

Salinity grips 10 Bagerhat villages

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY, Bagerhat

The water of the Baleshwar river in Bagerhat's Kachua upazila has never tasted salty in 58-year-old farmer Altaf Hossain's life, until this year.

To his utter dismay and shock, Altaf's watermelon, sunflower and paddy saplings were completely damaged after he irrigated his croplands with Baleshwar's water.

"I have never seen saline water in our area before," said Altaf of Charsonakur village in the upazila.

"Salty water started to enter our locality from February killing our paddy, pulse, watermelon and sunflower plants," he said.

Not just Altaf, farmers of 10 villages -- Charsonakur, Choto Andharmanik, Baro Andharmanik, Sammankanti, Sahabatkanti, Kalishakhali, Tengrakhal, Char Tengrakhal, Gopalpur and Malipatan -- expressed similar shock and distress at the loss of their crops this year due to high salinity levels in the Baleshwar.

Farmer Sikandar Sheikh, 50, a resident Tengrakhal village, said, "When the salinity began to decrease from the last week of June, we started to sow Aman paddy seeds in the fields. But, the seedlings are not growing properly because of the residual salt in the soil, which is also causing skin irritation."

Another farmer of the area Fayzul Islam, 53, said, "Due to less rain and increasing salinity, betel nuts, vegetables and other crops will not grow properly. We are in great despair facing salinity for the first time."

According to Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI) officials, salinity below 0.75 decisiemens per metre (dS/m) is considered safe

for irrigation; river water salinity decreases upstream from the estuary and depends on rainfall.

"Salinity naturally starts to increase in all rivers of the country from February and reaches its peak between May and June. Salinity decreases if rainfall starts early in May or late in July," said Shachindra Nath Biswas, principal scientific officer of SRDI Khulna office, which looks after the Bagerhat region.

Although SRDI does not have salinity data specifically from Kachua upazila, but salinity measured this year in June in the Baleshwar river under the Pirojpur Bridge near the Bagerhat-Pirojpur road was 7.1 dS/m, he said.

In July, it came down to 3.2 dS/m and in August it was 0.42 dS/m, he added.

Last year, the salinity level in Baleshwar under the Pirojpur Bridge point remained high even in September at 1.34 dS/m, said Sabbir Hossen, principal scientific officer of SRDI, Barisal regional office, which is located on the east of the river.

He said that flow of water in the upriver of Baleshwar, Bishkhali, Payra and Tetulia are going down at alarming rate.

"If upstream flow is normal then saline water intrusion does not occur that far inward (from the estuary)," he said, referring to the 10 villages that are on the west bank of Baleshwar.

The scientist said that SRDI will investigate whether a new pocket of salinity intrusion has been created in that region.

Deputy Director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Bagerhat Md Aftab Uddin said rainfall this year has been the lowest in the last 10 years, thus the pressure of freshwater



This recent photo taken from a field at Malipatan village in Bagerhat's Kachua upazila shows paddy saplings affected by salinity.

PHOTOS: STAR

in the river was lower than the saline water from the Bay.

Aftab expressed concern over this year's Aman production.

Meanwhile, farmer Altaf believes that saline water entered their village because of the on-going dredging of Ghosiakhali channel, that connects the Baleshwar

and the Bhairab river, in Taleshwar area under Bagerhat Sadar upazila.

Director of SRDI Bidhan Kuman Bhandar said the Ghosiakhali channel, which was closed due to siltation, does not have any upstream flow.

He said they will investigate whether opening the channel is increasing the

salinity of Baleshwar, which normally has high freshwater flow.

When asked about the dredging of the channel, Executive Engineer of Bagerhat Water Development Board Nahid Uzzaman Khan said salinity increased in the area due to sea level rise and less rainfall.

200 illegal structures demolished in Manikganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in a drive knocked down around 200 illegal structures in Manikganj bus stand area of the town yesterday.

They started the drive around 10:00am.

Dhaka Zone Estate and Law Officer Md Mahabubur Rahman Faruque and Executive Engineer of Manikganj RHD Amir Hossain led the eviction drive in cooperation with local administration and police.

The RHD will demolish all the illegal establishments on both sides of the Dhaka-Aricha highway in nearly one kilometre area of the town to be upgraded the highway from two lanes to four lanes, said Faruque.

Over five hundred illegal structures will be demolished from both sides of the highway in the drive, he said. The illegal structures include a four-storied supermarket owned by Manikganj municipality and a kitchen market. "Earlier, we issued notice to the occupiers asking them to remove their structures," said Amir Hossain. The eviction drive will continue until all the illegal structures are demolished, he said.



Hundreds of people from different areas thronged Matibhanga College premises in Pirojpur's Nazirpur upazila on Friday to enjoy a traditional lathi khela festival, organised by local Udayan Club.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

28 trees felled 'illegally'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Twenty-eight big trees on the Parbatipur upazila parishad premises have been felled 'illegally' in the last four days.

Without following proper procedures, the upazila administration has cut down the trees, locals said.

But no tender was floated for the felling of the trees, they alleged.

Seeking anonymity, a forest official of divisional forest office in Dinajpur said if the upazila parishad wants to cut down trees at is complex, the parishad should inform its district office.

The labourers engaged by the contractor have already taken away some logs of the felled trees from the compound, alleged locals.

Contacted, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Shahnaj Mithun Munni said she joined here recently.

'Protect rights of ethnic minorities, Dalits'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

People belonging to ethnic minority groups and Dalit community formed a human chain and held rally in front of Thakurgaon Press Club yesterday demanding effective steps to protect their rights.

Eco Social Development Organisation organised the programme in cooperation with Heks Eper under the banner Promotion of Rights of Ethnic Minority and Dalits for Improvement Programme.

The ethnic minorities face discrimination in different areas as the authorities are indifferent to their causes, speakers said at the rally.

They demanded formation of a separate land commission for protecting the lands of ethnic minority people living in plain lands and establishment of a separate ministry for dealing with their problems.

The Awami League in its election manifestos in 2008 and 2014 pledged formation of a separate land commission to protect dwellings, lands and water bodies of ethnic minority peoples living in plain lands and steps for preservation of their traditional rights on specific forest areas, speakers said.

But the commission is yet to be formed, they said.

Advocate Imran Hossain Chowdhury, adviser of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, Advocate Zahid Iqbal, district unit general secretary of Human Rights Commission, Raju Bashfor, general secretary of district unit of Harijan Samity, and Chaina Ram Tirki, president of Adibasi and Dalit Unnayan Forum, and Monsur Ali, president of Thakurgaon Press Club, addressed the programme, among others.

Patient's death sparks protest in Nilphamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Local people formed a human chain at Kherkathi bazar in Domar upazila yesterday protesting death of a young woman allegedly due to wrong treatment at a private clinic.

They also demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of owner of the clinic and its staffers.

The deceased was identified as Meghla Akhtar, 20, wife of Rabiul Islam of Paitkapara village in the upazila.

The victim's husband Rabiul at the programme said Meghla was admitted to Seven Star Clinic with labour pain in the upazila headquarters on September 20.

The clinic staffers told him that Meghla needed caesarian operation as her condition was critical, he said.

In absence of clinic owner Dr Ainul Huq, staffers Ranjit, Nihar Ranjan and Zahid conducted operation on her with Ainul's consent over cellphone, alleged Rabiul, adding, that she then gave birth

to a baby girl.

"Around 12:15am, Meghla started bleeding and we informed the staffers about the matter and they informed us to wait there till morning," said Rabiul.

But she was referred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital early in the morning as her condition worsened, he said, adding that Meghla later died on way to the hospital.

Rabiul then filed a case with Domar Police Station, accusing the clinic owner and the three staffers.

Soon after filing of the case, the accused kept the clinic locked and fled away, he said.

"The accused are moving freely and giving threat to us," alleged Rabiul.

Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they are trying their best to arrest the accused.

Civil Surgeon Ranjit Kumar Barman said a probe committee has been formed to investigate the incident and it has been asked to submit report within seven days.



Locals form a human chain at Kherkathi Bazar in Nilphamari's Domar upazila yesterday protesting death of a woman allegedly due to wrong treatment. PHOTOS: STAR

Idol artisans busy as Durga Puja nears

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Idols makers at different places across the country are passing busy time as Sharodiya Durga Puja Utsab, the biggest religious festival of the Bangalee Hindus, is only a few days away.

The celebrations will start on October 4 with Maha Sashti and end with Bijoya Dashami on October 8 with the immersion of idols in rivers and canals.

Our Mymensingh Correspondent reports: Artisans at different mandaps in Mymensingh city and other places of the district are giving the finishing touches to idols ahead of Durga Puja.

"We have already completed making earthen idols. Now we are doing painting and other related works to make the idols ready for supplying to the clients," said Bidhan Pal, a worker at Dharmashala Temple in Jubilee Ghat area of the city.

Several workers said they engage in making idols for three to four months a year and paid Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 per month each.

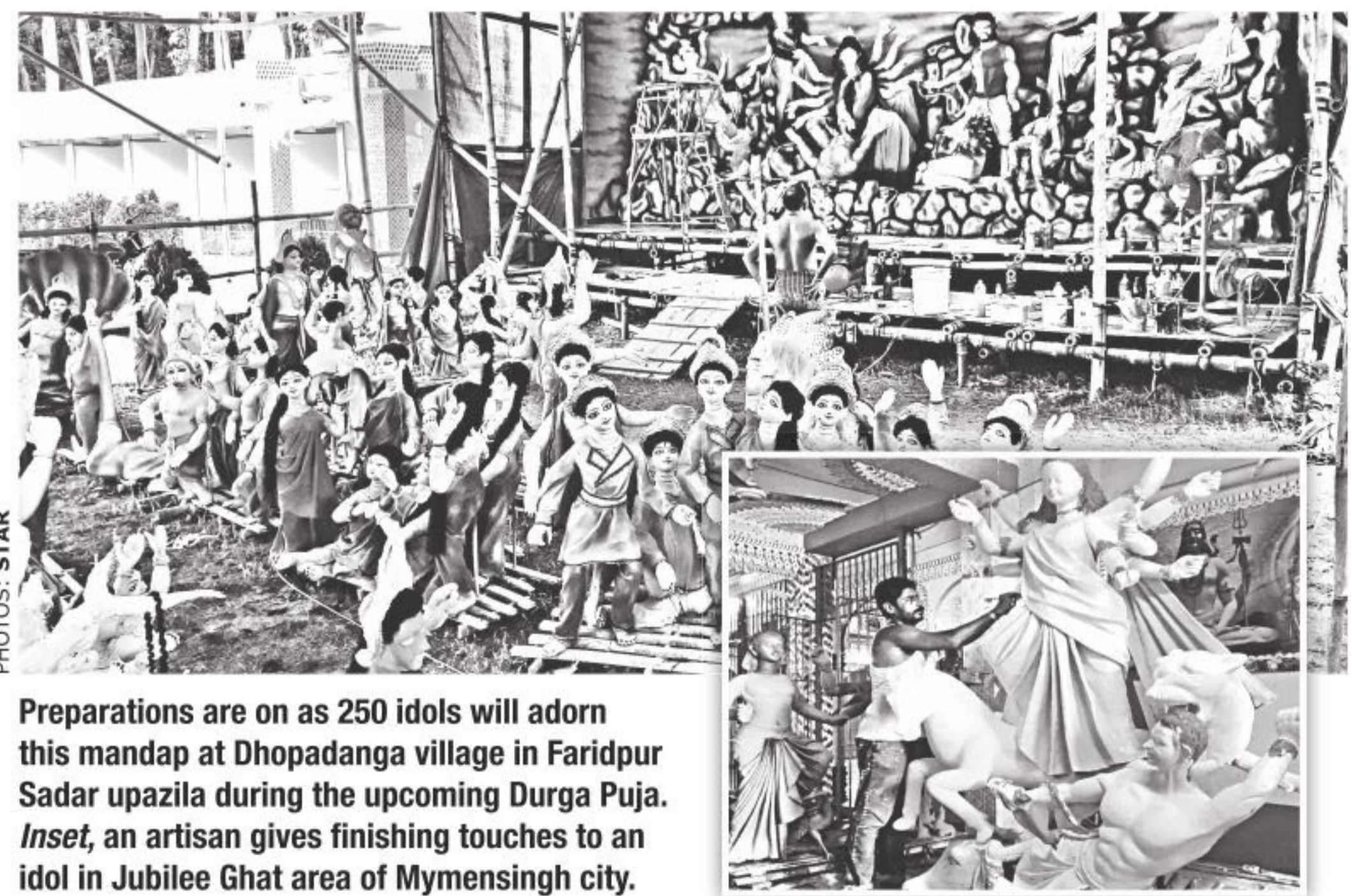
Sanjoy Das, an artisan in city's Kalibari area, said he got more orders this year as the number of puja mandaps has increased.

"We are taking Tk 2000 to Tk 3000 for every idol this year as the cost of materials has risen," said Joyonta Kumar Ghosh, a leading artisan in Mymensingh and proprietor of 'Mritt O Mrittika'. "We continue this ancestral business not only for economic gains but also as devotion for this art work," he said.

Shankar Saha, organising secretary of the district's puja celebration committee, said 773 puja mandaps will be set up in the district this year.

"We have already held several meetings with administration, police and city corporation authorities and they assured us of tight security measures during the celebration. We are satisfied with the measures," he said.

Mymensingh Superintendent of Police Shah Abid Hossain said a full-proof security measure



Preparations are on as 250 idols will adorn this mandap at Dhopadanga village in Faridpur Sadar upazila during the upcoming Durga Puja. Inset, an artisan gives finishing touches to an idol in Jubilee Ghat area of Mymensingh city.

has been taken in the district to ensure safety of puja mandaps and the devotees and police teams are visiting the mandaps every day.

Our Faridpur Correspondent adds: Preparations for Durga Puja celebrations are going on in full swing in Faridpur.

Visiting puja mandaps at Chalk Bazar, Old Bus Stand, Jiltuli, Ramkrishna Mission and Dhopadanga village, this correspondent found that the structures of the idols are complete and sculptors are doing the painting work.

Sukesh Saha, general secretary of the district's puja celebration committee, said Durga Puja will be held at 750 mandaps in nine upazilas of Faridpur.

At least 250 idols will be set up at the Durga mandap of Jasoda Jibon Devnath's house in

Dhopadanga village under Faridpur Sadar upazila this year.

"We are trying to make one of the largest mandaps in our country with 250 idols as my mother told me to do so. The idols will represent the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata," said Jasoda Jibon Devnath.

"We have been working for two months here and hope to complete the work before Maha Sashti," said Proloy Biswas, 30, a craftsman working at the mandap of Jasoda Jibon's house.

Md Alimuzzaman, superintendent of police in Faridpur, said, "We have already taken adequate security measures. Ansar members and local volunteers will work with police teams to ensure safety during the Durga Puja celebrations."