



As soon as the first light hits the horizon, coal collectors of Sunamganj make their way to Tahirpur upazila's Jadukata river. They sift out coal from sand sediments in the water using small box nets and sell them to designated contractors. Of the 20,000 labourers engaged in this profession, most are women. They are often accompanied by their 11-14-year-olds, who aid their mothers in their backbreaking work and contribute to their families' survival.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Two children drown in Ctg pond

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two children drowned in a pond near their house while playing in Fatikchhari upazila of Chattogram yesterday.

The deceased are Jannatun Nisa (2), daughter of Omar Faruk, and Mim (3), daughter of Nazrul Islam of South Rangamatia village.

Quoting family members, Dr Fatema-tuz-Zohra, emergency medical officer at Fatikchhari Health Complex, said the children were playing in the yard around 12pm.

As the family members were not around, they fell into the pond while playing and drowned.

4 BNP men jailed in 2013 violence case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court has sentenced four BNP men to two years imprisonment in a case filed for hurling crude bombs on police and preventing them from discharging duties in Dhaka's Badda on October 28, 2013.

The four are Dhaka north city unit BNP convening committee members Md Jahangir Mollah, Md Ismail Hossain, Abu Bakar Siddique and Bacchu Mia. All of them have been absconding since the case was filed.

Another one BITES THE DUST

Juri is less a river and more a dumpyard at present

MINTU DESHWARA

Juri has been robbed of its beauty.

During the monsoon season, discarded materials and polythene clog the river, threatening biodiversity of the Hakaluki haor. This has also led to the river's imminent death during the dry season.

Md Khurshed Alam, sub-divisional engineer (Moulvibazar) of Water Development Board, said the river originated in the northern part of Tripura. It enters Bangladesh through the Fultala border, flows through the upazila Sadar and becomes Hakaluki Haor, which merges with the Kushiara river.

Due to pollution, the river lost its navigability and is known to locals as "Mora Juri Nadi" (the dead Juri river). About a year ago, illegal structures on both sides of the river were evicted and 8.7km of the river were re-excavated, he added.

This correspondent recently visited the spot and saw that the river was almost dead. Garbage from nearby markets is being dumped indiscriminately into the river in a 300-meter area of the bridge connecting Bhabaniganj and Kamniganj markets.

Sadek Mia, a resident of Juri upazila town, said, "The markets' people have set up open toilets on the river banks. In addition to river pollution, the stench is hard to stand. In the rainy season, the filth washes into the river water and flows into



The Juri river in Sylhet can hardly be called a river anymore. At present, the river has turned into a garbage dumping facility for locals, since the authorities are yet to set up any designated waste management facility.

PHOTO: STAR

Hakaluki Haor.

Local journalist, Kalyan Prasun Champu, said, "People are dumping garbage in the river as there is no effective waste management system. It's possible to produce organic manure through waste management. The administration can take necessary measures in this regard."

Jaifarnagar UP Chairman Mashum Reza said a couple of years ago, it was decided in the Upazila Parishad meeting that waste management would be done by allocating space through a project. For this purpose, Chalibandar and Kapna Pahar regions were initially visited by the

administration.

Contacted, UNO Sonia Sultana said, "I've instructed the UP chairman to take measures to prevent waste dumping. We'll quickly determine a specific place for dumping garbage."

"If anyone disobeys the order and dumps garbage, strict action will be taken. If required, CCTV cameras will be installed for monitoring. Everyone should step forward to protect the river and haor," she added.

Badrul Huda, assistant director of the Department of Environment in Moulvibazar, said, "I will take necessary action after visiting spot."

'VICTIMISED TWICE'

Rohingya transgender women seek recognition as 'Third Gender'

DIL AFROSE JAHAN

Bilashi (not her real name), an 18-year-old Rohingya transwoman shared that she was blamed for transmitting Covid-19 -- with her neighbours calling the disease "a curse of the Almighty".

"People blame us for any disaster or unwanted incident; for example, the recent fires at Rohingya camp," said Bilashi.

An advocacy brief, titled "In the Shadows of the Pandemic: The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on Rohingya and Host Communities", was produced by Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), Gender Hub in collaboration with ACAPS & NPM Analysis Hub, CARE Bangladesh, Oxfam, and UN Women.

Published in October 2020, the brief quotes a transgender Rohingya, who said that the community has an aversion towards transgenders, blaming them for the pandemic. "After the advent of Covid-19, they said that transgender people would not remain in our communities." And violence erupts every time such behaviours are protested.

After being beaten for hours, an unconscious, bleeding Asmani (not her real name) was dumped by the roadside at a Rohingya camp last year. The 20-year-old transwoman was coming home from her uncle's wedding at the same camp.

She was allegedly picked up by members and followers of Harakah al-Yaqin (a Rohingya insurgent group) in the middle of the night. Her shoulder-length hair, feminine attire and make-up led to the assault, says Asmani. "I regained consciousness after four days at one of the MSF (Doctors Without Borders) health facilities. I thought I wouldn't make it alive," she said.

According to the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), transgender people of Rohingya ethnicity are victimised twice -- first for being Rohingya, then for being transgender.

Asmani now has a "Hijra Guru-ma" (mentor). Both Asmani and Bilashi managed to get vaccinated last year. However, Bilashi -- also a sex worker -- has had difficulties maintaining HIV prevention measures, such as condom usage.

Bandhu Social Welfare Society in Cox's Bazar has confirmed that hate crimes against transgenders in the Rohingya camps are on the rise.

The number of transgender people in the camps is unknown.

According to the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), transgender people of Rohingya ethnicity are victimised twice -- first for being Rohingya, then for being transgender. They are, indeed, the most marginalised in the most persecuted minority of the world, echoed Bangladeshi trans rights activist Joya Sikder.

Guru-ma Soheli, who leads 25 transwomen in the community, said, "Here [the camp], I am forced to introduce myself as a man. If they [al-Yaqin] see us with long hair, make-up and feminine clothes, they torture us."

In Myanmar, transwomen are known as "Natyafua". Rohingya refugee transwomen now want recognition of their gender identity in their documents and identity cards.

A recognised identity can create awareness in the Rohingya community, while families of transgender women also need awareness in this regard, according to Joya Sikder.

Dil Afrose Jahan is a freelance investigative journalist and fact-checker based in Bangladesh. Read more online.

Pandemic has left its mark

Books on Covid stand out at Boi Mela

DIPAN NANDY

With the Covid-19 pandemic engrossing almost every aspect of human lives in the last two years, literature was not excluded from these extraordinary effects as well. Writers were engulged with new connotations and realisations, and that's what influenced their works immensely, be it fiction or non-fiction.

This trend was observed in this year's Amar Ekushey Boi Mela as well, with many books being sold on the pandemic.

Late Tareq Shamsur Rehman, former chair of international relations at Jahangirnagar University, wrote a book just before his death, titled "Corona Poroborti Bishwa Rajniti". The book, focusing on multiple aspects of international relations influenced by the pandemic, has been published by Shobha Prakash.

"Coronakaler Kobita: Aro Ek Biponno Bishoy", edited by Khasru Parvez from Katha Prakash; "Pandemic 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost" written by Slavoj Zizek and translated by Dr Masud Alam from Oitijya; "Corona Kahini" by Bhorer Kagoj editor Shyamal Dutt from the



newspaper's publishing house; "Corona Kaale" by Awami League general secretary Obaidul Quader from Samay Prakashani; "Gudduburar Corona Protisedhok Abisker" by Anisul Haque from Prothoma; "Aninditar Coronajuddho" by Baren Chakraborty from Abosar Prakashani: are among some of the many books influenced by the pandemic in this year's fair.

Besides, books by economists and doctors on public health, socio-economic and political implications of the pandemic can be seen in the fair as well. The most prominent one in this category is

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Same trend, every year

Govt rice aid yet to reach Barishal's fisher families

SUSHANTA GHOSH

It's been a week since the two-month ban on fishing in six hilsha sanctuaries, the government's Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) rice aid is yet to reach the fishermen families in Barishal.

Every year, the aid reaches the families so late that the fishers are forced to accept this as an unfortunate norm. For many of them, the amount of aid provided isn't enough.

Kazirhat fishermen's village in Sadar upazila of Bhola has almost a few hundred fisher families.

Mintu Mistry, a member of this fishing village, has a family of ten. The last time he went fishing was on December 28, last year.

But as soon as the ban begins, he struggles to feed his family and

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With nothing much to do during the two-month ban on fishing in six hilsha sanctuaries, fishers are busy fixing their nets, preparing for the next catching season. This photo was taken from Bhola recently.

PHOTO: MONIR UDDIN ANIK