

Farmers unite to bring canal back to life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

After nearly two decades of waiting around for the authorities to take steps, farmers in Baulal upazila finally decided to restore a two-kilometre long dormant canal on their own.

The restoration of the Jauta-Naumala-Boga canal, running through Baulal and Naumala unions, will benefit local farmers grow crops on about 500 acres of land all year long.

During a visit to the area on February 18, several hundred volunteers were seen at work. About 750 metres of the canal -- running along Aleya Rahman Ladies' Club Government Primary School -- was found re-excavated already.

Farmer Faruk Sikder from Batkajal village said hundreds of farmers in Jauta, Batkajal and Naomala areas depend on the canal's water to irrigate crops, mainly Aman and IRRI rice, on around 500 acres of land in the area.

But they had not been able to grow most crops during most parts of the year and the rice production had also been suffering due to poor flow of water in the silted up canal. Now the re-excavation of the canal by volunteers will help rejuvenate agriculture in the area, he hoped.

Another farmer, Abdur Rouf Khalifa, from Jauta village, said water is a must

for agriculture, including rice. But rice seedlings are turning yellow already due to scanty supply of water in the canal.

"We started to dig the canal as the yield of IRRI will be affected this time if we can't irrigate the crop with sufficient water immediately," he added.

The canal slowly went dry after its source, Maishadi canal, was closed off with a sluice gate and silt kept on accumulating in it over a period of about two decades when the accumulated silt was not removed, said Shah Alam Chowkidar, of the same village.

Chairman Shahzada Hawlader of Naomala Union Parishad said livelihoods of agricultural communities in Jauta, Batkajal and Naomala depend on water from the canal.

The farmers have been suffering immensely after water stopped flowing in the canal. If the sluice gate upstream is opened up, the farmers in the area can be relieved of their miseries, he also said.

Baulal Upazila Nirbahi Officer Zakir Hossain said, "I have heard of the situation from the affected farmers. Necessary steps will be taken to re-excavate the dormant canals in the area so the farmers get uninterrupted supply of irrigation water for growing crops all year round."

He also suggested of taking steps to keep sluice gates open at the source of the canals.



Jurachhari Upazila Health Complex in Rangamati. Inset, built in 1978, the health complex is yet to see any infrastructural development. The wall of that hospital is at risk of collapse any moment. PHOTO: STAR

Lurking danger at Jurachhari Health Complex

ANVIL CHAKMA, Rangamati

Jurachhari Upazila Health Complex, the only medical centre for the health services of 40,000 people in Jurachhari, the most remote upazila of Rangamati district, is in a dilapidated condition.

According to the health complex official, the health complex was built in 1978. Although the health complex was extended to 50 beds in 2012, the medical facility is yet to see any infrastructural development.

Patients and local people said that the wall of that hospital is at risk of collapse any moment and that is why they are afraid to go to the hospital for treatment.

It is also plagued with manpower crisis. Currently, there are only five doctors against 11 posts.

It could be learned that due to a severe earthquake in the adjoining

Barkal upazila in 2001, large cracks appeared in different parts of the complex building. At present, the entire facility is at risk of an impending disaster.

Ratneshwar Chakma, 34, of Tashi para village in the upazila, said a few months ago, he went to the health complex to get his brother admitted there. But seeing the precarious condition of the hospital building, he did not get his brother admitted to the hospital.

His brother was kept at a relative's house near to the hospital and received treatment.

Md Syed Abedin, medical officer of the health complex, said patients who come to this health complex for treatment do not feel safe. Those who are helpless and those whose condition is very bad are admitted to bed in trepidation.

There are no doctors' and staff quarters here, he added.

Dr Bipash Khisa, civil surgeon of Rangamati district, said the infrastructure at the Jurachhari Health Complex is actually very risky.

An accident can occur at any moment, he said.

"I have written about this to the Ministry and the Department of Health. But there is no solution to it yet. However, the soil has already been tested by the Department of Health. Hope to get good news from the department soon."

Contacted, Suresh Kumar Chakma, chairman of Jurachhari Upazila, said it is very difficult to provide services to the patients at the hospital.

"I have already informed the matter to the higher authorities many times. I hope the government will take steps the next year", he added.



Local volunteers prepare a canal for re-excavation. The two-kilometre long Jauta-Naumala-Boga canal, in Patuakhali's Baulal upazila, has been dormant for around two decades. PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Teenage girl raped Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A teenage girl was raped allegedly by one of her neighbouring youths in Sujaganar upazila on Friday night.

The 13-year-old victim was sent to Pabna General Hospital for the medical test yesterday.

Officer in Charge (OC) of Sujaganar Police Station Mohammad Badruddoza said Shakib Hossain, son of Abdus Salam of Jorpukuria village in the upazila, picked up the victim while she was alone on Friday evening.

The culprit then took the girl to his house and raped her forcibly, the OC said.

Family members and neighbours rescued the victim from the house early Saturday but the culprit managed to flee the scene.

Later, father of the victim girl filed a case with Sujaganar Police Station accusing Sakib the same night, the OC said, adding that they were conducting drives to arrest the culprit.

Away in Chatmohar upazila, police arrested a youth from Dhonkunia village on Saturday for his alleged involvement in raping a college girl.

Police produced arrestee Hashem Ali before a Pabna court the same afternoon that sent him to jail.

On February 2, Hashem raped a neighbouring college girl promising to marry her, police said.

Later, victim's father filed a case accusing Hashem.



International Labour Organization

The Daily Star

International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention C190 and its relevance in Bangladesh

To observe the 16 days of activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV), The Daily Star and ILO's Improving Working Conditions in the Ready-Made Garment Sector Programme Phase II (RMGP-II) jointly organised an online discussion titled "International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention C190 and its relevance in Bangladesh". The discussion took place on December 10, 2020, on the International Human Rights Day which was also the last day of the 16 days of activism against GBV. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

TUOMO POUTIAINEN, Country Director, ILO, Bangladesh

The ILO Convention Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (C190) and its accompanying Recommendation (R206) went through a long process and it culminated in the adoption of the convention in the ILO Centenary Conference in 2019. The Bangladesh government voted in favour of the adoption of the Convention C190 and Recommendation R206 and we are optimistic about the ratification of C190 by the government of Bangladesh. Workers' and Employers' organisation need to engage to discuss the convention's ratification and figure out how it can be integrated into the national system through legislation to improve practices in addressing workplace violence and harassment. Without addressing issues around violence and harassment, including GBV in the world of work, it is impossible to achieve the Decent Work Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SHAMMIN SULTANA, Programme Officer, Gender Mainstreaming, RMGP-II, ILO, Bangladesh

ILO's C190 and R206 were adopted on June 21, 2019. This is the first-ever convention on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work. ILO's Dhaka office was actively engaged with stakeholders for the adoption of the convention.

ILO's RMGP-II, funded by the government of the Netherlands, Canada, and the UK, technically supports the Bangladeshi government's efforts to ensure safe and decent working conditions in the garment and other sectors to improve competitiveness in Bangladesh. Women workers make up more than 60 percent of the RMG workforce. Therefore, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is very crucial. Combating violence and harassment including GBV in the world of work is a major focus of the programme.

AYA MATSUURA, Gender Specialist, Decent Work Team (DWT), ILO, New Delhi

C190 recognises everyone's right to a world of work free from violence and harassment. It is critical to define and prohibit violence and harassment in the world of work in the laws and regulations. This convention also talks about the importance of adopting an inclusive, integrated, and gender-responsive approach in efforts to provide protection to everyone, to develop comprehensive frameworks for preventing and addressing violence and harassment, and to address persistent gender inequalities in eliminating violence and



TUOMO POUTIAINEN



SHAMMIN SULTANA



AYA MATSUURA



TASLIMA YASMIN



DR. FAHMIDA KHATUN



HUMAIRA AZIZ



NAZMA AKTER



MAHJABEEN QUADER



KOHINOOR MAHMOOD



NAIMUL AHASAN JEWEL



TAPATI SAHA



MAHEEN SULTAN



FAZLE SHAMIM EHSAN



MD. MATIUR RAHAMAN



GEORGE FALLER

harassment, especially GBV.

While disseminating information on C190, it is also essential to be sensitive towards different audiences.

TASLIMA YASMIN, Assistant Professor, Department of Law, University of Dhaka

ILO RMGP-II's recent study on "Overview of Laws, Policies and Practices on GBV and Harassment in the World of Work in Bangladesh" suggests that there are some key gaps in our legal framework. The laws defining and criminalising sexual offences are inadequate in Bangladesh. There is also a lack of provision addressing sexual harassment.

The government should emphasise on strengthening the national legal and policy frameworks on violence and harassment in the world of work, reform the Bangladesh Labour Act and the Bangladesh Labour Rule, and reform criminal laws on GBV and harassment. In the absence of specific legislation to address sexual harassment, strengthening the enforcement and monitoring of the 2009 High Court guidelines in workplaces and building awareness among all stakeholders is essential.

DR. FAHMIDA KHATUN, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

Sexual harassment and violence in workplaces arise due to power relations, along with certain social, political, and cultural factors.

Women's participation in the labour force is essential, not only for their own development, but also for the society. Bangladesh is expected to graduate from the least developed country (LDC) category in 2024 and ratification of ILO's Convention C190 is an integral part of this graduation.

HUMAIRA AZIZ, Director, Women and Girls' Empowerment Program, CARE, Bangladesh

In the context of violence against women, social norms play a huge role. These norms can only be changed through laws that deter these harmful practices.

In order to encourage the younger generation of women to participate in the economic realm, it is crucial to create a safe work environment which is monitored and guided by protocol.

Different stakeholders have concerns about

committing to an international convention which we may not be able to adhere to due to a lack of resources and we need to identify and address these concerns in order to move forward with the ratification.

NAZMA AKTER, General Secretary & Executive Director, Awaj Foundation

Awaj Foundation follows the C190 convention in order to eliminate GBV in the RMG sector. We work at the policy and advocacy level with the government and other stakeholders. We also educate and spread awareness among factory-level management, workers, and unions. Our goal is to convince factories in supporting this convention.

MAHJABEEN QUADER, Senior Advisor, Economic Affairs and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Netherlands Embassy

The role of the stakeholders needs to be given more attention and the recommendation section for C190 should identify what needs to be done at what level. The ratification of this convention is going to be a coordinated effort but the government definitely holds the primary responsibility in moving things forward.

KOHINOOR MAHMOOD, Director, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS)

BILS has prepared a Bangla draft of the ILO convention. We have distributed this translated version of C190 along with posters and leaflets to create awareness among the workers.

If the government wants to implement all its development agendas, ratification of C190 is crucial.

NAIMUL AHASAN JEWEL, Member Secretary, National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education (NCCWE)

Our request to the government and workers' organisations is to raise their voice in support of the implementation of C190 since its integration is crucial for us.

TAPATI SAHA, Programme Analyst, Women's Economic Empowerment, United Nations (UN) Women in Bangladesh

It is extremely important for C190 to be ratified and we also have a role to play in assisting the government in the ratification process.

This convention is highly important because it is focused solely on dealing with violence and harassment in the workplace. Our world of work is highly hierarchical with intellectual work being valued the most and work at the service provider level is undermined. Women are usually involved in this service-provider category.

MAHEEN SULTAN, Senior Fellow of Practice, Gender and Social Transformation, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)

Our research has shown that young women in the workplace have difficulties finding the right language to talk about sexual harassment or protest against it. One of the strengths of C190 is that it deals with both formal and informal sectors.

FAZLE SHAMIM EHSAN, Second Vice President, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA)

Guidelines need to be provided to the workers and to the employers for establishing a functional complaint mechanism. Otherwise, there will remain misconceptions on both the management's and the workers' side. There are times when we are unaware about what constitutes harassment. A set of guidelines provided for each employee would help them maintain professionalism with each other. We also need to form anti-harassment committees in our industries.

MD. MATIUR RAHAMAN, Deputy Inspector General (Health), Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE)

We have developed the Gender Roadmap with the support of ILO's RMGP-II. This roadmap will make the labour inspectors more capable of monitoring and inspecting the gender issues in workplaces. In order to speed up the whole ratification process, we need to find the key stakeholders.

We also must stop stereotyping and employing women in certain specific positions because of their gender.

GEORGE FALLER, Chief Technical Adviser, RMGP-II, ILO, Bangladesh

Convention C190 is the first international labour standard which comprehensively addresses violence and harassment in the world of work. ILO is calling for its ratification as a way of implementing and accelerating actions on prevention of violence and harassment in the world of work. Ratification will not be enough; the convention needs to be properly implemented as well.

ILO is in the process of translating the full C190 convention and the recommendations. From ILO's end, we will provide our full support to the government, employers, workers, and other partners to get C190 ratified and implemented in Bangladesh.