



OUR DYING PADMA

Poor upstream flow turns the river dry, farmers and fishers in trouble

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

The mighty Padma now lies as a pale imitation of its former self. Depletion in the flow of water from upstream, along with deposition of silt, has choked the riverbed, rendering it nearly unrecognisable.

The depletion of its flow along with the lack of rainfall has exposed vast stretches of the riverbed, where millions of tonnes of silt accumulate every year. The water in the river is now visible for only three to four months. The remaining eight to nine months see the water level plummet to its lowest point, revealing miles of sandy char lands across the river's expanse.

The mighty Padma, is now dying. Where boats and even big ships used to cruise once has now become crop fields at some places, while being turned into narrow ponds scattered across riverbeds in other places.

"I have never seen Padma dried up so much before," said Md Chand Ali, 50, a fisherman of Pakshey village under Pabna's Ishwardi upazila.

"Earlier, even during dry season, I could catch at least 3-4 kilogrammes of fish daily. Now, catching barely 1kg of fish is difficult due to poor water flow in the river," he said.

The river is completely dry across the area under the Hardinge Bridge, while huge number of shoals have emerged everywhere, Chand Ali added. Other fishermen from the area echoed him.

According to hydrology experts, the mighty Padma dried up significantly this year due to poor water flow from upstream, adversely affecting the livelihoods of hundreds of fishermen from the areas adjoining the river.

Irrigation has been badly affected as the operation of pumps of the Ganges-Kobadak project has remained suspended due to poor flow.

"We need a minimum water level of 4.5 metre for pump operation in the G-K project. The water level was more than 5-metre around this time last year. At present, the water level is at 4.07-metre which is inadequate, disrupting the country's biggest irrigation project," said Md Abdul Hamid, director of G-K project.

The three main pumps, which have been providing irrigation water for 96,000 hectares of agricultural land in the southern districts, are yet to resume operation this year, while subsidiary pumps have been out of services since 2002 for technical faults, he added.

Bangladesh reportedly got a poor supply of water in the first couple of

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MD REZAUL KARIM
Executive engineer,
Department of Hydrology

months this year as per the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty due to poor flow of water at Farakka Point, said Md Rezaul Karim, executive engineer of Department of Hydrology, Pabna division.

According to the Joint Rivers Commission report, the flow of water at Hardinge Bridge point recorded at each 10-day cycle between January 1 and March 10 this year were 63,113 cusecs, 48,518 cusecs, 48,359 cusecs, 43,926

cusecs, 34,697 cusecs, 35,751 cusecs and 36,818 cusecs.

Around the same time in 2023, the figures recorded in the JRC report were 85,316 cusecs, 70,827 cusecs, 69,990 cusecs, 67,364 cusecs, 59,376 cusecs, 47,891 cusecs and 42,372 cusecs.

"Due to poor discharge of water at Farakka Point, water flow reduced by 10-20 thousand cusecs at Hardinge Bridge point in the last couple of months. The poor upstream flow, alongside poor rainfall, is drying up the river alarmingly," Rezaul Karim also said.

According to the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, both Bangladesh and India will get 50 percent share of water if the available water level at Farakka Point is 70,000 cusecs or less. If the level is 70-75 thousand cusecs, Bangladesh will get minimum 35,000 cusecs and India will get the rest. If the level is 75,000 cusecs or more, then India will get a minimum of 40,000 cusecs and Bangladesh will get the rest.

Both Bangladesh and India will surely get a minimum 35,000 cusecs water from March 11 till May 10, according to the treaty.

Experts, however, opined that the treaty should be reshuffled considering the present perspective of the river's water flow.



'Bangabandhu took inspiration from Netaji Subhas'

Sugata Bose tells event on Liberation War Museum's founding anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During the Liberation War of 1971, Netaji Bhawan, the house of Indian nationalist Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, became the heart of the activities in support of the war, said Netaji's grandson Sugata Bose yesterday.

Bangabandhu himself, alongside students, farmers, and youths of Bengal, who came to Netaji Bhawan during the war repeatedly mentioned how inspired they were by Netaji Subhas, Sugata also said.

Sugata, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History at Harvard University, made the remarks while delivering a commemorative speech at an event titled "Memory and Preservation of the Liberation War", organised by Liberation War Museum marking its 28th founding anniversary.

"My mother Krishna Bose wrote in her diary that one day many unknown faces, including five boys from Kushtia and two students from Rajshahi University, were sitting at Netaji Bhawan with signs of disappointment and fatigue over their faces. Then she showed them the Netaji Museum,

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BNP wants to destabilise market

Quader on Rizvi's solidarity with "Boycott India"

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP is hatching a conspiracy to destabilise the country's overall market management system in the name of boycotting Indian products, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader claimed yesterday.

"The incident of a BNP leader throwing away his shawl and boycotting Indian products is nothing but madness. A major part of our daily essentials come from India. A leader of BNP wants India's help in salvaging democracy, while another leader calls for a boycott of Indian products," said Quader.

He was addressing a press conference held at the Party President Sheikh Hasina's Dhanmondi political office in the capital.

Throwing his Indian shawl away in front of the BNP Nayapaltan central office on Wednesday, the party's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi called for the boycott of Indian products.

"It is an outcome of BNP's mental disorder to destroy the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and India. The people of our country will not pay heed," said the AL General Secretary.

People will boycott those who came up with the call for boycotting Indian products, he added.

"Bangladesh is surrounded by India due to its geographical location, and a significant portion of our daily essentials are sourced from India. Furthermore, we have many advantages, such as the ability to import Indian goods at a lower cost," he said.

BNP is now politically bankrupt and thus its

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TRAIN TICKET BLACK MARKET

Rab uncovers syndicate inside Shohoz

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab has arrested nine members of a train ticket black market syndicate – including four employees of Shohoz Synesis Vincen JV – a Shohoz led joint venture – the ticket-selling partner of Bangladesh Railway.

The arrestees include – Mizan Dhali, 48, the alleged kingpin of the syndicate; his nephew Sohel Dhali, 30; Md Sumon, 39; Jahangir Alam, 49; Shahjalal Hossain, 42; Md Rasel, 24; Joyanal Abedin, 46; Sabur Hawlader, 40, and Newton Biswas, 40.

According to Rab, Mizan and Sohel are office assistants of Shohoz, while Newton and Sabur were server operators of the platform.

Rab-3 with members of National Security Intelligence arrested the group on Thursday night, Khandker Al Moin, Rab's Legal and Media Wing director, told a press briefing yesterday.

The arrestees admitted to collecting tickets and selling those at 2-3 times higher prices, he said.

"We have information on transactions worth Tk 1 crore in various mobile banking accounts of the syndicate members in the last six months," he added.

Mizan has been selling tickets on the black market since he joined as office assistant of the then ticketing partner

"Daffodil" in 2003. When Bangladesh Railway later partnered with Cnsbd, Mizan found a job there due to his experience. Then, in 2020, when the contract was given to Shohoz, Mizan moved there, Moin said.

Newton and Sabur, along with two other server operators who went into hiding, would provide details about tickets to Mizan and Sohel.

Then, Mizan, Sohel and other gang members – who had the passwords to many existing users' accounts – would log in and book tickets online or from ticket counters with the help of countermen, the Rab official said.

Moin said that agents across the country would place orders for tickets with Mizan and Sohel. After collecting tickets, Mizan and Sohel would send soft copies to the agents through messenger or WhatsApp.

This gang were putting 500 tickets on the black market daily, Moin said.

Agents received 50 percent of the profit, while Mizan shared the rest with his syndicate members.

During Eid season, Mizan and his gang would sell around 2,000-3,000 tickets through the black market.

Moin said they will investigate whether any top officials from Bangladesh Railway or Shohoz are involved in these illegal activities.

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Is a government official above the law?

Doctor gets caught smuggling gold, not behind bars yet

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Despite being caught red-handed with gold bars at the airport, the authorities concerned are dilly-dallying in taking any legal action against a physician of Chattogram Shah Amanat International Airport.

Officials of Bangladesh Customs and Directorate General of Health Services have said they are waiting for the findings of the probe committee of DGHS in order to take legal action.

However, the two-member probe committee has yet to submit its findings.

On January 29, customs officials arrested Dr MZA Sharif, a health officer at Shah Amanat International Airport, while he was carrying four gold bars.

Sharif, a Cadre (Health) of 27th BCS, used to work at the airport's Emergency Medical Services Department. After the incident, he was closed from the airport and was later attached to Chattogram Divisional DGHS office.

Usually, when someone is arrested with smuggled gold bars, customs officials file cases against them and hand them over to Patenga Police Station for further legal procedure.

There is a legal bar to arrest any government official directly, so we handed him over to his department (DGHS) concerned to take action. At that time, they said legal action would be taken within 48 hours.

ALIF RAHMAN
Assistant Commissioner (AC)
of Customs

But in Sharif's case, no legal action has been taken so far, even though he was caught red-handed.

Talking to The Daily Star, customs officials said according to the rule, direct legal action cannot be taken against Dr Sharif since he

is a government officer, which is delaying the legal procedure.

Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Customs, Alif Rahman, said, "After detaining Sharif, we provided all the evidence to DGHS officials so that they can take action in this regard. We provided CCTV footage, documents, and everything else."

"There is a legal bar to arrest any government official directly, so we handed him over to his concerned department to take action. At that time, they said legal action would be taken within 48 hours. We have already filed a case with the Customs department," he said.

"DGHS said action would be taken upon receiving their probe findings. If they delay the investigation process, it's unacceptable. I will inform my department's higher-ups in this regard," Alif also said.

Meanwhile, Dr Mohammad Mohiuddin, divisional director of Chattogram DGHS, said, "Please ask customs officials why they

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Drug money behind Faisal murder: DB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The killing of Faisal Russel, a craftsman from Pallabi, was orchestrated by a rival youth gang over drug trade and territorial supremacy, detectives said.

DB Chief Mohammad Harun Or Rashid disclosed the arrest of 10 suspects from Dhaka, Patuakhali, and Netrakona districts in connection with the incident in a press briefing at his office yesterday.

Police arrested Shaheen alias Nada Shaheen, 24, Murad Hossain, 24, and Parvez Ahmed, 22 yesterday, while Yasin, 20, Saiful Islam Simon, 30, Nasir Uddin, 20, Hridoy, 20, Rajib Mia, 25, Shahnewaz alias Kallu, 28, and Tanjila, 23 were held between March 18-21.

The detective branch seized machetes and knives from the suspects.

The arrests followed an attack on March 16 in Mirpur-12 area, captured by CCTV cameras, where

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