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RABANABAD-ANDHARMANIK ESTUARY

Of fish crisis and loss of livelihood

Fishers hold Payra power plant, Payra port responsible

SOHRAB HOSSAIN

A tributary of Rabanabad river merges with the Andharmanik river to form an estuary in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali before the rivers descend to the Bay of Bengal.

On the northern corner of this estuary lies the Payra Thermal Power Plant, while the Payra Sea Port lies on the southern corner.

The 1,320 MW coal-fired power plant was commissioned in 2020. The Payra Sea Port was inaugurated in 2016-17 fiscal year.

Before the port and the power plant came into the picture, the estuary used to be a rich and abundant fish reserve, especially of hilsa.

Andharmanik river was also declared a hilsa sanctuary.

Thousands of fishermen in Patuakhali and neighbouring districts used to catch hilsa and other fish in the two rivers and the estuary.

However, over the past few years since the port and the power plant became fully operational, the scenario changed significantly, much to the woes of the local fishermen.

CHAOS ON THE SURFACE

Around 3:00pm on November 10, this correspondent witnessed a chaotic scene while sitting on the bank of Rabanabad river adjacent to the Payra power plant.

Some fishermen were waiting in their fishing boats and trawlers after throwing their large nets in the water to catch hilsa.

Right then, a lighter ship was seen coming from the Bay. Visibly upset, the fishermen began waving a red towel, signalling the ship to change its course.

The ship, however, paid no heed to the signal and ran straight through the nets, tearing those apart, while the waves caused by its propellers swelled the river's water and pulled the nets to the surface, and the cries of the fishermen were lost amid the ship's loud noise.

"This has become a daily occurrence

since the port and power plant opened up here," alleged Alauddin, another fisherman who was standing by this correspondent.

"Ships come and go like this day and night, leaving the nets of fishermen torn on their way. Each of these hilsa nets costs between Tk 3-5 lakh. Who knows how many such nets got destroyed over the years, and how many fishermen had to suffer for this!" he added.

LESS FISH, LOST LIVELIHOOD

Over the past few years, fish populations in the estuary, which used to be an abundant reserve of hilsa and other fish, have depleted alarmingly, making

“Hilsa is a deep-sea fish that comes to the river to release eggs. If the water of a river is polluted, the movement of hilsa decreases in that river. Also, if hilsa eggs are released in polluted water, all the eggs don't hatch, reducing the fish population.

MD LOKMAN ALI
Dean of Fisheries, PSTU

fishing no longer profitable for the local fishermen.

Lamenting about it, Alauddin said, "If so many ships ply every day, how will fish come to the river?"

Fishermen Hossain Sharif, 48, and Harun, 35, of Pashurbunia village under Kalapara upazila, have been engaged in catching hilsa in the Andharmanik and Rabanabad rivers for their livelihood for years.

"Even around seven years back, I owned two trawlers and would catch hilsa worth Tk 15,000-20,000 in a single trip on a trawler. Now, I can catch hilsa worth hardly around Tk 3,000-4,000 a day, while each trip on the trawler costs Tk 5,000. Burdened by debt, I had to sell off one trawler, and some of my land. I can barely make ends meet

now," said Sharif.

Echoing him, Harun said the movement of fish in the rivers reduced considerably since the thermal power plant became operational and ships began plying the rivers in large numbers.

Due to this crisis of fish, many fishermen were compelled to change their profession.

Once a fisherman, Habibul Bashar of Panjupara village now provides ride-hailing service with his motorbike for a living.

Bashir Uddin Howladar, 48, who used to sell fish in Banati Bajar, has given up his business due to a crisis of fish.

Fisherman Ashraf Ali Pada, who caught hilsa in Andharmanik river for 15 years, said he now hunts crabs and sells those for Tk 500-700 a day.

Many other fishermen are now working as day labourers, masons or rickshaw pullers.

TROUBLED WATERS

According to Payra sea port authorities, about 4,000 domestic and foreign ships pass through the port every year, alongside numerous lighter ships.

If the port becomes connected to the rest of the country through a road network, transporting goods from the port will become a lot easier and hence the number of ships to the port will increase further, they opined.

This, in turn, will only reduce the fish resources of the rivers and add to the woes of the local fishermen.





BNP to establish accountability-based govt

Says Tarique Rahman

BSS, Dhaka

If Bangladesh Nationalist Party comes to power, it will establish a government focused on accountability to the people, said its acting Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday.

Speaking at a training workshop in Cumilla, Tarique outlined BNP's 31-point proposal for state reforms, urging party members to widely disseminate the proposals across the country.

He stressed that the outline represents BNP's plans for governance, aiming to resolve national issues in phases once in power. He called for the inclusion of all democratic opinions in the proposal, which was updated from an initial 27-point plan to 31 points.

Tarique also highlighted the sacrifices made by his family, referencing the martyrdom of his father, former president Ziaur Rahman, and the suffering of his mother, Begum Khaleda Zia, and brother Arafat Rahman. He criticised the Awami League government for destroying the education system and fostering corruption.

The BNP leader said the youth should be made aware of corruption from an early age. He said the education system should be modernised to create skilled citizens. He also said the public transport system should be improved, adding coordinated efforts should be taken to deal with traffic congestion.

BNP Standing Committee member Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, who inaugurated the workshop, called for early general elections, promising that BNP would win a fair vote. The event was attended by BNP leaders from across Cumilla, Brahmanbaria, and surrounding districts, with plans to extend the training to grassroots levels.

Respect our sovereignty

BNP tells India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh-India relations should be based on state-to-state interactions rather than influenced by individuals or organisations, BNP leaders said yesterday.

Speaking to reporters after paying homage at the grave of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman, BNP standing committee member Gayeshwar Chandra Roy urged India to refrain from interfering in Bangladesh's internal affairs.

"No nation's interference is desirable to the people of an independent country. Bangladeshis will decide who is competent for which roles; there is no need for external advice. If needed, we can bring in consultants," he said.

Gayeshwar emphasised the importance of

March towards Bangladesh mission halted

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
New Delhi

Hundreds of protesters, including Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh members, marched towards the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi yesterday, alleging human rights violations against minorities in Bangladesh.

The Delhi Civil Society and other organisations joined the protest, which began at 11:00am.

The procession was halted by police at Teen Murti roundabout, far from the high-security diplomatic enclave of Chanakyapuri, where the mission is located, according to the law enforcers.

Security was tightened around the High Commission, following vandalism at the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala last week.

Protesters called for UN intervention and urged Bangladesh to end alleged atrocities against Hindus.

Punish those responsible for BDR carnage

Demand former armed forces officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of former armed forces officers yesterday called for punishment for all those responsible for the BDR carnage that led to the killing of 57 army officers, as well as the murder of Major Sinha.

They also demanded justice for all the disappearances and murders that occurred during the previous government's tenure.

The officers also sought the reinstatement of around 1,000 army, navy, and air force personnel who were dismissed at various points during the last regime and are still within the service age.

The statements were made during a press briefing held at the Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) auditorium, organised by two platforms of former armed officers: "Justice for Comrades" and "Sohojoddha."

At the briefing, Major (ret'd) Shakil Newaz stated, "The neutrality and professionalism of the armed forces have repeatedly been questioned in different political situations, often influenced by the interests of the powerful. As a result, we have witnessed the abuse of martial law, planned killings, disappearances, and the unjust convictions and dismissals of meritorious officers by military courts without pensions."

Major Shakil emphasised, "We are here to highlight the ongoing injustice faced by serving and retired military members over the past 15 years. We have seen how agencies like DGFI, NSI, SB, and DB, under



Two farmers harvesting spinach in a lush crop field in Keraniganj yesterday. These freshly plucked greens are prepared to be sold in the kitchen markets of the capital, ensuring a supply of winter produce.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4