

Sati river gasps for survival

Encroachment, pollution push Lalmonirhat waterbody to the brink

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The Sati river in Lalmonirhat, once a vibrant waterbody around 500 feet wide, has now shrunk to a channel barely six to seven feet across after years of unchecked encroachment, pollution and negligence.

According to folklore, merchant Chand Saudagar of Manasamangal once sailed his boat along this very river route.

With its upstream located near Haribhanga and Balatari areas by the district town's bus stand, the 49-kilometre-long river originates from the Teesta in Parulia area under Hatibandha upazila, flows through Aditmari and Lalmonirhat Sadar upazilas, and then joins the Teesta again.

Locals allege that neither the Lalmonirhat district administration nor the Bangladesh Water Development Board has ever taken effective measures to save the waterway.



They say riverbanks have been grabbed and excavated for fish ponds and farming, disrupting its natural flow. Small bridges and culverts, illegal structures and rampant pollution have destroyed its vitality.

Mahir Uddin, 70, a farmer from Haribhanga, recalled hearing from his late father how trading boats once travelled the Sati's waters, often anchoring at Haribhanga to buy and sell goods.

"Now there is no river -- numerous structures have taken up the space where the river once flowed and boats once moved in numbers," he said.

Abed Ali, 65, of Balatari said, "The river has turned into a thin canal. We've watched it die before our eyes."

Dr Tuhi Wadud, professor of Bangla at Begum Rokeya University and director of Riverine People, said, "While some stretches of the river still exist, others are on the verge of complete disappearance."

"However, there is still a chance to save it. I have submitted a petition to the deputy commissioner with proposals for the river's protection," he added.

He recommended evicting illegal encroachers, cancelling private ownership, rebuilding bridges to the river's original width, removing small culverts, restoring its natural connection to the Teesta, and recording all its channels as river land through a survey.

Contacted, Shunil Kumar, executive engineer of BWDB in Lalmonirhat, said parts of the river still carry water but remain unlisted in government records.

"The river has lost its natural link to the Teesta due to encroachment and embankments. We are currently conducting surveys on it and will soon submit our report," he said.

HM Rqib Haydar, deputy commissioner of Lalmonirhat and president of the district's river protection committee, said, "Everyone knows Sati is a historic river, but in some sections, there are no records of it as a river."

BWDB has been asked to conduct surveys. Once the report is submitted, we will discuss with higher authorities and take necessary steps to restore it through land surveys."



Once upon a time, the Sati river stretched 500 feet wide. Now, after years of encroachment, pollution, and negligence, its channel is barely six to seven feet.

PHOTO: STAR

A school of hope on the Teesta shoal

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Kalikapur Char is a remote shoal within the Teesta river under Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila. Life there is marked by isolation and deprivation, with residents cut off from the mainland by water and further plagued by seasonal floods.

For years, the people of these shifting sandbars have struggled for access to healthcare, electricity, roads and education. For girls, the lack of schools beyond primary level meant education was often out of reach, as the nearest high school lies miles away across the river.

Most were forced to stop studying after Grade 5.

That changed in 2008, when Nodi O Jibon Junior High School was established in Kalikapur Char, opening up opportunities that once seemed impossible.

Today, the school stands as a beacon of hope, spreading the light of education among girls and helping them pursue their aspirations despite the odds.

Char residents recall the turning point came when Dr Atiur Rahman, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, visited the shoal for a development programme called Nodi O Jibon (River and Life) run by a non-government organisation.

Moved by the lack of opportunities, he encouraged villagers to build a school and helped mobilise resources.

With contributions from locals

and support from the programme, a tin-roofed building was erected on the sandbar and named after the project that inspired it.

"Before this school was established, girls here had no way to continue their studies after primary level," said Nazir Hossain, 68, a farmer from the char. "Now, our daughters study here and can dream of pursuing college, perhaps even university," he said.

distances across sandy stretches and cross narrow water channels, which swell during the monsoon.

Floods and erosion frequently damage the shoal, forcing families to relocate and rebuild. Despite these hardships, attendance has remained steady as parents increasingly recognise the value of education.

The school continues to run without government support.



The school, which began with only a few classrooms, now has 11 teachers and 136 students, 98 of them girls.

Students typically complete their junior secondary education up to class eight before transferring to mainland schools to pursue higher studies.

"I want to become educated and work for my community," said Marjina Akhter, an eighth grader. "Many girls before me have studied here and pursued college later on. I want to do the same," she said.

Reaching the school remains a daily struggle. Students walk long

Mobarak Ali, president of its managing committee, said Dr Atiur Rahman donated Tk 10 lakh in 2014 to improve the infrastructure, but teachers still work without regular salaries as the school has yet to be included in the government's Monthly Payment Order scheme.

Mahbubur Rahman, headteacher of the school, said teachers remain committed despite the hardship. "We are teaching the children of the shoal for free with a mission to spread education, especially for girls."

Mujibur Rahman, district education officer in Lalmonirhat, said the school has submitted all required documents for MPO inclusion. He said they will look into it.



Maleque Bhuiyan passes away

CITY DESK

Freedom fighter Lt Col (ret'd) MA Maleque Bhuiyan passed away on September 24. He was 83.

He was buried with a guard of honour at Banani graveyard, said a press release.

A doa mahfil was held at Banani Chairman Bari Mosque after Juma prayers yesterday. All are requested to pray for the salvation of his departed soul.

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A man wades through knee-deep water in a self-made boat. For the past two and a half months, 57 houses home to hundreds of people in the Ashrayan project in Khulna's Shareghata area have been waterlogged. Built on low-lying land by the riverbank, the project gets inundated every year. As the Shoilmari river has silted up, water cannot flow out through the main sluice gate, leaving the area waterlogged.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

'Probe Ducsu election'

Pro-BNP teachers demand re-election if rigging proved

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University's pro-BNP teachers' platform, the White Panel, yesterday demanded that the results of the recently held Ducsu election be suspended and a re-election arranged if allegations of irregularities and rigging are proven true.

In a joint statement, White Panel convener Prof Md Morshed Hasan Khan and joint conveners Prof Md Abdus Salam and Prof Md Abul Kalam Sarkar said investigative reports by private television channels presented "extensive evidence" of rigging.

It said the DU administration must provide clear explanations and, if necessary, form a neutral probe committee comprising members from inside or outside the university, with the findings published at the earliest.

They also demanded exemplary punishment for those involved if irregularities are proven.

LOW PRESSURE AT BAY

Ports asked to raise cautionary signal 3

BSS, Dhaka

The maritime ports of Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Mongla and Payra have been advised to hoist local cautionary signal 3 as low-pressure over the Bay of Bengal has intensified and turned into a well-marked low.

Bangladesh Meteorological Department, in a special weather bulletin yesterday, said the low may intensify further. Under its influence, gusty or squally winds may blow over the north Bay and Bangladesh's coastal areas and sea ports.

Fishing boats and trawlers in the north Bay have been asked to come close to the coast and proceed with caution until further notice.

Mother, daughter killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Three people, including a woman and her daughter, were killed when a speeding truck rammed into a CNG-run auto-rickshaw on the Sylhet-Sunamganj regional highway yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Abadit Keshba, 40, of Ukilpara in Sunamganj town; her daughter Prathama Chowdhury, 12; and auto-rickshaw driver Sajal Ghosh, 50, of Nabinagar area, said Suman Kumar Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Jaykals highway police outpost.

Quoting witnesses, the OC said the accident occurred around 7:10am when a Sunamganj-bound truck hit the Sylhet-bound auto-rickshaw, killing Abadit and driver Sajal on the spot.

Prathama, critically injured, was rushed to Shantiganj Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared her dead. The truck veered off the road and plunged into a roadside ditch.

Locals caught the truck driver, Parvez Ahmed, 40, and handed him over to Shantiganj police.

Gobinda Kumar Das, Prathama's relative, said all three victims were travelling to the temple for prayers. The truck driver is now in police custody, the OC added.

Murder case filed 13 years after Jubo Dal leader's killing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Thirteen years after the killing of Abdul Khaleq, then general secretary of Jubo Dal's Putkhali union unit in Benapole, his family has finally filed a murder case in a Jashore court.

Khaleq's son, Ahsan Habib, lodged the complaint on Thursday. The court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Mahbuba Sharmin took cognisance of the case, summoned documents and a CD earlier submitted by police, and set the next hearing for November 20, said plaintiff's lawyer Debashish Das.

Thirteen people, including former police officials, were named accused: former OC (investigation) Syed Lutfor Rahman; former SI Abul Kalam Azad; former SI Shikder Matiar Rahman; then-DB SI Abul Khayer Molla; Rezaul Islam Reza and his brother Azizul Islam; Shahadat Hossain; Kamal Hossain; Tarikul Islam; Abdur Rob; Yakub Ali; Ziaur Rahman; and Riazul Islam.

Khaleq was allegedly killed on January 3, 2012, for refusing to pay extortion money. The complaint stated that he was attacked at Shahjalal Filling Station on Benapole highway.

Rezaul, Azizul, Yakub and Ziaur Rahman reportedly opened fire, with a bullet from Rezaul fatally injuring Khaleq. The others allegedly blocked the area to facilitate the attack.

The complaint further alleged that then SI Abul Kalam Azad filed a fabricated case on January 7, 2012, with the OC's involvement, to shield the perpetrators. Police later submitted a final report in March 2013, exonerating all accused.

Khaleq's family claimed they were barred from filing a case at the time and forced into hiding. They returned only after the fall of the Awami League government.