



Women using aquatic weeds to make doullas for floating beds. Right, vegetables grow in a floating bed at Balodia village in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

# The women behind Pirojpur's floating agriculture

Many women in wetland areas take part in making spherical objects, locally known as doulla, in which seeds are sown or seedlings are planted

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Local women in Pirojpur's wetland areas play a vital role in floating agriculture that is recognised by Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN as one of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems.

The unique system, locally known as 'dhap', is being practised for over three centuries in flood-prone areas of Nazirpur and Nesarabad upazilas under

Pirojpur and Banaripara upazila under Barishal where water remains for a prolonged period of time.

Many farmers there grow vegetables while others grow vegetable seedlings all throughout the year on floating beds that are primarily made from water hyacinth and other aquatic weeds. Up to 2,000 plants can be grown on each floating bed that can be used for at least five times in a year.

While men mostly work on the

floating beds, other members of their family, especially women, take part in making spherical objects in which seeds are sown or seedlings are planted.

After finishing household chores, the women gather around a spot and use various aquatic weeds to roll up the objects they call 'doulla'.

"Before setting the doullas on the floating beds, we [women] sow seeds or plant saplings in those," said Nasrin Begum from Mugarjhor village in

Nazirpur upazila.

Sultana from the same area said, "Time flies by while we make doullas and chitchat till dusk."

After seeds are planted, the doullas are kept in an area for at least two days for sprouting, said Hafiza Begum, another woman from the same village.

The women said they can make nearly two thousand doullas a day and some of them are even getting paid for making doullas. "The money comes in handy for

my family's needs," said Nurjahan from Balodia village in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila.

In some cases, saplings are planted in the doullas. After the seedlings or saplings are ready, men transport the doullas in boats and place those on floating beds.

Farmer Zakir Hossain said the role of women in floating agriculture is an important one as their contribution eases workload of men.

## Couple found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A couple were found dead in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Saber Ali, 42, and his wife Muktara Begum, 35, of Balatari village. They have two kids.

Quoting the deceased's family members, Moshir Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Gangachara Police Station, said the couple engaged in an altercation over a family issue on Monday night. At the time, the two children were asleep with their grandmother in the nearby room.

In the morning, family members entered the room by breaking open the door as the couple were not responding despite being called repeatedly.

Muktara's body was found lying on the bed while Saber was found hanging from the ceiling of the room, said the OC.

The police official said Saber might have committed suicide after killing his wife.

## Youth strangled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

The body of an unidentified youth, aged about 22, was found floating on the Kaliganga river at Nalora village in Manikganj Sadar upazila yesterday.

Informed by locals, police recovered the body from the river around 12:00 noon, said Rakibuzzaman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sadar Police Station.

The victim's legs were tied up with his shirt, said the OC.

A gang might have strangled the youth and dumped the body in the river, said the police official.



Straw, widely used as fodder, is kept for sale at Sundarganj Bazar in Gaibandha. The item is now selling at unreasonably high prices as cattle farmers in sandy lands of Teesta basin areas see fodder crisis due to the recent floods affecting vast croplands including those cultivated with Napier grass.

PHOTO: KM REZAUL HOQUE

# Bhairab river on deathbed

Grabbing, pollution threatens several canals in Bagerhat's Kachua upazila

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY, Bagerhat

Once flowing Bhairab river and several canals in Kachua upazila of Bagerhat are heading towards virtual death, thanks to illegal occupation and garbage dumping for years.

"Influential people have built illegal establishments occupying lands on both sides of the Bhairab river, the lifeline of Kachua. Besides, mindless dumping of rubbish is gradually filling up the river and causing dangerous pollution to the water," said Afzal Hussain, a retired teacher.

Several canals of Sangdia, Afra, Kolmibuniya, Bakulatala, Kachua Sadar and Bhadhal Bazar areas are in awful conditions.

"Cultivation is hampered as water for irrigation is not that available. Shortage of water and pollution

*Influential people have built illegal establishments occupying lands on both sides of the river.*

in rivers and canals also affect fish stocks," said Anath Kumar Das of Sangdia village.

Farmers are facing serious problem to bring their agricultural products to Kachua Sadar Bazar as movement of boats has become difficult, said Kabir Sheikh, a local.

Along with navigability problem, locals are facing problem as they cannot use the polluted water of the Bhairab and several canals for household purposes, said Kondokar Niaz Iqbal, president of Kachua Press Club.

"We demand immediate steps to free the natural water bodies from the grabbers and excavate those on an urgent basis," he said.

Md Nahid Uzzaman, executive engineer of Water Development Board in Bagerhat, said, "We are excavating rivers and canals in different upazilas. With the help of administration, we are taking action against illegal occupiers of rivers and canals."

## 10 missing in Teesta boat capsized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

At least ten people went missing after a boat capsized in the Teesta River under Rajarhat upazila of the district on Sunday.

Quoting locals, Krisna Chandra Sarker, officer-in-charge (OC) of Rajarhat Police Station, said a boat carrying around 30 passengers hit T-embankment and sank due to strong current in the river near Burir Bazar area around 12:05pm. At the time, 10 went missing.

However, other passengers managed to swim ashore, said Gharialdanga union parishad chairman Rabindra Nath Karmakar.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Rashedul Haque Prodhon said they were trying their best to rescue the missing people.

# Take steps to stop illegal sand lifting

Affected villagers demand at press conference in Tangail town

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Villagers of Baghil and Kakua unions in Sadar upazila have urged the authorities concerned to stop illegal sand lifting from the Dhaleshwari river.

They made the demand at a press conference in Tangail Press Club yesterday.

The speakers at the press conference alleged that Azizul Islam of Kakua village, general secretary of the union unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League, and Lal Miah of Paikmuri village, an outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Red Flag), continued lifting sand illegally from the river, posing threat to the croplands nearby.

The affected farmers lodged complaints to the assistant commissioner (Land) and upazila nirbahi officer in this regard several times but they are yet to take any steps

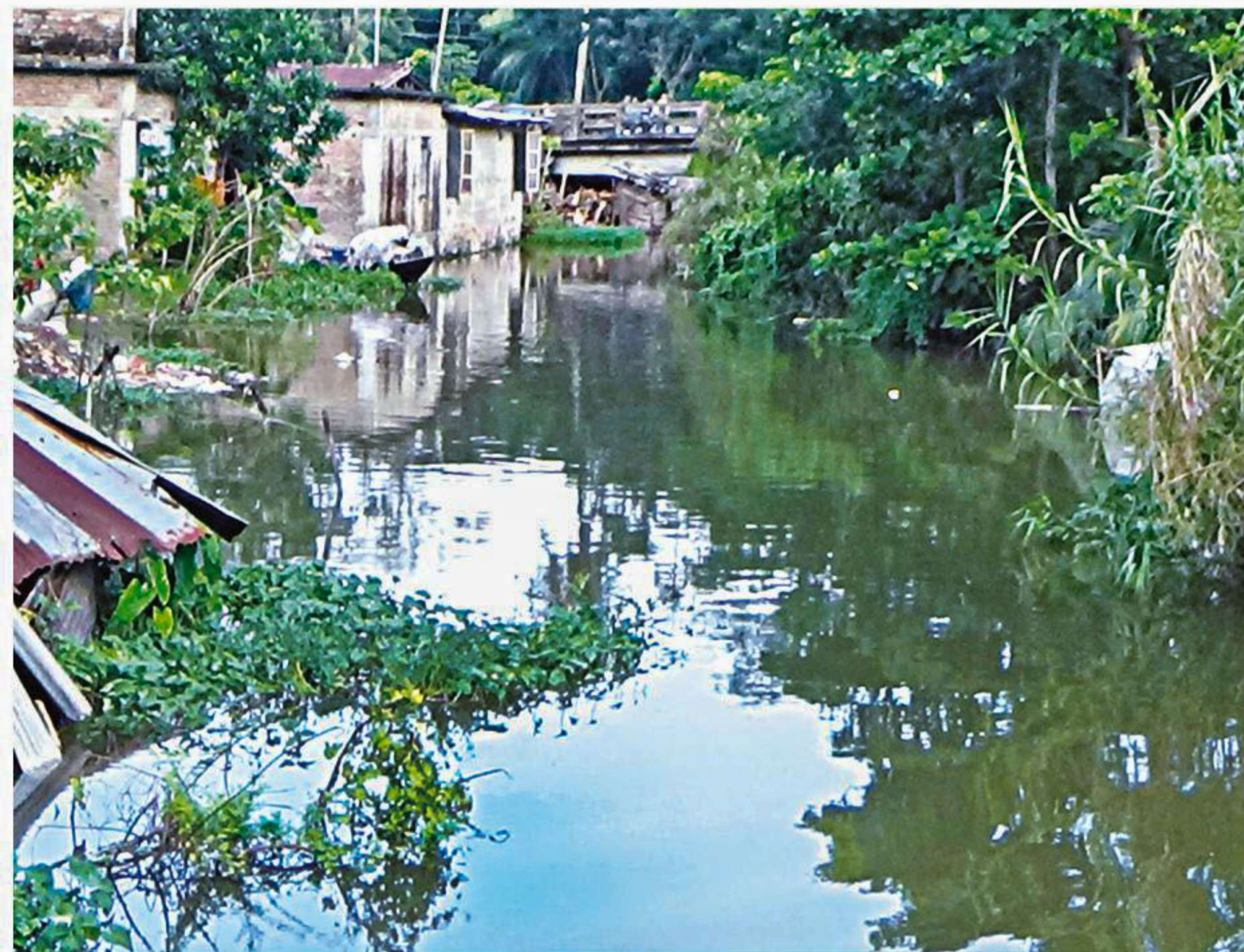
in this regard.

On September 18, they informed the deputy commissioner about the matter. Later, a mobile court in a drive burnt two dredgers in the area and sentenced two sand lifters to one month's imprisonment each on September 23.

However, other sand lifters--Azizul and Lal Miah -- managed to flee the scene, sensing the presence of the executive magistrate who led the court.

The illegal sand lifters are local influential people having political clout and they gave death threat to the villagers when they protested the illegal sand lifting, said the speakers.

Affected villagers Abul Hossain Sarkar, Monayem Sarkar, Kabir Sarkar, Koddus Ali and Nurul Huda, among others, spoke at the conference.



A scene of the Bhairab river in Kachua upazila of Bagerhat.

PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTY