

WORLD WATER DAY

While World Water Day is celebrated every year to support the UN's Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring water and sanitation for all, it also sheds light on the grim truth that around 2.2 billion people across the world don't have access to safe water. Bangladesh is also not free from the drinking water crisis, with sources of water drying up in different regions of the country, while salinity and lack of supply are aggravating the crisis in some other areas. Below are the stories of how the drinking water crisis has gripped people in certain parts of the country.



Water sources run dry in Bandarban

MONG SING HAI MARMA, Bandarban

Residents of Bandarban district, including the indigenous communities residing in the hilly areas, are facing an acute crisis of drinking water as most sources of groundwater have dried up.

Natural waterfalls and small streams (locally known as jhiri) are the main sources of freshwater in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region. With those having dried up, people in some areas now have to walk for miles to collect drinking water for their households, said locals.

"Water crisis has deepened over last two years as all the jhiris around our village have dried up," said Maung Lung Mro, a resident of Mro Long Para, around 12 kilometres away from district headquarters.

"Some 28 families live in our village. Usually, we face water crisis from January to May. This year, it has taken a severe turn. We cannot imagine how we will survive in the coming days," he added.

Mennu Mro, 62, of the same village, said, "We cannot carry out our Jhum cultivation due to a scarcity of water. Even so, we cannot take baths regularly during dry season. If this situation continues, we will be compelled to relocate elsewhere."

Some officials of local administration visited the area last year and pledged to take necessary measures to arrange water through alternative sources. But locals claimed no step has been taken yet.

Mang yong Mro, a teacher of Mro Long Para Government Primary School, said some 1,600 residents of Menlung Para, Bagan Para, Ramari Para, Riannai Para, Mensing Para, Krapu Para, Daliyam Para Nra Para, Babla Hedman Para, Patui Para, and Mro Long Para villages in Chimbuk Pahar area are facing severe water crisis.

Children are suffering from different types of disease due to scarcity of safe drinking water, he added. Claris Bawm, a resident of Bethani Para area on Bandarban-Chimbuk Pahar road, said he has been buying drinking water for his family.

"But we are poor people. How long can we survive in this way?" he asked. Some 18 families live in Gunguru Aga Para area under Bandarban Sadar upazila. All of the people depend on a single tubewell installed in the village.

The villagers said they have to wait in long queues to collect water from it.

"However, we don't get water from this tubewell from around mid-March. We have

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Water everywhere, yet not enough to drink

Residents of Barguna's Pathargata upazila struggle with salinity

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Barguna's Pathargata upazila is surrounded by large rivers, with canals and other waterbodies crisscrossing across the area.

Yet, residents of the upazila have an acute shortage of drinking water.

Located close to the Bay, the rivers and waterbodies in and around Pathargata are highly saline and unfit for drinking.

"There is water everywhere, but no water to drink. Fresh water is increasingly becoming scarce over time. For consumption, people are largely dependent on water from ponds. The situation worsens when the ponds dry up in the dry season," said Sohrab Hossain, a resident of Badurtala village.

Pathargata Municipality filters water from its pond and supplies it to the townspeople for payment, while locals line up in long queues to fetch water from ponds in the neighbourhoods.

At present, around 50 percent of the upazila's population is largely deprived of adequate drinking water.

Mehdi Hasan, deputy assistant engineer of Department of Public Health Engineering in the upazila, said the situation is further aggravated by the fact that tubewells cannot be installed for groundwater extraction due to the existence of hard materials, like stones, beneath the topsoil.

"In the dry season, the crisis of drinking water becomes more acute.



The residents use ponds, ditches, canals or rivers for bathing and other domestic chores, but for drinking they have to collect water by other means," he said.

"There are 40 PSFs [pond sand filters] in the upazila, including two in the municipal area. Filtered pond water is supplied through pipes on a limited scale. PSFs often have water taps through which locals collect water. There are 16 such water points in the municipal area," Mehdi continued.

Also, there is a system of regular delivery of water to houses through vans after collection from these points. The price of each drum of 20-litre water is Tk 20. Seven delivery men are involved in selling water in the municipal area," he added.

Shah Alam, who supplies water to households on a van, said he earns Tk 15,000 to 20,000 every month, with which he runs his family.

Babul Sheikh, a local, said, "My family of two needs 10 drums of water monthly for Tk 200, alongside municipal water supply through pipes for which I have to pay Tk 300."

Sohel Ahmed, officer of municipal water supply unit, said, "Of the 27,000 residents of the municipality, around 80 percent are supplied with PSF water through pipes. The municipality sells water for Tk 22 per litre."

"There are also 16 public water taps at various points through which locals can collect water. During water shortage in the dry season, 12 more

water taps are installed to meet the increased demand," he said.

"The municipality has two PSFs and two overhead tanks with 16,000 litres capacity each. Currently, it is capable of supplying 23 lakh litres of water against a demand of 28 lakh litres daily in the municipal area. Also, 3,000 families have been given water tanks free of cost for harvesting rainwater," the official added.

Abdul Karim of Chaherabad village said, "We all grew up amid scarcity of drinking water. People sometimes wait 2-3 hours in a queue to fetch a pitcher of water. The lack of food can be tolerated, but the lack of water is difficult to withstand."

Some residents are also supplied fresh water through "solar-powered water plants" under a project of Bandhu Foundation established in 2022. The foundation also constructed 600 water tanks and five PSFs for rainwater harvesting in three villages.

Shamim, project engineer of Bandhu Foundation in the upazila, said, "The foundation has been working since 2012 to solve the water crisis in the upazila. Ten solar-powered water plants have been installed to this end since 2022."

Mustafa Golam Kabir, chairman of Pathargata Upazila Parishad, said, "This year, 15,500 tanks have been allocated through the DPHE to be distributed to residents for rainwater harvesting. It will meet the water shortage to a large extent."

Policies alone insufficient without implementation

Says US embassy official on safe drinking water

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Policies alone are insufficient to ensure safe drinking water for people without enforcement, said an official of US Embassy in Bangladesh yesterday.

There can be gaps between policies and enforcement, but the extent of the gap is the main issue, as it will determine the quality of water, he said during a background briefing at the American Centre in Dhaka marking World Water Day, which will be observed today.

Media publication and public awareness are also keys to ensuring safe drinking water, the official added.

The US embassy official showed examples of how lives were brought back to dead rivers in the US through proper policy and implementation.

The US government has been working in Bangladesh through various projects to ensure safe water for the people for quite a long time, he said citing an example of Drinkwell, which provides safe water through ATM booths at around 300 locations in the capital.

They have also taken up a project titled "US Global Water Strategy - 2022-2027" through which 22 million people will get safe drinking water and the same number will access safe sanitation across the world. "Bangladesh will benefit immensely from this strategy," he said.

The US government is extending support to the government, private sector, and civil societies to ensure the supply of safe water in different parts of the country, he added.

To reduce stress on groundwater, the US government is focusing on giving importance to rainwater harvesting, he also said.

PREETI'S DEATH Ashfaque, wife denied bail again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday denied bail to Executive Editor of The Daily Star Syed Ashfaque Haque and his wife Tania Khondoker in a case over the death of Preeti Urang, a teenage domestic worker who fell from their flat in the capital's Mohammadpur.

Judge Mohammed Ash-Shams Joglul Hossain of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka passed the order after hearing the bail petition filed by the defence lawyer, said state lawyer Tapash Kumar Pal.

Earlier, the couple was denied bail two times.

Preeti, 15, from Moulvibazar, died after falling through an opening on Ashfaque's eighth floor flat around 8:00am on February 6.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Women can help smooth transition to clean energy

Speakers tell MJF discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Empowering women in renewable energy sector is vital not only for promoting gender equality, but also for maximising effectiveness of different initiatives, said speakers at a dialogue yesterday.

They stressed the need for women to access education in STEM and training in technologies to progress in energy sector.

Titled "Importance of Renewable Energy in Women's Empowerment," the session was organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) at their headquarters.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of MJF, said, "We need to increase the use of renewable energy. The government has already taken steps to increase generation of renewable energy."

However, there are many gaps in our renewable energy policy. Changes should be brought to the policy by reviewing it through a gendered lens, she added.

Banasree Mitra Neogi, director (programme) of MJF, said providing women with equal education, training, and employment opportunities in this industry can help leverage diverse perspectives and skills to help transition to clean energy.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



A long tailback on the FDC-end ramp of Dhaka Elevated Expressway at Karwan Bazar around 4:30pm yesterday. Opened to the public just a couple of days ago, the structure aimed at easing travel from northern parts of the capital to Karwan Bazar, Banglamotor, and Moghbazar areas. However, the reality took an unexpected turn, making the road a traffic menace instead.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON