

3 lakh suffer for man-made floods in dry season

Over 108 villages in five upazilas in Jessore, Khulna affected: Protests, hunger strike fail to draw govt attention

MD ABU BAKR SIDDIQUE, Jessore

There are vast sheets of water all around instead of winter crops. Even homesteads and compounds of many schools and mosques are still inundated by stagnant water.

Greater parts of Monirampur, Keshabpur, Abhoynagar upazilas and a portion of Noapara pourashava in Jessore are still under water even during the winter season. The problem also affects Dumuria and Fultala upazilas of Khulna district.

Over 3 lakh people of 108 villages in the 5 upazilas are affected only because of a sluice gate set up across the Srinadi river at Bhabaddah in Jessore.

IRRI-Boro can not be cultivated in the areas, not to speak of winter crops like mustard, pulses and vegetables.

The water-logging in the areas was created following the heavy rains in mid-October last year. The problem recurs whenever there is heavy rain.

The sluice gate was set up in 1960s by the then East Pakistan WAPDA due to wrong planning, local officials said.

Since then, governments have changed but the sufferings of several lakh people of the area continue, despite protests, demonstrations and submission of memorandums to the authorities.

In 1994, the then BNP government sanctioned Tk 252 crore to remove the stagnant water. A Tidal River Management (TRM) project was launched to raise the level of land of Beel Bhaina and Beel Kedalia. But the government efforts to introduce TRM in Beel Khuksia an best Kedalia were foiled by local Union Parishad chairmen and land owners who cultivate fish in some of the water bodies, locals alleged while talking to this correspondent during a recent visit.

Life of the three lakh people are virtually paralysed by the problem as agriculture, education and trade are affected.

The affected people observed hartal, formed human chain, barricaded roads, laid a siege to offices of local administrations, submitted memoranda and even went on token hunger strike in the last three and a half months.

Agitation programmes are still going on. About 100 people were injured in a clash between locals and musclemen of Paira Union Parishad chairman after villagers tried to cut a small embankment to drain out the water.

Work for removing silt from Srinadi river began in December but the pace is very slow.

Sources said, the work for exca-

vation of a canal to connect Jhikra Beel and Bhairab river is going on to drain out the stagnant water from about one lakh hectares of land in Paira, Chalisia, Shundali and Prembug unions in Abhoynagar upazila under the initiative, of local lawmaker Aminuddin.

About 50,000 hectares of cropland and 60,000 hectares of fish enclosures in the 15 water bodies including Jhikra Beel, Dhaliani Beel, Dumurer Beel, Gandhimara Beel, Haviner Beel, Beel Bokor, Dhopadir Beel, Shundali Beel and homesteads in neighbouring areas are inundated for last three and a half months, the sources said.

If the canal linking the area with Bhairab river is re-excavated, several lakh people of the area will

be relieved of the problem, they added.

Water Development Board (WDB) sources said a project has been taken up to re-excavate the three and a half kilometre canal and construct some bridges, culverts, cross dams and small sluice gates up to Bhairab river.

As work under the WDB project is yet to start, local people on their own initiative and led by local lawmaker Aminuddin has started the re-excavation work at certain points.

But this will not remove the problem as such a massive work needs government help, locals said. They said a railway line and two bridges on roads are main obstacles to draining out the water through the canal.



PHOTO: STAR

An inundated homestead in Abhoynagar upazila in Jessore as water remained stagnant there for over three months.

TEPAI MUKH DAM 'Black flag' rally held in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Protesting planned construction of Tepai Mukh dam in Monipur in India, the local unit of Ongkar Bangladesh (OB), held a rally in front of Mymensingh Press Club yesterday. The participants carried black flags.

Many rivers in Bangladesh including Surma, Kushiara and Meghna will dry up if the dam is built on the Barak river in the upstream of Surma in Monipur, they said.

Environmentalists in India, Nepal and Bhutan have declared February 3 as a 'black day' to protest the dam construction plan, they said.



PHOTO: STAR

The Grameen Primary School in Basail upazila in Tangail is facing collapse due to erosion by Jhenai river, a tributary of Jamuna, even in dry season.

Outlaws regrouping in Jhenidah Janajuddha cadres distributing leaflets in remote villages

HOSAIN SERAJ, back from Jhenidah

MAGURA: The Janajuddha faction of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddha) is regrouping in remote villages in Jhenidah district. Its cadres are distributing leaflets, according to intelligence sources and locals.

In last two days till Monday, they distributed leaflets at Alukdia, Kalpart and Kodalia villages in the Sadar upazila; Bherikhali and Hingerpara in Harinakundu upazila; Abhoupur and Padmanagar in Shaikupa and Baluhar and Alangi villages in Koatchandpur upazila, the sources said.

The sources said the leaflets are being distributed marking 'January 26', observed by Janajuddha as a 'day of achievement'. On this day in 2002, they snatched away their top leader Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Dada Tapan by hurling bombs on police when he was brought to Khulna to produce him before a court, the sources said. Janajuddha is observing the day since 2003.

In observance of the day, the outlawed party holds discussions in their strongholds in remote villages and also distributes 'special' leaflets. But they failed to hold any programme in Jhenidah district in last two years due to strict vigilance by law enforcers, the intelligence sources confirmed.

This year, Janajuddha is distributing leaflets in their strongholds in the four Jhenidah upazilas in a bid to observe the day.

"We got some of the leaflets Monday morning from near a primary school in Kodalia village in Jhenidah Sadar upazila", a local Union Parishad (UP) member seeking anonymity told this correspondent during his visit to the area.

"They came to our village on four

motorbikes and left the area after giving some leaflets", said a villager in Kodalia.

In the leaflets, the PBCP-Janajuddha said, "It is time for revolution."

"Reactionary forces do not leave power willingly. They launch attack even standing in the jaws of death. However fierce the attack may be, destruction of reactionary forces is inevitable", the leaflet reads.

In the leaflets, Janajuddha also vowed to avenge murder of their cadres in so-called 'crossfire', terming it 'extreme violation of human rights'.

Talking to this correspondent Jhenidah Police Superintendent in Akram Hossain however said, "We are not aware of such leaflets. The matter will be verified".

According to intelligence agencies and police, Jhenidah is an outlaw-infested district where eleven outlawed parties are active.

The strongest among the outlawed parties is PBCP-Janajuddha, with over 100 firearms in possession of its activists, the sources said.

Despite several special anti-crime drives and their 13 cadres' death in 'encounters' with law enforcers, Janajuddha's activities could not be checked.

Janajuddha earlier claimed that it killed 16 people last year branding them 'class enemies'. The victims included public representatives, political leaders, businessman, police informers and 'rivals' belonging to other outlawed outfits.

THREAT BY KHATME NABUAT

Trishal Ahmadiyyas demand security

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Leaders of panic-gripped Ahmadiyya Muslim community at a press conference at here Friday evening demanded security of their life and property in the face of threat by International Khatme Nabuat Movement, Bangladesh (IKNNB).

The IKNNB earlier threatened to 'capture' the Ahmadiyya mosque at Bhatipara village in Dhanikhalsa unio in Trishal on February 10.

Addressing the press conference, Abdul Awal Khan said, "We are Muslims and want peaceful co-existence with all communities".

Awal Khan, mission-in-charge of the Ahmadiyya community, alleged that some vested quarters are trying to create anarchy in the name of religion for personal gains. Islam does not allow this.

"As the country is run by laws, we seek guarantee that nobody can do any harm to us, which is guaranteed by the Constitution", he said.

"We seek protection by the

administration", he said.

He also said over 200 people of Bhatipara village earlier sought security by the local administration.

Central leaders of Ahmadiyya community including Ahmed Tafsir Chowdhury, Mir Tarik Ali and local leaders Amir Hosain and Prof Dr. Muzahid Ali of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) were present at the press conference.

Earlier, they met Mymensingh Police Superintendent Abdullah Baki Friday afternoon at his office.

The SP assured them of all possible steps for their security, they told the press conference. Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and police visited Bhatipara village.

Earlier, on February 28, Monjur Anam filed a general diary (GD) with Trishal thana after the IKNNB announced its programme.

The IKNNB has been demanding for long that the government declare Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims.

BURIMARI LAND PORT

Importers evade huge tax often by using false declaration

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The government is being deprived of huge revenue as a large number of importers evade tax while bringing goods from three neighbouring countries through Burimari Land Port.

At least 300 trucks carrying imported goods from Burimari port ply through Jaldhaka upazila town of the district everyday.

On the way, truck drivers allegedly pay a handsome amount of money as toll to the agents of police and various labour organisations at different points of their destination. This is because of carrying imported goods by evading tax often through false declaration.

Although incidents of tax evasion are detected frequently, still the concerned land port officials are seldom punished. In some cases they are simply transferred to different spots, it is alleged.

At least 80 importers of Nilphamari use the port. The importers of Rangpur, Dinajpur and Bogra districts also use the port.

Different kinds of goods like rice, onion, garlic coal, motor parts, rocks, plywood, fruits and other things are imported through this port from India, Nepal and Bhutan while Bangladeshi goods like jute, garments, Hilsa fish, melamine and some other materials are exported to India.

But import of goods by false

declaration and tax evasion has become a regular feature. This practice is going on unabated for a long time due to corrupt Customs and police personnel.

Rangpur Detective Branch (DB) of police detained a truck containing 10 tons of cumin worth Tk 20 lakh on December 7 last year. The cumin-loaded truck was on the way to Dhaka from Burimari port. Following detection of tax evasion and false declaration, the higher authorities transferred Customs Commissioner Shafiquezzaman and Customs Inspector Kamruzzaman of Burimari port to some other spots recently.

Another incident of forgery of a treasury chalan amounting to Tk 78 lakh was detected in 2004. A departmental case was filed against the concerned C&F (clearing and forwarding) agent for the offence. But it was allegedly settled without punishment of the offender.

In another incident, the government was deprived of Tk 10 lakh revenue. In this case, two trucks carried 22 tons of grapes, but it was falsely shown that the trucks were carrying seven tons of grapes.

In July last year, five corrupt Customs officials were transferred to different spots. They are Abul Kasem, Shahjahan Ali, Nazimuddin, Humayun Kabir and Atul Chandra.

Of them offences of first three officials were proved beyond doubt, but no stern action was taken against them.

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