

Erosion fear grips Dacope residents

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

Panic has gripped residents of Sutarkhali and Kamarkhola unions in Khulna's Dacope upazila ever since an embankment of the Water Development Board built in the region started to collapse.

The dam's construction, under the World Bank's Coastal Dam Development Project, is almost complete. Meanwhile, some parts of it, especially in Gunari village of Sutarkhali union have been washed away in the river.

Being surrounded by Dhaki, Shibsra, Sutarkhali and Bhadra rivers, the embankment erodes every year, said locals.

In 2009, cyclone Aila destroyed parts of the polder no. 32, forcing people to stay away from the region for more than two years. If 50 kilometres of the dam in that polder somehow collapses, it will affect 60,000 people in two unions, feared locals.

Visiting the area recently, this correspondent saw that the main road from Jaliakhali to Nolian in Thakurbari area has been blocked by the local authorities because of the state of erosion. As a result, residents are having to use a bypass road to cross the area.

Besides many places, including Joynagar, Hatkhola gate, Gunari, Kalibari, Nalian, Jaliakhali, Kalabagi Dakkhin, Uttar and Pashchim, and Sutarkhali areas are getting eroded.



Inhabitants of Sutarkhali and Kamarkhola unions in Khulna's Dacope upazila find themselves gripped by panic as an embankment constructed by the Water Development Board begins to crumble. As the embankment, part of the Coastal Dam Development Project, nears completion; sections, notably in Gunari village of Sutarkhali union, have already been devoured by the river.

PHOTO: STAR

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Dhaka invites Tashkent to monitor polls

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has invited Uzbekistan to send an election monitoring team during the upcoming national elections due late this year or early next year.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has extended the invitation to Uzbekistan's Deputy Foreign Minister Bakhromjon A'loyev during a meeting, according to a foreign ministry statement yesterday.

A'loyev also requested Momen to send an election monitoring team for Uzbekistan's presidential elections scheduled for July 9.

During the visit by the Uzbekistan minister, the two countries held the second foreign office consultation that discussed whole range of issues, the statement added.

The two countries are eyeing direct air and shipping services to boost trade and commerce between them.

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TEA WORKERS' DAY

Binota, a symbol of resilience, empowerment

MINTU DESHWARA

From the humble confines of a mud wall house, where economic struggles cast their long shadows, emerges a woman who defies all odds and shatters gender norms.

Binota Bhumij, a widow, has ascended as a symbol of resilience to become the president of a tea garden panchayat committee. The workers of Rehana Tea Plantation in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar voted her to power twice.

However, her path to leadership was strewn with obstacles, as opposition groups, mostly run by "men", sought to undermine Binota's capabilities by perpetuating archaic stereotypes. They scoffed, insinuating that a woman tea worker should confine herself to plucking leaves and tending to domestic chores, questioning her aptitude for political negotiations.

Binota stood her ground, unyielding in the face of opposition. Despite concerns of potential harm, she dismissed them, asserting that her time would come when fate deemed it, refusing to succumb to unwarranted fear.

Her resolute determination resonated deeply with the tea garden workers, who admired her ability to boldly say "no" to those in positions of power.

In her journey, Binota draws strength from her upbringing and the support of her family. Her father Narayan Bhumij instilled in her the confidence to speak up against all injustice, while her husband, Budhuha Bhumij, stood by her amidst all obstacles.

Binota firmly believes that the increased representation of women in policymaking is essential.

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As the backbone of tea gardens, female workers far outnumber their male counterparts at the labourer level, yet their presence at the decision-making table remains negligible.

Binota Bhumij
President of Panchayat Committee
Rehana Tea Plantation,
Moulvibazar

presence at the decision-making table remains negligible," she says.

Binota has spearheaded numerous transformative initiatives that have brought tangible improvements to the lives of tea workers.

One of her notable achievements has been her unwavering dedication to education for the children of tea workers. Through her efforts, she has successfully secured funding so that they can break the cycle of generational poverty and build a brighter future.

Furthermore, she has fought tirelessly to secure earned leave for tea workers, negotiating with the tea garden authorities and leveraging her position. She also helped workers get back their arrears.

"My husband was also the president of this committee for many years. But in my short tenure, I did what he could not," said

Binota.

Pankaj Kanda, president of the Central Committee of Bangladesh Tea Workers Union, commended Binota's achievement as the first and only woman president among the 243 tea garden panchayat committees in Bangladesh's 168-year tea industry history.

"Her exceptional courage and determination to break gender barriers within the tea gardens' political landscape are truly remarkable," he said.

Perboti Prodhan, a fellow tea worker, passionately expresses the significance of having female leaders in the tea plantations.

"Female tea workers are the backbone of these plantations, and their unique challenges require empathetic and understanding leaders who can effectively address their concerns," she asserts.

AFFIDAVIT TO EC Khaleque's income soars

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Khulna

The affidavit submitted to Election Commission by Khulna City Corporation polls mayoral candidate Talukdar Abdul Khaleque shows that his money and wealth have increased significantly.

Abdul Khaleque, who is going to contest the June 12 KCC polls from the ruling Awami League, submitted affidavit along with the nomination paper on May 16.

According to his affidavit submitted five years ago in 2018, he had only Tk 9.78 lakh in cash. But now, he owns Tk 4.79 crore in cash.

At that time, his wife's cash was over Tk 2.15 crore and now she has Tk 73.62 lakh.

Five years ago, Abdul Khaleque had Tk 2.42 crore in three banks. He also had Tk 10 lakh in sanchaypatra (national savings certificate), Tk 10 lakh as FDR and Tk 18 lakh as postal FDR.

During the same period, his wife had Tk 20.44 lakh in two banks. And now, she has Tk 95.4 lakh in four banks.

Five years ago, her sanchaypatra was Tk 45 lakh and FDR was Tk 16.94 lakh. Now she has a sanchaypatra of Tk 50 lakh.

Similar situation was found in their other sources of income and wealth including land and house.

Abdul Khaleque told The Daily Star, "I have not earned any wealth illegally. Everything was achieved with my salary and allowance. Look at the affidavits of the last 20 years and tell me about my wealth."

NILPHAMARI LEPROSY HOSPITAL

Where leprosy patients find hope and care



ASADUZZAMAN TIPU, *Nilphamari*

After being diagnosed with leprosy about 20 years ago, Zohra Begum, now 48, was forced to live on the streets of Jhenaidah town due to social stigma surrounding the disease.

Several years later, she was finally taken to the Danish-Bangladesh Leprosy Mission Hospital in Nilphamari in 2011, where she received treatment for the advanced stage patients.

"Had I not been here, I would have died many years ago," Zohra Begum, mother of two who also lost parts of her hands and legs due to the infection, told The Daily Star sitting on her bed at hospital recently.

The hospital, which was established in 1977 on a 26-acre property in Notkhana village in Nilphamari, is the largest leprosy hospital in the country, has been providing free treatment to advanced stage leprosy patients like Zohra, who are mostly referred from different hospitals across the country, according to officials.

"For such patients, it requires long-term treatment – sometimes 10-12 years, and the hospital staffers do this with care," said Dr Shamsunnahar Moni, in-charge of the hospital.

The hospital also has outdoor services to serve walk-in patients with suspected leprosy infection, she said.

Run under the National Leprosy programme of the government, the hospital receives a big chunk of the donation from the Leprosy Mission International-Bangladesh (TLMIB).

Visiting the hospital recently, nurse Anita Rani

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CMP to get two bomb disposal robots from US

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

For the first time in its history, the Counter Terrorism division of Chattogram Metropolitan Police will get explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) robots from the US today.

Under the Antiterrorism Assistance programme of the US embassy, the equipment will be handed over to the bomb disposal unit for free, confirmed CT officials.

The officials said two robots are scheduled to be provided to the CMP commissioner today at CT office in Chattogram Dampara Police Lines.

Ricky B Chambers, senior counter terrorism advisor to the US embassy in Dhaka, will hand over the two EOD robots with full setup.

To operate the robots, the bomb disposal experts will also be given a two week training by EOD technicians, confirmed Additional Deputy Commissioner Asif Mohiuddin of CT Division to The Daily Star.

The remotely controlled robots are capable of breaking into militants' dens, defuse explosives on the spot or move them to a safer place without physical touch. The value of the robotics consultation along with other sensitive equipment worth approximately \$251,786, said CMP sources.



People pay their respects to the martyrs of Chuknagar genocide with floral wreaths yesterday at a memorial built for those killed in the 1971 massacre at Chuknagar in Khulna's Dumuria upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Chuknagar Genocide Day observed

Speakers call for international recognition of the massacre

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Chuknagar Genocide Day was observed yesterday with due solemnity and respect, as various government and non-government organisations paid their tributes to the victims.

Attendees also demanded international recognition of the massacre.

On this day in 1971, the Pakistan occupation forces mercilessly killed at least ten thousand people, predominantly from the minority community. The army employed light machine guns and semi-automatic rifles, spraying bullets and causing instant fatalities within a matter of hours.

The victims of this horrific massacre hailed from Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Jessore, and Gopalganj districts. They had gathered at Chuknagar, situated in the Dumuria upazila of Khulna district, with the intention of seeking refuge in India through any available border route.

Chuknagar, located 32km from Khulna city, is a market area that serves as a transit point for Khulna, Satkhira, and Jashore districts. The Bhadra river flows alongside the

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