



A rubber dam on the upstream of the Halda disrupting its natural flow. The photo was taken recently.



Industrial discharges flowing into the river through a canal.



A rapid increase of tobacco farming near the river.

# HALDA IN PERIL

Industrial discharge, tobacco farming, rubber dam continue to threaten its existence; sees drastic drop in spawn collection

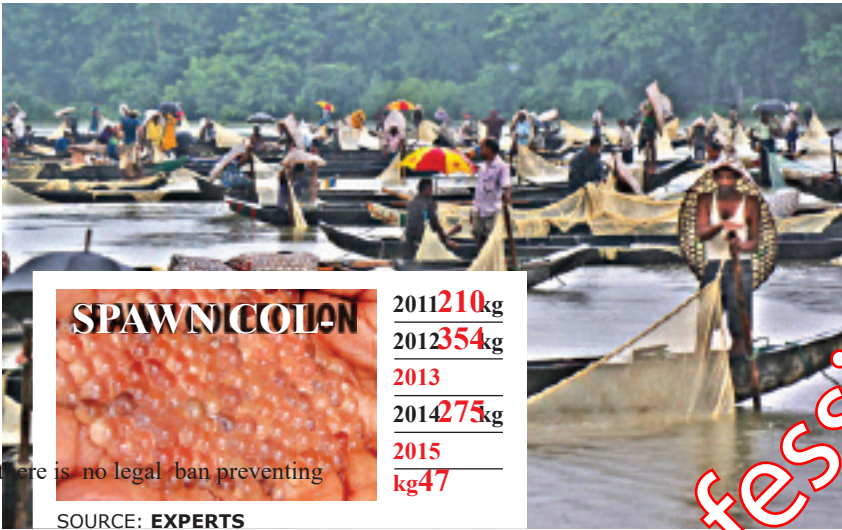
ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The Halda river, the country's largest natural breeding ground for carps, has been under constant threat due to manmade hazards, including industrial waste, sewage contamination and sand extraction.

The situation has gotten worse owing to a rapid increase in tobacco farming near the river in recent years, which threatens the unique biochemical properties of the water that supports the existence of these fish.

Also, setting up of a rubber dam on the river's upstream disrupts its natural flow.

This season, carps have released an almost negligible amount of spawns, As there is no legal ban preventing



SOURCE: EXPERTS

their continuing existence.

Originating from Halda Chora of from March to May, it was not on a large scale are flowing into the carp-breeding ground. Ramgarh upazila under Khagrachhari, scale. 98km river flows through Fatikchhari, Hathazari and Raozan in the river but collected just 1.8kg of carps continue to cultivate tobacco, he upazilas and Chandgaon Thana in spawns whereas it was 7kg the year said.

Chittagong city, and falls into the before," said the 65-year-old. "Approximately 80 percent of the around 250 zoologists at Chittagong University, said Karnaphuli river.

Halda is a unique river as it is the lone natural breeding ground for carps (ruhi, while in the 90s I used to collect over the river katol, mrigal etc). Due to the unique 40kg of spawns."

biochemical properties of its water, carps choose it as a safe haven to release spawns there.

But the manmade hazards now threaten the natural habitat of these fish, experts said.

According to researchers and spawn collectors, 210kg of spawns were collected in 2011 while the amount was 354kg in 2012, 70kg in 2013, 275kg in 2014, 47kg in 2015, and 12kg in 2016.

However, the data differed significantly from that of the Department of Fisheries (DoF), according to which, 326kg of spawns were collected in 2011, 1,569kg in 2012, 612kg in 2013, 508kg in 2014, 156kg in 2015 and 168kg in 2016.

The Daily Star talked to some spawn collectors to get a clear picture of the discrepancy between the data collected by the researchers and DoF.

Kamal Uddin Sawdagaor has been involved in collecting spawns for around 45 years. He said although carps released spawns three times last year

are flowing into the carp-breeding ground. Halda river threatens its very existence.

"I engaged six boats for three months tence. But eyeing the river front, the farmers are not interested in collecting carps. They are more interested in tobacco cultivation," he said.

Manzoorul Kibria, an associate professor of zoology at Chittagong University, said that the river is being polluted by industrial effluents and sand extraction.

A rubber dam on the upstream of the river is also disrupting its natural flow, he said.

When asked what would be the total amount of spawns in 2016, Kamal said it would not be more than 12kg to 15kg.

He said around 70 years ago fishermen used to collect about 5,000kg of spawns from the river. If carps do not release spawns in the river, it will be an irreparable damage, he pointed out.

Harech said he engaged six boats in 2016 but collected just 1.95kg of spawns. "I invested Tk 95,000 but was variety of carps."

He said he collects data from primary sources like the spawn collectors during the spawning season and his data is true since most of them did not get an accurate amount of spawns last year.

"Tobacco cultivation on a large scale the traders. Pravati Debi, deputy director, Fish Inspection and Quality Control, DoF, said carps not releasing an adequate amount Chittagong, said carps released spawns of spawns," said Halda researcher Dr in three phases this year on a small scale, Manzoorul Kibria.

"It has been found in research that collected in 2016. When asked why this figure was significant, adding, residues of the toxic plants nificantly larger than that of the and excessive pesticide from farmlands researchers and spawns collectors'.

accounts, she said the DoF officials by the Ministry of Fisheries and collected information from every quay Livestock, adding, "So the government where the spawns are sold.

She, however, admitted that the extent in the river has decreased a great deal in recent times due to pollution. "A commission for the river should be formed and Halda should be declared a national river," he the reasons and level of pollution in emphasised.

Halda and to learn about other threats. "Water obstruction through the rubber dam must be stopped. A portion of necessary steps as per the river turns into a desert due to it for which the mother fish cannot be ready to release spawns," said Prof Dr Umme Kulsum Navera of the water resources engineering department of Buet.

"Non-functional sluice-gates in the river should be redesigned and all the sluice-gates must be made fish-friendly," she said.

Navera, also team leader of the

tobacco cultivation, the DoE cannot do anything," he said. "If the government takes

any decision to ban tobacco cultivation research project, said the river must be around Halda, we will enforce that law." freed of pollution from industrial and He said the government is pondering domestic effluents.

to declare Halda an ecologically critical area to protect its unique trait. Tobacco cultivation around the river should be banned along with operation

Contacted, Dr Md Khalilur Rahman, of the mechanical dredgers, she stressed. director (admin and finance), and Mohammad Ali, general secretary of chief scientific officer of Bangladesh the Committee for Saving Halda River, Fisheries Research Institute, said Halda said some brick kilns and poultry farms is the only tidal river where carps are also operating around the banks, release spawns.

"It's a unique and valuable wealth of the country," said Rahman, also director dredgers, manual ones may be used to of the Halda Research Project initiated extract soils, if necessary.



A brick kiln near the river bank.

## REMEDIES

Controlling industrial pollution

Banning tobacco farming

Declaring Halda — ecologically critical area

Using manual dredgers

Relocating brick kilns

Redesigning sluice-gates

Forming river commission

## GONDAMARA CLASH

Police refuse to record case based on victim family's written complaint

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The family of Mohammed Ali, who was killed in a clash on Wednesday over a proposed coal-fired power plant in Gondamara of Banskhal upazila in Chittagong, yesterday alleged that police are not recording a murder case based on their written allegation.

Ali's brother-in-law Ataur Rahman Jishan said, "In our written allegation we accused 29 persons by name, including one Liaqat Ali as the prime accused, and around 150 unnamed ones." Banskhal Police Station Officer-in-Charge Alamgir Hossain first asked us to settle the matter by receiving compensation from the accused, he said.

As they refused to do so, the OC asked for their statement assuring them of including the written allegation, he said.

"We stayed at the police station from 7:00pm on Thursday to 12:00. At 10:00am yesterday, we went there. But still then, they said the allegation was not recorded," said Ataur.

Although Ali was murdered in front of their eyes, police are trying to cover up the incident, alleged Ataur.

When contacted, OC Alamgir said they did not record the family's statement as a sub-inspector had filed a case against 150 to 200 unnamed persons before the family went there. "We would consider their written allegation during investigation."

He, however, denied the allegation of asking the family to negotiate with the accused.

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## Govt 'harassing' Zia family: BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed yesterday criticised the government for "targeting Zia's family members", saying it wants to destroy the nationalist forces deliberately.

Zia's family members are being harassed, he added.

Rizvi said BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia is being forced to appear before court twice a week. "It is nothing but an outcome of politics of vengeance by the chief of the government."

He was addressing a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan central office in Dhaka.

The BNP leader slammed the government for giving India corridor facilities in the name of transit.

"An attempt is on to turn our government institutions into extensions of that of the neighbouring country," he said, adding, "As a result, political, financial and cultural aggression in Bangladesh has taken a serious turn."



Visitors look at photos at Chhobi Mela in the capital's Shilpakala Academy yesterday.

The two-week biennial international photography festival was organised by Drik Picture Library Ltd and Pathshala South Asian Media Institute

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Fight against communalism to save culture

Noor urges all STAFF


CORRESPONDENT If values and culture is not nurtured in the society then attacks such as

the one on Holey Artisan Bakery at Gulshan will continue to occur, said Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor yesterday.

"People need to love songs, poetry, art and photography as these are part of the culture that will enable us create a more compassionate society," he said at the inauguration ceremony of Chobi Mela -- an international festival of photography.

The ninth edition of the festival is being jointly organised by Drik Picture Library Ltd and Pathshala South Asian Media Institute at Shilpakala Academy in the capital.

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