

Families trapped in saline water

Health crisis grips Bagerhat villages, vested groups demanding bribes to install water desalination facilities

PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY, Bagerhat

A silent health crisis is unfolding in Gulishakhali village in Bagerhat's Morrelganj upazila. Take the case of Putul Akhter, a 32-year-old resident who, along with her family, is grappling with a myriad of health complications, including diabetes, kidney, liver and skin-related issues. Doctors attribute these ailments to the persistent use of saline water for bathing and consumption.

"I consulted doctors multiple times in the last two years. They told me the diseases have developed due to bathing and consuming saline water, and I would not get well if I don't stop using saline water," she said.

Putul lives with her mother-in-law and two children in a small house on the bank of Bhola river, adjacent to the Sundarbans, while her husband lives in Dhaka for work.

"Due to poverty, we are unable to relocate, away from saline water. We don't know how we will survive in this way," she said.

Cold brings misery for the little ones in Kurigram

UNB, Kurigram

Chilly northern winds and thick fog are severely disrupting the daily lives of the people in Kurigram.

The district has not seen the sun since last Tuesday, with fog persisting throughout the day and night.

The minimum temperature in the district was recorded at 13.4 degrees Celsius at 9:00am yesterday, which is comparatively lower than the previous two days.

The situation has caused a rise in cold-related illnesses in Kurigram, particularly affecting the elderly and children.

Symptoms include cold, fever, cough, shortness of breath, pneumonia, diarrhoea, and other related ailments.

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During the ongoing cold wave, people's way of life is getting severely disrupted in different regions of the country. On one such foggy morning, a group of people near the Barishal port gather dry tree branches and leaves to make fire and keep themselves warm. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Govt faces 3-pronged challenge

Says Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said the challenges that lie before the new government are political, economic and diplomatic.

"It's not going to be so easy to protect Bangladesh from the repercussions of the global crisis in these three sectors," Quader said.

The Awami League general secretary was speaking to journalists after the new cabinet paid homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing floral wreaths at his portrait at Dhanmondi 32 in the capital.

"We've been able to hold a peaceful and fair election, overcoming the crises. This has been possible because of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," Quader told reporters.

"The main target of the government is to implement the election manifesto of the party," he said.

JU turns 54

BSS, Dhaka

Jahangirnagar University celebrated "JU Day" yesterday, marking its 54th founding anniversary, on the campus.

JU wore a festive look with participation of former and current students, teachers and officials amid colourful banners, balloons and festoons.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Nurul Alam inaugurated the programme by hoisting the national flag and releasing balloons in front of the Business Studies Faculty of the university at 10:00am.

In the inaugural speech, the VC greeted university teachers, students, officers, employees and the present and former students of the university.



Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Nurul Alam inaugurated the 54th anniversary programme of JU in front of the Business Studies Faculty at 10:00am yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

Pro-VC (Administration) Prof Sheikh Md Monzurul Huq, Pro-VC (Academic) Prof Mohammed Mostafa Feeroz, Treasurer Prof Rasheda Akhtar, deans of various faculties, senate and syndicate members of the university were present at the inaugural session.

Later, a colourful procession was brought out from the Business Studies Faculty premises. The procession paraded through the main streets and ended at Selim Al Deen Mukta Mancha.

The daylong programme included a blood group testing campaign, friendly football and handball matches between former and current students, painting exhibitions, pitha festival, cultural programme organised by the Students Counseling and Guidance Centre and Teacher-Student Centre at the Muktamancha.

INTRA-PARTY FEUD JP relieves two senior leaders of all party posts

STAR REPORT

Two senior leaders of Jatiyo Party were relieved of all posts, in the latest instance of intra-party feud. JP chairman GM Quader yesterday relieved JP Co-Chairman Kazi Firoz Rashid and JP presidium member Shunil Subho Roy, exercising the power bestowed upon him by the JP charter, the party said in a press release.

GM Quader took the decision a day after several hundred JP leaders and activists staged a demonstration in front of the JP chairman's Banani office, demanding resignation of Quader and secretary general Mujiburul Haque Chunnu.

JP had participated in 267 seats but managed to win in only 11, which is the party's worst outing in the polls since 1991. Most JP contestants lost their security deposits in the 12th parliamentary polls.



Subho Roy was among several JP senior leaders and activists who gave Quader and Chunnu a 48-hour ultimatum to resign from their posts.

They blamed Quader and Chunnu for the debacle in the January 7 national election, an allegation refuted by the duo.

After Quader's decision, Subho Roy said, "GM Quader is no one in the Jatiyo Party, so his order means nothing to me."

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Due to increase in salinity, local hospitals and clinics have been witnessing a considerable increase in number of patients.

PHOTO: STAR

Putul's mother-in-law Shefali Begum has also been suffering from skin and bone diseases for a long time. Their stories are emblematic of a larger problem affecting thousands in Bagerhat's Sadar, Morrelganj, Sharankhola, Mongla, and Rampal upazilas.

This correspondent, after speaking to more than 50 villagers, found a similar pattern of health concerns plaguing the community. The root cause lies in the relentless intrusion of saline water, a consequence of factors such as sea level rise and geographical vulnerability.

"It seems we are living in a salt mine. We have to drink and use saline water all year round except in the monsoon. That is why we are always ill with complications including diarrhoea, dysentery, hypertension, and skin diseases," said Piara Begum of Gulishakhali.

Sakina Begum of Baruikhali village echoed her. Amzad Hossain, 85, of Guatla village, said, "Around 50 years ago, we could use water of Baleshwar river. Later, salt water of nearby Pashur river gradually started to intrude into the Baleshwar," said Amzad Hossain, 85, of Guatla village.

Dredging of Pashur and Bhola rivers resulted in reduction in the rivers' current, which in turn increased the water's salinity, further deteriorating the situation, said locals.

Meanwhile, local hospitals and clinics have been witnessing a considerable increase in number of patients.

Azizur Rahman, a community health care provider in Badsharhat under Morrelganj upazila, said he provides treatment to around 900

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Woman dies after falling from balcony in Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

A woman died after falling from the eighth floor of a building in the capital's Motijheel AGB colony yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Hamida Akter, 28, wife of Saddam Hossain.

Saddam is a police constable at the home ministry.

Sub-inspector Fatema of Motijheel Police Station said Hamida fell from the balcony around 9:30am.

Police rescued her in an unconscious state, after locals informed them of the matter.

Later, she was taken to the emergency department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital at 11:00am.

She was declared dead at the hospital.

The body was kept at the hospital's morgue for an autopsy, added the SI. Police said they are looking into the incident to find out more details.

PRAYER TIMING
JANUARY 13

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:36 7:00
JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:40 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



During winter, the Dharla dries up, leaving boatmen unable to ply the river. The case is the same for Brahmaputra, Teesta, and many other rivers. As a result, nearly 1,000 boatmen from Kurigram and Lalmonirhat now face a livelihood crisis. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Shrinking rivers SHRINK LIVELIHOODS

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Lalmonirhat

Boatmen in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram are struggling to remain afloat, facing a situation of seasonal unemployment.

Amid the dry winter, around 26 rivers in the districts, including Brahmaputra, Teesta, and Dharla, have dried up and lost navigability, with shoals

appearing across them.

Around 200 ghats in the districts, which remain busy for rest of the year, are now empty, leaving around 1,000 boatmen amid a livelihood crisis.

"I am unable to ply my boat while people are crossing the Teesta on foot. Every year we face a livelihood crisis during dry season," said Julhas Mia, a boatman in Kalmati area of

Lalmonirhat.

"Of the seven boatmen in this ghat, three have started pulling rickshaws, while the other four are also considering joining other professions," he said.

"Even a decade ago, the situation was different. The river did dry up but remained navigable, and we could ply boats round the year," he added.

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LAST 2 DAYS - VISIT.

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