent for the construction of bridge, but later no fund was allocated for the construction of approach roads, said Abed Ali, the then vice-president of local rural infrastructure development committee.

Despite repeated appeals to the local authorities and public representatives no initiative has been taken in this regard, said small trader Abul Hossain of Bujruk Pakuriya village.

Asiruddin, a farmer of the village, said they count excess fare to carry agriculture products as they have to cover additional three kilometres to reach the market.

Ariful Islam Chowdhury, chairman of Khordakamarpur union parishad, said they informed the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of the matter and requested him to allocate fund to make the road usable.

Sadullapur UNO Nabi Newaz said initiative is being taken to make approach roads connecting the bridge.

DNA test of Jashore child rape victim, newborn done

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Following an order on Sunday by a Jashore court, DNA test of 10-year-old rape victim and her newborn was conducted in Dhaka on Tuesday.

The girl from Jashore's Monirampur upazila gave birth to a baby recently.

She became pregnant while working as a maid at the house of Golam Kibria, assistant officer of Rural Poverty Alleviation Foundation, an NGO in the upazila.

The court ordered the DNA test to ascertain paternity of the newborn.

On Monday night, Sub-Inspector Somen Das of Monirampur Police Station escorted the girl and her child from Manirampur to Dhaka. They returned to Manirampur yesterday.

The accused, Golam Kibria, was arrested on September 5, a day after the girl's father filed a case with the police station, said Sub-inspector Rafiqul Islam, investigation officer of the case.

The next day, the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court of Monirampur sent him to jail after police produced him before it, he said, adding that Kibria's DNA test has already been completed upon an earlier order of the court.

The court ordered DNA test of Kibria as he denied the rape charge brought against him.

BSF hands over Bangladeshi's body

He was shot 14 days ago on Patgram border while cutting grass, say family members

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Body of a Bangladeshi man, killed on September 3 by India's Border Security Force (BSF) in bordering area of Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila, was handed over to Bangladesh authorities on Tuesday night.

Bablu Mia, 25, son of Nur Mohammad of Kaliganj village in Nilphamari's Dimla upazila, was a cattle herder.

Lt Col Isahaq Mondol, commander of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) 51 battalion, Dimla Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mofizuddin Sheikh and Poshchim Satnai Union Parishad Chairman Abdul Latif Khan were present during the handover of the body on Patgram border.

Soon after OC Mofizuddin Sheikh handed over the body to his family in Kaliganj village, he was buried at a local graveyard around 10:00am yesterday morning.

On September 3, Bablu was killed and another Bangladeshi, Saiful Islam, injured as BSF fired gunshots while the two were collecting grass for their cattle near the border, alleged their families.

BSF, however, claimed that the two were cattle smugglers and BSF opened fire on them while they were transporting cattle on the Indian territory.

Soon after the firing, BSF detained Saiful and took away Bablu's body.

Injured Saiful is still being detained by the BSF.