

ENCROACHMENT, SILTATION

Shrinking Soilmari threatens livelihoods

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

The once mighty Soilmari river, flowing through Khulna's Batiaghata and Dumuria upazilas, is in dire need of excavation.

The 29-kilometre-long river, which used to be around 150 metres wide, has now shrunk to a mere 3-4 metres due to siltation and illegal encroachment over the past six or seven years, according to the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in Khulna.

The river can no longer hold water during the rainy season due to its reduced depth. As a result, around 100 villages in Batiaghata, Dumuria, and Phultala upazilas now face severe waterlogging, with water from the area unable to drain through the river.

The situation has raised concerns among locals and environmentalists.

Siltation has raised the riverbed and banks, with locals encroaching upon the river for shrimp farming and housing projects, exacerbating the crisis. The

reduced navigability of the river has severely affected agriculture, which is heavily reliant on the river's water.

Experts point to a lack of upstream water flow, as well as unplanned dams and sluice gates, as major factors in the river's degradation. Without urgent intervention, the entire river may soon be lost.

"Some influential locals have dug ponds and started shrimp farms by encroaching on the river, while others are filling it with sand for housing," said Ashim Biswas, a resident of Hogol Bunia village. "It is urgent to excavate the river to restore its natural flow."

Nimail Boragi, a farmer from Soilmari village, said, "The canals cannot drain water after heavy rains due to the river's condition. I planted Aman paddy on eight bighas of land, but nearly all of it has been underwater for a week."

Hundreds of farmers from villages such as Hogol Bunia, Hatbati, Hetal Bunia,



The 29km long Soilmari river in Khulna, which once was around 150 metres wide, has now shrunk to a mere 3-4 metres due to siltation and illegal encroachment. With its reduced depth, the river can no longer hold water during monsoon, causing around 100 villages in Batiaghata, Dumuria, and Phultala upazilas to face severe waterlogging.

PHOTO: STAR

Three funerals instead of one
Woman dies on way to mother's burial; her cousin loses life in same crashOUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogura*

Nupur Akhtar had barely come to terms with the grief of losing her mother when fate dealt a second, cruel blow.

The 23-year-old RMG worker from Dhaka's Ashulia left for Gaibandha early yesterday to attend her mother's funeral. But she never made it. A road accident in Bogura claimed her life just hours after her mother's death.

Nupur, her cousin Runa Akhtar, 19, and her husband Rakibul Islam, 29, set off at dawn on a motorcycle, desperate to reach Gaibandha in time for the funeral.

But tragedy struck around 7:30am in Bogura's Dhonmundi area, where poor road conditions caused their bike to skid.

In that brief moment of chaos, an unidentified truck ran over them, killing Nupur and Runa on the spot, said Azizul Islam, officer-in-charge of the Bogura Sherpur Highway Police.

Rakibul was seriously injured and is currently receiving treatment at a hospital, he added. "The truck fled before it could be identified," he said.

Fire Service officer Bakhtiar Uddin, who responded to the scene, said, "When we arrived, the two women had already died. We rushed Rakibul to the hospital and handed over the bodies to the police."

The family, shattered by the double tragedy, has chosen not to file a case.

They were preparing to hold one funeral, now they would have to arrange three.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



PHOTO: STAR
The scene of the accident.

Fire breaks out at the Barishal hospital

Patients panic, blaze doused in 3hrs, probe body formed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barishal*

A fire broke out at the new medicine building of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal yesterday morning, leaving the hospital's patients and their attendants in panic.

The fire was brought under control three hours after it broke out at the building's warehouse, according to the Barishal divisional office of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

After the fire broke out, patients were shifted to the old building from the medicine building, said the hospital's Assistant Director (Finance) Md Rejwanur Rahaman.

Meanwhile, the SBMCH authority has formed a six-member investigation committee, led by Prof Md Imrul Kayes, and asked it to file a report within three days, he also said.

Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, deputy director of Barishal Fire Service and Civil Defence, said, "As per the initial investigation, the fire at the warehouse of the new building may have been caused by an electrical short circuit. A formal investigation committee is being established to ascertain the cause."

Anar, an Ansar member who took part in the evacuation process, said they have shifted around 600 critical patients,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

A STINKY WELCOME

Garbage being dumped beside Keshabpur's key road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Benapole*

Stench of waste lining the roadside welcomes anyone entering Keshabpur town in Jashore.

Garbage from various parts of the municipality is being dumped beside the road near Majhir Pond, creating hazards for vehicles.

As such, all passengers of buses entering the town, as well as pedestrians and residents of the area endure the brunt of the municipality's mismanagement in waste disposal.

Locals are also worried about potential accidents as well as the spread of disease.

Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Dr Alamgir Hossain said there is a fear of various infectious diseases spreading as a result of this unsanitary environment. "It can also put people at risk," he added.

According to locals, the dumping has been ongoing for about a week in the Madhyakul Majhir Pond area of Keshabpur municipality. Previously, waste was disposed of in an adjacent area, but that site has become inaccessible.

This road serves as a vital entry point to Keshabpur town, used by large vehicles such as buses and trucks that travel along the Jashore-Chuknagar route.

Shafiqul Islam, a van driver who frequently uses the road, said he has to cover his nose multiple times a day to cope with the overwhelming smell. Zahidul Islam, the cleaning officer for Keshabpur Municipality, explained that the previous dumping site became unusable after the monsoon rains made the access road impassable for garbage vans.

He assured that cleaners have been deployed, and the waste will be cleared within the next couple of days.

Dhaka explores ways to recover money from US

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka and Washington yesterday discussed the possibility of signing a mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT) to enhance cooperation in combating corruption and money laundering.

The issue was discussed when Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin and US Acting Coordinator for Global Anti-Corruption Shelby Smith-Wilson met in Washington DC.

The foreign secretary is on a weeklong visit to the US.

He held a series of meetings with UN and key US officials in Washington DC and New York. He is scheduled to return home today.

MLAT is an agreement between two or more countries to gather and exchange information to enforce public or criminal laws. A mutual legal assistance request is commonly used to formally interrogate a suspect in a criminal case when the suspect resides in a foreign country.

Early this month, the Anti-Corruption Commission sent 71 such requests to various countries to recover the vast sums laundered abroad during the Awami League government's 15-year tenure.

Bangladesh lost approximately \$8.27 billion annually between 2009 and 2018 from mis-invoicing of values of import-export goods by traders to evade taxes and illegal movement of money across international borders, said 2021 Global Financial Integrity's report.

Low pressure likely over southwest Bay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A low-pressure area is likely to form over southwest Bay of Bengal in the 48 hours from 9:00am yesterday, according to the forecast of Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD).

The Met office confirmed the withdrawal of southwest monsoon from Bangladesh, except Chattogram region.

Conditions are favourable for further withdrawal of the southwest monsoon in the 24-hour period, according to BMD's weather bulletin yesterday morning.

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely to occur in one or two areas over Rangpur, Mymensingh, Chattogram, and Sylhet divisions, BMD said.

Elsewhere in the country, the weather may remain mainly dry with a temporary partly cloudy sky during the period.

Man killed in dispute over fishing rights

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Natore*

A 60-year-old man was killed in an altercation over fishing rights in a disputed pond in Natore's Baraigram upazila yesterday morning.

The incident happened around 9:00am in Warishpur village, Gopalpur union. The deceased is Torab Ali Khan.

According to Md Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Baraigram Police Station, Torab had been embroiled in a longstanding dispute with a local named Rana, 48.

The conflict escalated yesterday when both sides gathered during an argument over fishing in the pond. Members of Rana's group attacked Torab Ali with sticks and sharp weapons, leaving him critically injured.

Locals rushed Torab to a nearby clinic in Rajapur Bazar, but doctors pronounced him dead upon arrival. Rana was also seriously injured in the clash.

22-day ban on hilsa fishing starts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

A 22-day ban on catching, selling, and transporting hilsa fish began yesterday as part of government efforts to safeguard mother hilsa during the peak breeding season.

The ban, enforced by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, will remain in effect until November 3.

On the first day of the ban, Cox's Bazar Fish Landing Station saw traders selling marine fish, though the quantity was insufficient to meet demand. Abdus Shukkur, a fish seller, said they were selling off the last stock they had purchased on Friday night.

"Once the stock is sold, we will leave the landing station," he said.

Fishing trawlers were docked along the Bakkhali river, and fishermen were busy cleaning their boats. Mohammad Sobhan, one of the fishermen, lamented the tough times ahead, as recent trips to the sea yielded little catch due to poor weather.

"We couldn't go fishing for many days because of rough seas. The next 22 days will be difficult," he said, adding that he would not receive government food aid as he does not have a fisherman's card.

Meanwhile, Taufiq Mahmud, district fisheries officer of Munshiganj, said that to support affected fishermen, the government is distributing 25 kg of rice to each of 3,000 registered fishing families during this period. He added that mobile courts have been deployed along the Padma river to ensure compliance with the ban.



Fishing trawlers docked along the Bakkhali river in Cox's Bazar. The 22-day ban on catching, selling, and transporting hilsa fish began yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR