

Tidal surge floods farmland in Patuakhali

Farmers devastated as saltwater destroys crops, fish enclosures

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

A tidal surge inundated around 100 acres of farmland in Itbaria village of Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila, destroying winter crops and washing away fish from at least 10 ponds.

The flood occurred on Tuesday as seawater entered the fields through a worn-out, single-gate sluice connected to the Tiakhali River.

Local farmers reported that the area is cultivated year-round, with Aman paddy grown during the monsoon, followed by winter crops like pulses, sunflowers, and maize.

Just two days before Eid, the fields were dry and cracked, but now saltwater has submerged everything. Due to the new moon, an unusually high tide overflowed local canals and spread into the fields.

Along with the crops, many farmers' fish enclosures were also flooded, and saltwater entered household ponds, creating a crisis for daily use and livestock drinking water.

Farmer Mahtab Hossain said, "Suddenly, saltwater entered and flooded the fields.

The pulse plants, which were about to be harvested in two weeks, will now rot. It is heartbreaking to see our hard-earned crops being destroyed."

Another farmer, Delwar Talukdar, said the old, deteriorated sluice gate had long lost its effectiveness.

"Water used to flow in and out unchecked. But this time, due to the intense tidal pressure from the new moon, the entire canal overflowed and submerged the fields. My four-bigha winter crop field is now filled with saline water, and everything is rotting. This is a disaster for all farmers here."

He said fresh water from ponds and canals was used for cooking and daily needs, but now, due to the saline intrusion, people are facing an acute water crisis.

The executive engineer of the Water Development Board in Kalapara could not be reached for comment as the office was closed.

Kalapara Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Rabiul Islam said necessary measures would be taken to resolve the issue after Eid.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A line of rickshaws lay parked side-to-side on the capital's Green Road yesterday. On the third day of Eid, with many Dhaka-dwellers still outside the city for the holidays, rickshaw-pullers could not find enough passengers. As such, they parked their vehicles while they waited.

SAD leader arrested over sexual assault charges

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Lalmonirhat*

A man has been arrested and sent to jail on charges of sexually assaulting and attempting to abduct a woman at Char Rajibpur upazila of Kurigram.

The arrestee is Mehedi Hasan, 22, a Students Against Discrimination (SAD) leader from the Marichakandi area of Rajibpur Sadar union.

The incident reportedly took place on a bridge at Marichakandi at 9:00pm on Monday night, the day of Eid.

The father of the victim filed a case with Rajibpur Police Station against four named and 4-5 unnamed people, alleging sexual assault and attempted abduction of his daughter.

Mehedi was sent to jail through the court on Tuesday, said Rajibpur Police Station's Sub-inspector Atiquzzaman Atiq.

Police said that the victim and her husband were going to their home by autorickshaw from her father's house at 9:00pm on Monday night. When they reached the bridge at Marichakandi village, Mehedi and his men blocked their way. At that time, they tried to sexually assault the woman and abduct her.

When the locals rushed to the spot after hearing their screams, Mehedi and his men fled. A case was filed at the police station on Monday night and police arrested Mehedi.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Canal runs dry as tea estate 'diverts' water flow

Over 3,000 farmers in peril

SIFAYET ULLAH, *Ctg*

The Baromasia canal in Chattogram's Fatikchhari upazila is on the brink of drying up after the Halda Valley Tea Estate altered its course at several points to facilitate irrigation for its tea garden.

The modifications have completely halted the canal's water flow, severely impacting over 3,000 farmers who rely on it for irrigation, especially during the dry season.

Connected directly to the Halda river, the Baromasia canal channels freshwater from hilly areas, supporting Bangladesh's only natural breeding ground for major carps. It plays a crucial role in sustaining a healthy freshwater ecosystem and supplying carp fries to fish cultivators nationwide.

However, the extensive diversion of the canal has triggered a severe irrigation crisis, threatening both local livelihoods and the environment.

The Halda Valley Tea Estate is currently extracting water at three separate points using heavy pumps -- an act that violates the Water Act 2013 and is punishable under the law.

"The Tea Estate has been extracting water from the canal since 2007. Now, they have altered its course at multiple points," said Sohag Talukder,

sub-divisional engineer of the Water Development Board (WDB) in Chattogram.

"Both altering a stream's course and unilaterally extracting water from a natural canal are legal violations, and action will be taken against the violators," he added.

During a visit to the area last month, this correspondent observed that approximately

one, benefiting nearly 10,000 people and increasing paddy production by 7,000 tonnes annually.

That initiative is now on the verge of collapse. Due to the water crisis, cultivation has ceased on at least 2,500 acres of land.

Fatikchhari Upazila Agriculture Officer Hasanuzzaman said due to insufficient irrigation, farmers

haven't been able to grow Boro paddy due to the irrigation crisis," said Mohammad Musa, a farmer from Edilpur village, who now works in brick kilns as a day labourer.

Fayezur Rahman, another farmer from Mirzahat, said, "I used to cultivate paddy on two acres of land, but now my fields are dry. We are helpless as the canal has no water."

To prevent further water extraction, the WDB sent a notice to the Halda Valley Tea Estate on March 13. The Daily Star obtained a copy of the notice.

Fazlul Karim, president of the Baromasia Canal Irrigation Project, said, "We are not against the tea garden, but the canal is dying due to their unplanned activities."

Sovkat Ibne Sahid, executive engineer of the WDB in Chattogram, said, "We sought help from the upazila administration to take action against the tea estate to stop the destructive activities."

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Fatikchhari, said, "If the Halda Valley Tea Estate is found to have violated the law, legal action will be taken against them."

Contacted, Nader Khan, owner of the Halda Valley Tea Estate, denied the allegations of altering the canal's course.

"We need water to operate the tea gardens, but the claim of extracting water unilaterally is completely false," he said.

However, he added, "Since a complaint has been made, I will advise the garden's manager to extract water only after discussing it with the farmers."



two kilometers of the canal -- stretching from Joy Nagar to Edilpur -- had dried up, leaving several paddy fields parched due to the lack of water.

In 1980, the WDB built a water retention structure on the canal to irrigate over 3,000 acres of land across two unions during the Boro season.

This enabled farmers to grow three crops a year instead of just

one, benefiting nearly 10,000 people and increasing paddy production by 7,000 tonnes annually.

"With the dry season setting in, the tea garden authorities altered the canal's course, causing rice seedlings to die from lack of water," he added.

For generations, farmers have cultivated three crops annually along the fertile land surrounding the canal. Now, they can barely grow one.

Many have been forced to seek alternative livelihoods, such as daily labour.

"For the past few years, we



Children slide down this slope and into the Rajarbar canal, where they then bathe. The children first made the slope slippery by adding water to the soil, making their own custom slide. The photo was taken from the Badla village in Babuganj upazila of Barishal recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Fire guts 11 shops in Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Lalmonirhat*

A fire gutted at least 11 shops at Shiberdangi Bazar in Char Rajibpur upazila of Kurigram yesterday.

The fire broke out at dawn. Locals said they noticed the fire after leaving the mosque and saw a vegetable shop engulfed in flames.

Before firefighters could reach the scene, the fire spread, destroying grocery stores, a shoe shop, a cow fodder shop, and a vegetable warehouse.

There were no casualties as the shops were unoccupied at the time.

Three firefighting units took around two hours to bring the blaze under control, said Abu Hanif, in-charge of Char Rajibpur Fire Service Station.

Man hacked to death in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

A man was hacked to death over a family feud allegedly by his step brothers at his ancestral home in Haldia village under Raozan upazila of Chattogram on Tuesday afternoon.

The deceased is Shah Alam Bakul, 40. He was an engineer by profession. Bakul and two of his step brothers locked into an altercation over ownership of family properties at their village home around 2:30pm.

At one stage, his step brothers hacked Bakul with machetes and fled the scene, leaving him critically injured, said Monirul Islam Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Raozan Police Station. Locals rushed him to Raozan Upazila Health Complex, where on-duty doctors declared him dead, the OC said.

Woman raped at knife point in Kishoreganj

Teen sued for attempting to rape a third grader

STAR REPORT

A woman was raped at knife point in Katiadi of Kishoreganj on Monday.

The victim filed a rape case with Katiadi Model Police Station the next day, said its Officer-in-Charge Habibullah Khan.

The accused is Hakim Mia, 25, of the upazila. The incident took place at her house in the village. The victim is a mother of three children.

According to the case statement, the victim's husband is a tea stall shopkeeper and a night guard at a local market. When the woman was sleeping at her house with her children on Monday night, Hakim entered the house and raped the victim at knife point.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

2 die while making TikTok videos on train roof

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Brahmanbaria*

Two men died after falling from the roof of a moving train in Brahmanbaria's Akhaura upazila yesterday.

According to railway police, the two were shooting TikTok videos on their phone when the accident took place.

Two others have sustained severe injuries as well.

The accident occurred around 12:00pm at the Gangasagar railway bridge in Mogra union of the upazila, confirmed Jasim Uddin Khandaker, officer-in-charge of Akhaura Railway Police Station.

The victims fell from the roof of the Sylhet-bound Paharika Express train, which had departed from Chattogram, the police official said.

The deceased are Abdul Kaiyum, from Debidwar upazila in Cumilla, and Tarek, from Guruhit village in Kasba municipality of Brahmanbaria.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Man sets mother-in-law on fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinaipur*

A man allegedly set his mother-in-law on fire by pouring petrol over her in public in Dinaipur's Birampur upazila yesterday morning.

The victim, Bully Begum, 55, is in critical condition at Rangpur Medical College Hospital, said Ataur Rahman, officer-in-charge (Investigation) of Birampur Police Station.

The accused, Mehedul, 40, is on the run, and police have launched an operation to arrest him.

According to family sources, Mehedul married Bully Begum's daughter, Shilpi Begum, around ten years ago. The couple has three children.

Mehedul, an auto-rickshaw driver, used a vehicle rented from his brother-in-law. Recently, the vehicle was damaged and left at his in-laws' house. When his brother-in-law repaired it and rented it to another driver, Mehedul allegedly became enraged, leading to the attack.

At around 7:30am, Mehedul called Bully Begum outside to the main road via mobile phone. As soon as she arrived, he poured petrol over her and set her on fire before escaping, the OC said, quoting locals and family members.

Most of her body was severely burned.

A police operation is underway to arrest the accused, the OC said.