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# The Kuhelia crying

## River turns into a narrow stream, thanks to earth-filling by RHD

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

The Roads and Highways Department has earth-filled about 26 acres of the Kuhelia river in Cox's Bazar to build a two-lane road.

The massive encroachment has turned the once-vibrant river in Moheshkhali's Matarbari union into a narrow stream.

The department is going ahead with the construction despite the land ministry's objection.

In its Environmental Impact Assessment, the RHD even concealed the fact that the construction work would require earth filling to make way for the road along the ecologically sensitive river, said Nazmul Huda, deputy director of Department of Environment, Cox's Bazar.

Because of the river's natural value, the land ministry had turned down the RHD's proposal to build the road, according to Prime Minister's Office documents seen by The Daily Star.

Besides, a proposal, sent by the Cox's Bazar district administration to the ministry, on acquiring the river land mentioned the river area as ponds and ditches, the documents show.

Construction of the 7.35km road from Rajghata area of Kuhelia to Muhuriaghona of Dolghat began in October 2018 and is expected to complete in June 2023.

The 13km stretch of the river, which used to facilitate maritime trade and ensure livelihoods for many, now flows like a canal due to heavy earth filling.

The grim picture came up in an investigation by the DoE, which found the RHD earth-filled 25.68 acres of the river as of January 2021. Latest data are not available, but sources say more river area has been encroached upon by now.

Mujibur Rahman Howlader, former chairman of the National River Conservation Committee, who visited the river in April 2021, recently told this newspaper that the way the RHD filled up the river was a criminal offence.

"They sandwiched the river by reducing its breadth and depth.... They can in no way stymie the current of a river. They can't fill up the flood plains of any river either," he said, referring to river protection laws and Supreme Court orders.

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The Kuhelia river in South Rajghat area of Cox's Bazar has been narrowed due to earth-filling. The Roads and Highways Department is building a two-lane road on the river despite the land ministry's objections. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Star HEALTHLINE

Know your deshi 'superfoods': NIGELLA SEEDS

STAR HEALTH DESK

Many of us know kajojeera or Nigella seeds from the time when our grandmother handed us a small cloth pouch filled with the black seeds to sniff -- for relief from a stuffy nose.

Nigella seeds are one of the most common traditional home remedies, specially in the sub-continent.

Nigella seeds are known for their medicinal properties and culinary use.

Its use can be traced back several centuries as a natural remedy for various illnesses.

Let's take a look at some of the benefits they offer.

1. Nigella seeds are packed with antioxidants. Essential oil made from them also acts as antioxidants. However, it was not yet proven how the antioxidants found in Nigella Sativa may impact human health.

2. Nigella seeds are used by many to lower cholesterol levels.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Hyginex spray Instant hand sanitizer with alcoholizer

BEACON Pharmaceuticals Limited

# India fears another Covid catastrophe

## Cases hit 7-month high; seven-day home quarantine made mandatory for all overseas travellers

AGENCIES

India's daily Covid-19 cases jumped to 117,100 yesterday, a five-fold increase in a week, and on course to overtake its previous infection peak as the fast-spreading Omicron becoming the dominant coronavirus variant across the country.

Case numbers have yet to match the enormous figures seen during the brutal second wave of the pandemic last year when thousands died each day and crematoriums maintained round-the-clock pyres for mass cremation of victims.

Government officials have privately said they are working under the assumption that daily infections will surpass the record of more than 414,000 set in May, given what has happened in countries such as the United States where daily cases recently rose past 1 million.

"We will clearly surpass our record shortly and reach a new peak by early February," MD Gupte, a former director of the state-run National Institute of Epidemiology and an immunisation adviser to the government, told Reuters.

Fearing another catastrophe like last year, authorities in several cities have brought in restrictions in a bid to keep infections in check.

As cases have shot up, the Indian health ministry said that starting from January 11 arrivals from all countries would have to isolate at home for a week. Some two percent of such people would be tested at their port of arrival, and sent to institutional quarantine if found positive for Covid-19.

Earlier, only those arriving from countries with a high number of cases had to be mandatorily tested and sent to institutional quarantine if found positive or

home quarantine for a week if negative.

Preliminary studies have so far suggested the Omicron variant has led to less severe health consequences among those infected, despite its rapid spread.

Experts however warned that an uncontrolled spread of new virus infections could still pose serious problems for India.

World Health Organization (WHO) on Thursday warned against complacency against the new variant.

"While Omicron does appear to be less severe compared to Delta, especially in those vaccinated, it does not mean it should be categorised as mild," director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at the same briefing in Geneva.

"Just like previous variants, Omicron is hospitalising people and it is killing people."

# One killed, 10 hurt in clash over trifles

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A 65-year-old man was killed and 10 others were injured in a clash over money between two families in Bera of Pabna.

Tota Bepari died on the way to a hospital after he was injured in the clash, said Arbinda Sarkar, officer-in-charge of Bera Police Station.

Tota's son Akher Ali went to Saudi Arabia with his neighbour Shafiqul Islam one and a half years ago. Akher returned home after a few months, but Shafiqul, who took money from Akher's family for the latter's migration, stayed back, the OC said.

After Akher returned home, his family members forced Shafiqul's family to return the money, which began an enmity between the two families.

Yesterday morning, members of the two families engaged in an argument and attacked each other, said the officer.

# 5 killed in 2 road crashes 3-year-old girl among victims

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Five people, including a child, were killed and seven others injured in two road crashes in Tangail's Madhupur and Mirzapur upazilas yesterday.

Police said an accident took place near Madhupur Bus Stand on Tangail-Jamalpur Regional Highway around 7:00am.

Tarik Kamal, officer-in-charge of Madhupur Police Station, said a pickup van and a CNG-run three-wheeler collided head-on, leaving three dead on the spot and four injured.

The dead are Sharmin Begum, 31, her daughter Sohagi, 3, of Jamalpur, and Rasel Miah, 20, of Sherpur, said police, adding that the injured were sent to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

On information, a police team went to the spot and recovered the bodies, the OC said.

Meanwhile, two men were killed and three others injured in a road crash at Bashtoli union in Mirzapur upazila.

According to police, a passenger bus collided head-on with a covered van and both the vehicles fell into a ditch around 1:00pm.

Mohammad Selim, sub-inspector of Bashtoli Police Outpost, said the identities of the dead could not be known immediately.

The injured were rushed to Kumudini Hospital, the police official added.

# TALKS ON EC FORMATION JSD (Rob) turns down invite

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rob) yesterday became the latest political party to reject President Abdul Hamid's invitation to a dialogue on the formation of the Election Commission.

Earlier, five more political parties -- BNP, Liberal Democratic Party, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Communist Party of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal -- also rejected the dialogue, terming the initiative "meaningless".

It is the first time since 2012 that political parties have refused the president's invitation on holding the dialogues on formation of the EC. JSD president ASM Abdur Rob yesterday revealed the party's decision not to join the dialogue at a press conference at his residence in the capital's Uttara.

In the briefing, Rob said that formation of EC is not a solution for holding a free and fair elections.

"Considering the reality, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal is not participating in the President's dialogue," he said. "The dialogue has to be on process of formation of a national government for holding a free and fair election and to establish rule of law."

The JSD chief said the current Election Commission was appointed by the president. But this commission has been biased and betrayed the nation by destroying the electoral system.



A health worker wearing protective gear takes a nasal swab sample of a passenger during a routine coronavirus screening event at a railway platform in Mumbai, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP