

Keeping a painful past alive

Survivors demand preservation of WDB torture cells of 1971

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

It was May 1971, when the Rahman family's world turned upside down. Shafiur Rahman Jamal, a fifth-grader at BM School in Barishal, was a fifth grader at BM School in Barishal at the time.

Now in his 60's, he recalled the moment Pakistani soldiers stormed their Kalish Chandra Road home. Led by Captain Jamil, the soldiers demanded the whereabouts of his father, Mujibur Rahman Kanchan.

"We told them our father was in Khepupara," Jamal recounted. "They couldn't find him, so they took my brother and me to the Water Development Board (WDB) torture cell."

Over two days, Jamal and his elder brother endured relentless interrogation, with threats that they would be killed unless their father surrendered.

To save his sons, Kanchan made the ultimate sacrifice.

On May 11, the day of Eid, he took a ritual bath, donned a white punjabi, and shared breakfast with his family. "My mother fed him with her hand. He hugged her, and left the house...for good."

At the WDB camp, Kanchan pleaded for his sons' release. "It was the last time I saw my father," Jamal said. Two days later, Kanchan was executed. Witnesses said he was shot near the Sagardi Canal, his body was dumped into the water. It was found floating near Sagardi Bazaar and buried in a Muslim cemetery.

The WDB torture cells bear the mark of the atrocities of 1971.

AMG Kabir Bhulu, another victim, recalled his horrific ordeal. Captured on July 16, 1971, he was taken to the WDB torture cell, where he witnessed unthinkable brutality.

"They wrapped me and my companion, Anwar, in cloth, thinking we were dead," Bhulu said.

Anwar succumbed to the torture, but Bhulu survived, enduring three months and six days of torment before being transferred to Jessore Jail and released on October 21.

The torture cells were a nexus of cruelty during the Liberation War. Sub-sector Commander Mahfuz Alam Beg, who entered Barishal after crossing from

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Climate and human rights activists formed a human chain in front of the parliament building yesterday, urging the government to adopt an emergency action plan to tackle Dhaka's air pollution crisis. The event was jointly organised by Janabhasya and earki. Over the past week, Dhaka's Air Quality Index (AQI) has consistently ranked the city as having the worst air quality in the world.

Century-old Basugi canal now on its deathbed

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Once a vibrant waterbody crisscrossing through Barguna's Amtali town, the century-old Basugi canal is now on its deathbed due to rampant encroachment and pollution.

During a recent visit to the canal and its adjacent areas, this correspondent observed numerous establishments built by encroaching on the canal's banks. Meanwhile, local residents and traders have been dumping garbage into the canal's waters.

As a result, the canal -- once approximately 30 metres wide, according to locals -- has now been reduced to a narrow ditch filled with dark, polluted water and almost no flow, owing to the accumulation of solid waste.

Locals said the canal, which connects to the Payra River, flows through Amtali town before splitting into two branches: one heading southward toward Basugi, Nayavanguli, and Manikjhuri areas, and

the other flowing eastward through Natun Bazar before joining Chawra canal.

Around two acres of the canal's land have reportedly been illegally occupied near the iron bridge in front of a local resident, Samsul Haque Ghazi's house, where over 100 structures have been constructed.

The alleged encroachers include Nurul Islam and Saiful Islam and approximately 50 others. Of them, Saiful has built an ice mill on the canal's land.

Additionally, residents on both banks of the canal and traders at the local fish market have been dumping household garbage, plastics, polythene, and fish waste into the water.

Sewage from a public toilet on the east side of the fish market also flows directly into the canal.

Gofar Pada, a local farmer, said the canal's condition has deteriorated so severely that it no longer has any water flow. During the monsoon, the canal

overflows its banks, inundating the surrounding locality and damaging adjacent croplands, he added.

Nurul Islam, one of the encroachers, said, "We built a structure on the government land of the canal for our business as we have no other place. If the authorities decide to evict us, we will leave."

Saiful Islam Molla, owner of the ice mill, echoed this sentiment.

"Since the space was vacant and fish traders need ice, I built the ice mill here. If the government asks me to leave, I will relocate the mill," he said.

Contacted, Azizur Rahman, deputy assistant engineer of the Bangladesh Water Development Board in Amtali upazila, said they would identify and demarcate their land and evict the illegal occupants.

Similarly, Tarek Hasan, assistant commissioner (land) in the upazila, said that the illegal encroachers of the canal would soon be identified and evicted.

Forest department, resort owner face off over land

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

Forest Department (FD) and the owner of Mati-Ta Resort has locked horns over the demarcation of forestland in Chattogram's Bhatiary area.

The FD has filed a case against the resort owner, Tasneem Mahmood, accusing him of encroaching on forestland to build the resort. However, Mahmood has denied the allegations, filing a discharge petition and claiming the case is baseless.

According to the FD, the disputed land falls within the Dakshin Jungle Sonaichari protected forest under the Kumira Forest Range of the Chattogram North Forest Division. Trees were planted on the land during the 2011-12 fiscal year.

In February 2021, an FD patrol team reported that the resort owner was encroaching on forestland and had felled around 25 trees. The FD subsequently filed a case under Section 33 of the Forest Act.

The case documents reveal that the FD sent a letter to Mahmood in March 2021, asking him to demarcate the land to resolve the dispute. Despite being given two extensions, Mahmood reportedly failed to comply.

Safiul Karim Mazumder, assistant forest case conducting officer of the Chattogram North Forest Division, said the 6th Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Chattogram has already accepted the charge sheet against Mahmood.

Meanwhile, Mahmood maintains his innocence. In his petition, he claimed he was attending an event with the home minister on the day of the alleged incident and did not authorise any encroachment.

Mahmood initially appealed to the lower court to discharge him from the case, but his plea was rejected. In April 2024, he appealed to the Chattogram Judge Court, which has scheduled a hearing.

Jaynul Abedin, Mahmood's lawyer, said the court has accepted the appeal.

Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) Jaynul Abedin said the resort had constructed a boundary wall on forestland, according to their documents. He added that the FD is working to demarcate the land and will take steps to evict structures built on forestland.

The Forest Department accuses Mati-Ta Resort owner Tasneem Mahmood of encroaching on protected forestland in Bhatiary, filing a case under the Forest Act. Mahmood denies the allegations, claiming innocence and appealing the court's rejection of his discharge plea.

Woman killed as truck runs over motorcycle

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

A woman was killed after falling off her husband's motorcycle after a truck hit the bike from behind in Kishoreganj's Karimganj upazila yesterday.

The deceased is Maqsuma Begum, 35, of Vadera village of Tarail upazila.

The incident took place around 11:00am on Kishoreganj Chamta road in front of Niamatpur Union Parishad.

According to police and locals, the couple were going to Balikhala in Karimganj on a motorcycle with their 4-year-old daughter from their home in Kishoreganj town.

Maksuda was crushed to death under the wheels of the truck when a truck rear ended the bike.

Karimganj Police Station OC Shahab Uddin said her husband and daughter who were on the motorcycle are safe.



Basugi canal has been reduced to a narrow ditch filled with dark, polluted water and almost no flow due to the accumulation of solid waste and encroachment.

PHOTO: STAR

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BNP leader suspended for assaulting driver, journo

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

The general secretary of BNP's Shiddhirganj upazila unit, Iqbal Hossain, has been suspended after assaulting a bus driver and a journalist in Narayanganj yesterday.

The incident took place on Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Sanarpar area.

Passengers said Iqbal became enraged over a trivial matter and, with his supporters, assaulted the driver and vandalised the bus.

Journalist Minhaj Aman, a passenger, was also attacked while trying to protect the driver. Both sustained injuries. The attackers left after handing the driver Iqbal's visiting card, according to the driver.

In a press release signed by Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, BNP announced Iqbal's suspension, citing his harassment of journalist Minhaj Aman.

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