

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION FOR RIVERS

Rivers are the lifelines of Bangladesh, shaping its geography, economy, and culture. However, unchecked encroachment, pollution, and water withdrawal from upstream have left many rivers struggling to survive. Once-mighty rivers like the Padma, Bhairab, and countless others are drying up, forming vast shoals, disrupting agriculture, and forcing fishermen to abandon their livelihoods. The worsening crisis demands urgent attention and action. On this International Day of Action for Rivers, let's have a look at two of our rivers, which once used to flow gloriously, but are now being choked to death due to a lack of sustainable management, dredging, and pollution control.

## The shrinking Padma

Declining water levels fuel shoal expansion, threatening livelihoods

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

School teacher Rakibul Islam used to cross the mighty Padma at the Shilaiddah point in Kushtia every day to reach his school. But this year, his journey has become even more arduous due to the expanding shoals in the river.

"The 4-kilometre-wide river has narrowed to just 300 metres. Now, I have to cross over 3.5 kilometres of shoal, which is both costly and time-consuming. This year, I am forced to stay in Kushtia instead of commuting," said Rakibul, a teacher at Gangadhardiar Government Primary School in Pabna Sadar upazila.

A visit to different points of the river revealed excessive shoal areas developing across its course, severely affecting agriculture and fishing.

Farmer Abdul Malek from Mokkampur in Bheramara upazila of Kushtia, who used to cultivate paddy on the riverbank near Hardinge Bridge during the dry season, said this year the land has become uncultivable due to excessive sand accumulation.

"As the water recedes, the entire riverbank is getting covered in sand, making the land infertile for crops," he said.

Many farmers who prepared seedbeds in early winter lost their crops as vast sand fields developed along the riverbanks.

Apart from that, fishing communities are also facing challenges due to the shrinking water space.

"Five to six years ago, I could catch 5 to 10 kg of fish daily. Now,

I barely get 2 to 3 kg," said Bodhon Kumar, a fisherman from Pakshy in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila.

Around 75 fishermen living near Hardinge Bridge are experiencing the same crisis, he claimed.

Meanwhile, despite concerns over water shortage, officials say the recorded flow at Hardinge Bridge has increased this year compared to last.

According to the Joint River Commission, the flow of water at



Hardinge Bridge in January last year was 63,113 cusec, 48,518 cusec, and 48,359 cusec in three cycles.

This January, the recorded flow increased to 69,643 cusec, 64,186 cusec, and 64,672 cusec.

Similarly, in February last year, the flow was recorded at 43,926 cusec, 34,697 cusec, and 35,751 cusec, while this February, it rose to 59,202 cusec, 49,984 cusec, and 42,886 cusec.

The flow of water has increased at the Hardinge Bridge due to more water discharge from upstream," said Zahedul Islam, executive engineer of Regional Hydrology Department.

However, asked about the formation of shoals, he said the water

level still remains low, and due to a lack of proper dredging, silt is being accumulated, forming shoals in different points.

According to experts, the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty (1996) ensures that Bangladesh receives a fixed share of water from India's Farakka Barrage between January and May each year, but this allocation is not enough to sustain the Padma.

The 30-year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty is set to expire this year, prompting Bangladesh and India to begin discussions on its renewal.

However, experts emphasise the need for a fair water-sharing agreement based on international regulations.

"Since the construction of the Farakka Barrage, we have been deprived of our fair share of water, leading to the gradual destruction of the river," said Mizanur Rahman, a wetland activist and member of the Bangladesh Water Development Board.

Despite the increased flow at the Padma this year, the water level remains a lot less than ideal, and the level is still declining, leading to the expansion of shoals, he also said.

"We have been receiving an insufficient share of water for years, leading to the gradual destruction of the Padma," he said, adding that to save the river, Bangladesh must negotiate a fair share of water in accordance with international regulations.

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আমরা গভীরভাবে শোকাহত ও মর্মাহত!



এপেক্ষা ফ্ল্যাপের চেয়ারম্যান

সৈয়দ মনজুর এলাহী

ইন্টেকাল করেছেন

(১৯৪২-২০২৫)

(ইন্সা লিলাহি ওয়া ইন্সা ইলাইই রাজিউন)

সৈয়দ মনজুর এলাহী এর মৃত্যুতে শাহজালাল ইসলামী ব্যাংক পরিবার গভীরভাবে শোকাহত ও মর্মাহত। আমরা মহান আল্লাহ'র দরবারে তার রহের মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি এবং প্রার্থনা করছি আল্লাহত্যালা তাকে যেন জান্নাতুল ফেরদাউস দান করেন-আমীন।



শাহজালাল ইসলামী ব্যাংক মিলনী

অভিযন্ত দেবার প্রতিষ্ঠিত

MODEL MOSQUE  
Govt to probe graft allegations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has formed a committee to investigate corruption allegations linked to the construction of model mosques during the previous autocratic regime.

"During the authoritarian regime, around 560 model mosques were built at a cost of nearly US \$1 billion. Concerns over irregularities have been raised, as the expenditure could have been halved if corruption had not occurred," said Press Secretary to the Chief Adviser Shafiqul Alam at a press briefing yesterday.

Addressing vacancies in government positions, Shafiqul said the Chief Adviser has instructed authorities to expedite recruitment. "The cabinet secretary will present a report in the next meeting outlining potential appointments," he added.

The press secretary also announced that the Food and Agriculture

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## Wasa pipeline chokes Bhairab

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

The 20km part of Bhairab River, stretching from Khulna to Bagerhat, is shrinking into a stagnant canal due to a massive pipeline installed by the Khulna Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa).

The 56 inch-diameter pipeline, laid without an adequate environmental assessment, has severely disrupted the river's natural flow, causing heavy siltation and making navigation nearly impossible for boats and trawlers.

To protect the pipeline, Wasa later erected five- to six-foot-high iron structures, further worsening the situation.

These barriers obstruct boat movement, forcing fishermen and transporters to wait for high tide to cross. During low tide, the pipeline remains exposed, creating an impassable obstruction.

"Almost every day, I have to wait an extra six to seven hours for the tide to rise just to cross the pipeline," said Sabur Rana, a fisherman from Naihati village, Rupsha, "Khulna Wasa did this without thinking of our plight. We urge the authorities to resolve it immediately."

Mohammad Ali, a 75-year-old tea stall owner near the Mulghar Bridge, said, "This river, once 300 feet wide, has narrowed to just 20-25 feet over the years. The pipeline has made things worse."

The once-mighty Bhairab, vital for trade and transportation, is now struggling to survive. Businesses relying on river transport face immense hardship, with goods-laden boats frequently getting stuck.

In 2019, Water Development Board (WDB) undertook a Tk 24.23 crore excavation project to improve the river's water flow, dredging 17.5km of the river from Daratana in Bagerhat to Atharobaki in Khulna.

However, the benefits of this effort have been undone by the pipeline's installation.

Md Humayun Kabir, WDB sub-assistant engineer, said, "We opposed the pipeline installation. When the river flow was obstructed post-excavation, we warned them again. Instead of resolving the issue, they made things worse by erecting an iron cage."

Environmentalists say Bhairab's condition reflects

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Manzur Elahi laid to eternal rest at Banani graveyard

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent industrialist and entrepreneur Syed Manzur Elahi was laid to eternal rest at Banani graveyard yesterday.

He was buried around 4:30pm, according to a senior officer of Apex.

Elahi's first namaz-e-janaza was held at East West University in Dhaka at 10:30am yesterday.

He was then taken to the headquarters of Mutual Trust Bank PLC, where employees of the bank and Apex Group paid their respects and bid him farewell, officials said.

Later, he was taken to Gulshan Azad Mosque for the second janaza after the Zohr prayers.

Tributes from all corners of society, including business leaders, government high-ups, political leaders, and employees from different organisations he established, poured in, honouring his memory.

Chief Justice Syed Reafat Ahmed, Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin, economists Rehman Sobhan and Mustafizur Rahman, President of International Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh Mahbubur Rahman, business leaders

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122 DU students involved in July 15 violence  
Finds fact-finding committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fact-finding committee of Dhaka University has identified 122 DU students involved in violence on the campus on July 15 last year.

Outsiders including students of other educational institutions were also involved, Quazi Mahfujul Hoque Supan, convener of the committee, told the reporters after handing over the report to the DU vice-chancellor.

"As an institution, Dhaka University cannot directly file a criminal case. However, the authorities will take institutional measures against the perpetrators," said Mahfujul Hoque Supan, associate professor of the law department.

After receiving the report, VC Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan said, "The report will be presented at the meeting of syndicate which will take further decisions."

The convener said the July 15 violence is a well-planned attack on the students.

The committee has also found the involvement of many former students.

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LUBNAN

RICHMAN

INFINITY  
Mega Mall