

SYSTEM LOSS REDUCTION

Nilphamari Polli Bidyut Samity exceeds target

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Amid frustrating performance by government and autonomous service sectors, the Nilphamari Polli Bidyut Samity (Rural Electrification Association) has raised some hopes. It has exceeded its system loss reduction target last year.

The Samity had fixed a target to bring down the system loss to 11.39 per cent this year in its command area. It has scaled down the system loss to 11.40 per cent.

This was revealed at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Samity, held here recently.

On the other hand, the Power Development Board (PDB), with only one fifth of distribution lines of the Samity in the area, has a system loss of about 35 per cent, sources said.

The Nilphamari Polli Bidyut Samity has 2,004 kilometer power supply lines covering five out of six upazilas, giving 39,400 connections and benefiting 10,68,406 households in 240 villages. The PDB has only 391.50 kilometer supply line. The five upazilas are Nilphamari Sadar, Domar, Jaldhaka, Kishoreganj and Dimla.

The Samity's revenue collection rate is 98.09 percent, according to the annual report presented at its 8th AGM.

The Samity made a surplus of Tk 2,85,28,677 this year after meeting all expenses including staff salary and maintenance cost.

Presided over by the Samity's President Habibur Rahman, the AGM was also addressed by, among others, its vice-president Md Habibur Rahman, Secretary Md Sohrab Hossain Shah,

Treasurer Md Lutfar Rahman and Advisor Siddika Doulatun Zaman.

In the Annual Report it also reported that in the area about 35 per cent with only one fifth power distribution lines compared to a loss

The Samity brought 44 lakh acres of land under irrigation and helped produce 1.5 lakh tonnes of food grains in the district by connecting 3,424 shallow and 42 deep tube wells last year.

Besides, it helped poverty alleviation in the district by providing power supply to a large number of small industrial units in rural areas. It will extend its distribution network by 259 kilometres next year, sources said.

The loadshedding in its command area is three to four hours a day during peak season (irrigation season) and one to one and a half hours during off-peak season, they

said.

Addressing the AGM, General Manager of the Samity, Md Nazibul Islam, said that they are ready to expand power supply network. But designing and extension are being hindered as the PDB is yet to hand over their lines to the Samity despite a government decision.

About 2000 members and representatives of various associations in its command area, its directors, advisors and high officials of Rural Electrification Board (REB), local journalists and elite of the district also attended the AGM.

At the AGM, a seven-member board of Nilphamari Polli Bidyut Samity was elected by members and representatives of various grassroots level associations in the district for one year. The programme concluded with a cultural function.

10 hurt in JP factional clash in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A clash between two rival factions of Jatiya Party (Ershad) yesterday left at least 10 persons injured in the port city.

The clash between factions led by Solaiman Sheith and Tapan Chakrabarty took place over holding rallies at the same venue -- Old Railway Station premises -- in the afternoon.

The rallies were planned to mark the 20th founding anniversary of the party.

Party sources and witnesses said the Solaiman Sheith group occupied the Old Railway Station premises earlier and did not allow their rivals there. The Tapan group gathered at nearby New Railway Station premises. They were carrying lethal weapons and were waiting for rivals to pass through the road in front of the venue, witnesses said.

After their rally, the Solaiman group brought out a procession. When they were passing, activists belonging to Tapan group swooped on them from behind with lethal weapons, resulting in a clash, the witnesses said.



PHOTO: STAR

Rival factions of Ershad's Jatiya Party testing their strength. The clash ensued as two factions tried to hold rally at the same venue at the same time in Chittagong yesterday, marking the party's 20th founding anniversary.



PHOTO: STAR

Several thousand people joined a 15-km march in Lalmonirhat yesterday marking the second anniversary of Alokito Lalmonirhat to eliminate crimes and social ills.

'Enlightened Lalmonirhat' creates awareness

RAFIQUE SARKER, Back From Lalmonirhat

Rangpur: Several thousand people from different areas of Lalmonirhat yesterday observed the 2nd anniversary of launching of the much-acclaimed Enlightened Lalmonirhat programme in a colorful manner.

The day's programme began with a huge rally where participants carried yellow and red coloured umbrellas inscribed with 13 slogans.

The programme aims at creating awareness to eliminate 13

types of crimes and social ills in Lalmonirhat, such as drug use and peddling, extortion, copying in public examination, dowry, early marriage, women and child repression, smuggling, polygamy and use of polythene shopping bags.

The rally started early in the morning from Abul Kashem College premises in Borobari union in Sader upazila and ended at Mission Square in Lalmonirhat town. The participants paraded about 15 kilometres to create awareness to attain the 13 objectives.

Deputy Minister for Relief and

Rehabilitation Asadul Habib Dulu, chief advisor of the programme, led the rally.

The programme was launched on January 1, 2003.

Under the programme, about 20,000 people who were earlier involved with the 13 types of crimes and wrongdoing, have so far been brought to normal life and rehabilitated, the organisers told this correspondent during the rally.

Talking to newsmen at the end of the rally at Mission Square, Dulu said the Enlightened Lalmonirhat programme has brought some

positive changes among the participants. It is completely a non-political programme he said and hoped it will continue whether BNP remains in power or not.

He said mere enforcement of law can not remove crimes and social ills. A great social awareness is needed, he added.

The programme attained some success in two years, he said. People who were involved in the crimes were given Tk 5000 to 10,000 under a loan programme for their rehabilitation, Dulu said.



PHOTO: STAR

Crowd of tourists in Kuakata sea beach yesterday.

Kuakata full of tourists

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Kuakata sea beach is now full of tourists. Thousands of tourists from home and abroad have flocked there to spend holiday and to welcome the New Year.

All hotels, motels and tourists lodges are jam-packed with visitors days ahead. The main attraction was the last sunset of the year in the Bay of Bengal.

The administration has made adequate security and safety measures and deployed police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in strategic areas including the beach and tourists zone.

The tourists include a large number of students who came in groups either for picnic or for study tour.

Jamal Hossain come from Dhaka with his family of six. "I have to the beach to enjoy the New Year", he said talking to this

correspondent yesterday.

Hotel owners and law enforcers said they did not see such rush of tourists earlier.

The crowds increased this year as annual examinations at schools is over.

However, many tourists said hotel owners increased rent. They are charging Tk 200 to 300 for a single bed and Tk 500 to 700 for a double-bed room.

The Daily Star Readers' Club formed in B'Baria

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

An 101-member committee of The Daily Star Readers' Club was formed with Prof Abdul Noor as its convenor at a meeting held at the North South School of Primary Graduation School hall room here on Friday.

Magistrate Md Ataul Guni, Principal Mubarak Ali Khadem, Principal Md Supanul Islam, Sheikh Md. Shahidul Islam was selected as its advisors and Md Mathin Ahmed became its member secretary.

Members are Parimal Bhaumik, Imtiaj Kabir Numan, Muhammad Arif Hossain, Yaqub Ali and Travis Schultz.

Head of English Department of Brahmanbaria Government College Prof Abdul Noor presided the meeting while it was attended by Rafi Hossain, In-Charge of The Daily Star Readers' Club as the chief guest.

A day-long attractive programme was organised to mark the occasion. The programmes included English debate, drama, songs and music and discussion.

The discussion was participated by Principal Mubarak Ali Khadem, Principal Md Supanul Islam, Sheikh Md Shahidul Islam, Md Mathin Ahmed, Parimal Bhaumik, Imtiaj Kabir Numan, Muhammad Arif Hossain, Travis Schultz, Wanhar Saitya, Inaqbe Ali, Nion Babu and Md Arman Hossain.

About 150 people from all walks of life attended the programme.

2 JMB men handed over to Jessore police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Two JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh) commanders who were arrested by members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Khulna Friday night were handed over to Jessore police for interrogation on Saturday.

They are Motiur Rahman Masood, son of Banat Ali of Gangni upazila in Meherpur district and Raqib alias Nuruddin of Rajshahi district, police said.

Police further said, Motiur Rahman Masood was the JMB commander of Jhikargachha and Sharsha upazilas and Raqib alias Nuruddin was the JMB commander of Abhaynagar and Keshabpur upazilas.

After their arrest from Daulatpur in Khulna city, they are now being interrogated in connection with August 17 bomb blasts in Jessore.

Police said, they confessed that they had been hiding in Khulna after the blasts.

Rice truck hijacked in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A truck carrying rice worth Tk 5 lakh was hijacked by an armed gang of highwaymen at Shahebganj on the Gobindaganj-Dinajpur Highway Friday night.

The rice was being sent to Dhaka by Niamat Hossain, a rice trader of Dinajpur. The gang tied up the driver and the helper and dropped them beside a crop field. They took control of the truck and left for an unknown destination.

Later, Gobindaganj police rescued the driver, Salek and the helper, Rana and took them to custody for interrogation.

BNP activists drive out lessees from ferry ghats

Illegal toll realised in Ghaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The government is being deprived of a good amount of revenue as influential BNP activists are allegedly collecting toll illegally from passengers and cargo boats at Balashi and Sayedpur ferry ghats (terminals) on the Brahmaputra in Fulchhari upazila for a long time.

Balashi and Sayedpur ferry ghats leaseholder Asaduzzaman Hasu told this at a press conference held at Gaibandha Press Club on Sunday.

He told the press conference that he had taken lease of both the ghats from the Inland Water Transport Authority (IWTA), Baghabari, on payment of Tk 5,07,990 as tender bid for one year effective June 2005-June '06. Since then a group of miscreants led by a Union Parishad (UP) member, Abdul Hamid Fulchhari and patronised by a local BNP activist illegally took possession of the ghats by force and started collecting high amount of tolls from passengers and incoming and outgoing cargo boats. Despite lodging

complaints with the local police station, the authorities concerned did not take any step to free the ghats from clutch of the illegal grabbers. This has resulted in great loss of the genuine leaseholder, Asaduzzaman told the conference.

Over 50 labourers are now facing hard days and starving for want of food, he said. He further said that BNP cadres are harassing him with false cases.

He has appealed to the authorities concerned to free the ghats from clutch of illegal grabbers.

A prospective sector ignored

Quality seed production attracts enterprising youths in Tangail, needs govt support

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Though a new venture, seed production has drawn many enterprising youths in the district's Modhupur area, employing about 6000 agriculture labourers and supplying good quality seeds to farmers.

Quality seed is the main input for good yield but Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) supplies only 5 per cent of seeds of various crops needed in the country annually.

The rest 95 per cent is preserved by farmers in traditional ways in which the quality is affected, resulting in poor yield. Taking the opportunity, Indian inferior quality seeds find their way into the country.

Though there has not been any government patronisation, some private seed companies have grown in Modhupur area in recent years following untiring efforts by some educated youths.

Atique Seed Company grew 150 tons of Boro seeds and 50 tons of transplanted Aman seeds in the last season. BADC provided support to it in quality control, preservation, moisture control, processing and grading, its official Arun Chandra Das told this correspondent. He claimed that paddy seeds, having 95 per cent germination

rate, are acclaimed by farmers. The seed is tested in its laboratory and competes with those supplied by BADC, he said.

"We are preparing to produce HYV Boro seeds next season. About 1,500 agriculture laborers are working in our farm", he added.

Farid Ahmed, owner of Alam Seed Company at Dhanbari, said he started commercial production of seeds after training on seed farming, preservation and marketing from Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) at Gazipur in Dhaka. He produces paddy seeds and seedlings and potato seeds.

Farid produced 66 tons of Boro seeds, 20 tons of transplanted Aman and 135 tons of Diamond variety of potato seedlings last year. These are being marketed this year. The BRRI-41 Boro seed supplied by his company gave a yield of around 75 maunds per acre, Farid claimed.

Farid bought 'mother seeds' from BARI at Tk 10 per kg and after multiplication in his farm he sold it at Tk 20 per kg to farmers.

He said BADC gets subsidy for seed production but private growers do not get any such facility from the government though he employs about 4,000 people in temporary jobs for collecting, packing, grading, transportation

and marketing of seeds.

Officials of the companies said they do not get bank loan. Banks do not give loan to any farm owning less than 40 acres of land. This is very much unrealistic for Bangladesh where land is scarce and holdings are fragmented.

Seed production needs a huge investment, he said. He has to spend Tk 30 to 40 lakh a year, Farid said.

Jamal Uddin, owner of another seed farm -- Taem Traders in Dhanbari produced 35 tons of Boro and 80 tons of potato seeds last year and employed about 1,000 laborers.

Seeds grown in Madhupur area being supplied to greater Mymensingh, Gazipur, Munshiganj, Khulna, Jessore, Rangpur and Bogra districts.

A high official of BADC in

Tangail said this is a prospective sector which needs government patronisation. BADC, with its limited resources, is providing support to private seed companies so far possible to encourage them.

The official said Bangladesh imports seeds worth crores of taka every year from Japan, China, India and Korea though there is potential in the country for production of hybrid seeds by private companies.



PHOTO: STAR

Women workers winnowing paddy seeds at a private seed company in Modhupur. Several companies in the area employ about 6,000 people.