

BADOKHALI BEEL IN BAGERHAT

A lifeline turns into source of suffering

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY, Bagerhat

Around 50,000 residents of 13 villages along the vast Badokhali Beel (swamp) in Bagerhat Sadar upazila have long been facing hardships due to waterlogging caused by broken sluice gates and illegal encroachment of the waterbody.

The beel has an area of around 7,000 acres and is surrounded by Shat Gombuj, Karapara, and Jatrapur unions, with over 20 canals flowing into it.

Local influentials have been grabbing lands along the beel and the canals for fish farming.

This has been obstructing the water's natural flow and preventing the waterbody from providing adequate drainage.

Meanwhile, four crucial sluice gates of Bangladesh Water Development Board, constructed for regulating water levels in the swamp and connected canals, have been non-functional for a long time.

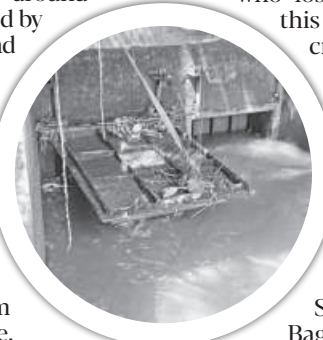
As such, the swamp and the canals fail to effectively drain excess rainwater during monsoon, leading to severe waterlogging throughout the season.

On the other hand, in the dry season, an acute shortage of water in the swamp and canals cripples agricultural activities in the area.

"Badokhali beel was once a lifeline to the people of this area, but not it has become the cause of our sufferings," said Moniruzzaman Molla of Rajapur village, who lost his crops and fish twice this year from his four acres of cropland and enclosure due to repeated waterlogging.

Rashid Sheikh, a local farmer, said, "The sluice gates need to be repaired urgently, and the canals need excavation to solve this issue."

Environmental activists from Khulna Poribesh Suroksha Mancha and Bagerhat Poribesh Suroksha Nagarik Committee visited the area on September 29 for inspection, said Khudrat-E-Khuda, president of Khulna Poribesh Suroksha Mancha. Abu Raihan Mohammad Al Biruni, executive engineer of BWDB in Bagerhat, said they have requested funds to repair the sluice gates. Once funding is approved, we will repair the sluice gates on a priority basis," he added.



Members of Bangladesh Combined Minority Alliance rallied at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday, demanding an end to the recent communal attacks. They also demanded that extrajudicial killing under the guise of "mob justice" be brought to an end and that those involved are punished swiftly and strictly.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

ATTACK ON STUDENTS

JU teacher shown arrested

JU CORRESPONDENT

A teacher of Jahangirnagar University, who has been accused of inciting attacks on students during the mass protests on July 17, was shown arrested yesterday after students of Jagannath University detained him on JnU campus and handed him over to police the day before.

Farid Ahmad, a professor of philosophy department, was shown arrested in a case filed by a JU student, said Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station. He was produced before a court in the morning, he added.

Saijadul Islam, a student of the English department at JU, filed the case on September 29.

According to the case
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TEESTA IRRIGATION PROJECT

Concerns rise over mass tree felling

ASADUZZAMAN TIPU, Nilphamari

Trees have allegedly been felled indiscriminately in Nilphamari and nearby districts as part of the Bangladesh Water Development Board's Teesta Irrigation Project rehabilitation and expansion. The project, worth Tk 1,500 crore, is Bangladesh's largest irrigation initiative.

Located in Dalia, Nilphamari, the Teesta Irrigation Project currently supplies water to 12 upazilas across Nilphamari, Rangpur, and Dinajpur districts, though it only operates at partial capacity.

According to BWDB officials, the project's rehabilitation and expansion will enable it to operate at full capacity. Initiated in July 2021, the project is slated for completion by December 2024.

As part of the project's design, the 735-kilometre irrigation canal network is set to undergo



renovation, repair, and widening. To accommodate this, a total of 1,04,000 trees within the project area were marked for felling, said Md Ahsan Habib, the project director and superintendent engineer of BWDB in Rangpur. The trees were grouped into lots, and tenders for their felling were called in mid-2022.

Multiple bidders were awarded

work orders for felling specific lots.

However, allegations have surfaced that bidders, in collusion with some forest and BWDB officials, have been felling far more trees than authorised.

Sources from Rangpur forest department revealed that around 6 lakh timber and fruit trees had been planted in the Teesta project

area during its initial phase in the 1990s.

GM Quader, chairman of the Jatiyo Party and former lawmaker of Rangpur-3, has claimed that approximately 4 lakh trees were felled by unscrupulous individuals associated with the project. He has called for an investigation into the matter, echoing similar allegations raised by locals and environmentalists.

These concerns were addressed at the Rangpur divisional commissioner's office during a recent coordination committee meeting.

High-ranking forest department officials were instructed to provide clarification on the matter.

During a recent visit to several areas within the project site, including Ramnagar, Bahalipara, Kakra, and Khalisha Chapani, this correspondent observed vast barren stretches where trees had
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MURDER CASES

Ex-food minister, Awami League leaders remanded

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed former food minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder on a seven-day remand in a case filed over the death of a university student, Ramij Uddin Ahmed Roop, in Dhaka's Tejgaon area during the protests on August 4.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Saifuddin Hossain passed the order.

A team of detectives arrested Sadhan from Bashundhara Residential area on Thursday night.

On September 7, AKM Rakibul Ahmed, father of the victim, filed the murder case with Tejgaon Police Station against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 222 others.

Yesterday, magistrate Saifuddin also placed Enamul Haque Abul, president of Paltan thana unit of Awami League, on a five-day remand in a case filed over the killing of a Jubo Dal leader, Shamim Mia, in Paltan on October 28 last year.

Abul was also a former councillor of Dhaka South City Corporation.

In addition, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Shahin Reza placed Krishak League central committee president Samir Chandra on a three-day remand in a case filed with Badda Police Station over the death of one Dulal Sarder in Badda area on July 18. He was arrested early yesterday.

On September 29, Shoriful Islam filed the murder case against Hasina and 44 others.

Many injured staring at bleak future

FROM PAGE 1

For Mozammel Haque and his family, the future looks bleak after the 21-year-old student lost vision in both eyes because of multiple shotgun pellet injuries he received during the quota reform protests in Narsingdi town on July 18.

He was rushed to a local hospital and later transferred to the National Institute of Ophthalmology & Hospital (NIOH) on August 6, where he has been receiving treatment ever since.

Tears rolled down her face as the 48-year-old mother, Moriyam Begum, described the situation.

"My son is now dependent on others. We are growing old, and I don't know how my son will live his life after we are gone," she told The Daily Star on October 2 at the NIOH.

Mozammel, a final year BA student of Narsingdi Government College, had already filled out the form to sit for his exams. "How can he take the exam now as he has lost vision in both eyes?" Moriyam asked.

She had hoped that after graduation, her son would get married, take responsibility for the family and relieve the burden from his father Nur Mohammad Madhu, a 55-year-old day labourer.

"But everything changed in the blink of an eye, and

so did his future," Moriyom said.

She added that her son used to contribute to the family with a part-time job, but now he is in such a condition that he will not be able to do anything to support himself.

"I still can't believe that my son is almost blind. When we see him, both my husband and I cry out loud," she said.

According to her, the hospital has been covering the cost of his treatment since August 8, but before that, they had already spent more than Tk 60,000, which they had borrowed.

"What we want now is better treatment for my son. This government came to power because of the sacrifices of many. They deserve the best treatment. If that treatment isn't available here, they need to be sent abroad," she added.

Speaking to the newspaper, Mozammel asked the government to send him abroad, as he believed he could regain his vision if treated outside the country.

"I need nothing - no compensation, and no rehabilitation. If I can see again, I will find a way to live my life," he said.

Like Mozammel, 34 others injured during the protests are receiving treatment at the hospital, looking for answers to the

question - how they will support themselves and their families without the ability to work.

Most of them have lost vision in one eye, while some have lost both.

Besides eye injuries, Mallik Hafizur Rahman Litan, 40, sustained severe head wounds after being beaten by Awami League goons on August 5 in Bagerhat town. He is also undergoing treatment at the hospital.

"Without government help, we will have to beg,"
Sagar Miah, vehicle mechanic who lost his vision partially due to shotgun pellet injuries.

Easy bike driver Litan, the breadwinner for his five-member family, underwent surgery and lost vision in his left eye.

"With just one eye, it won't be possible to drive the easy bike. I've been in the hospital for the past two months, and I have already spent all my savings. My family is now surviving on loans. I don't know how much longer I'll need to stay here," he said.

Hurged the government to rehabilitate him, provide him with employment, and ensure access to medical treatment when necessary.

Another 79 people injured during the protests are undergoing treatment at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), said the hospital members.

One of them, vehicle mechanic Sagar Miah, 29, was hit by pellets on his face in police firing during the movement at Notun Bazar in the Badda area of the capital in July.

After an operation on his left eye on September 30, he could see slightly but not clearly. He also sought the government to take responsibility for the injured and their family members.

"Without government help, we will have to beg," he said.

Two bullets pierced through the torso of Mohammad Sujon, 21, an employee of a cable TV operator, in the final moments of the uprising on August 5 in Old Dhaka's Naya Bazar.

He needed two open-heart surgeries and another on his intestine to survive. The doctor said his rehabilitation would take at least three years with medication and other sorts of treatment.

Still, he will never fully regain the ability to work, according to the doctor at Sir Salimullah Medical College Mitford Hospital.

His family of four is fully dependent on his income, as his father is unable to work after suffering two strokes.

They live with Sujon's elder sister Sumi Akter and her 10-year-old child after her husband left her. The boy dropped out of his madrasa after the family was hit by the tragedy surrounding Sujon's injuries.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Sujon and Sumi urged the government to bear the cost of his treatment until his recovery, and make arrangements so that he can work and earn for the family afterwards.

Another 34 injured, mostly with bullet wounds, are undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital while 25 others are being treated at the Super Specialized Hospital BSMMU.

A few others are receiving treatment at the National Institute of Neuro Sciences & Hospital.

They are among more than 19,200 people who needed hospital care for injuries caused by attacks during the protests, according to a government report.

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