

Processions, rallies in Nilphamari demanding diesel, fertiliser

DC office besieged: Police action on processionists

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Nilphamari turned into a town of processions and rallies yesterday as different political parties and farmers' organisations came on the streets and besieged the Deputy Commissioner's office one after another, demanding fertiliser and diesel.

Awami Juba League, Communist Party of Bangladesh, its peasant front Khet Mojur Samity, and Jatiya Saamajtantrik Dal brought out separate processions, held rallies and laid a siege to the DC's office.

Jobo League activists scuffled with police and there was a chase and counter chase as police obstructed their siege programme. Juba League then held a rally out-

side the compound of the DC's office. Similar programmes were also observed in some upazilas.

The district administration claims that diesel supply is normal in the district but owners of different filling stations said their tank lorries were queuing at Parbotipur oil depot for 3-4 days, but in vain.

The manager of Raza Filling Station in the town said his demand for diesel per day is 18,000 litres now but he gets the same amount in a week.

Alongside the diesel crisis, short supply of urea has deepened problems for farmers.

A 50 kg bag of urea is being sold at different markets at Tk 310 to Tk 320 against Tk 285, fixed by the district fertiliser monitoring committee.

Fertiliser dealers in Nilphamari used to lift their quota of area from Parbatipur in Dinajpur upazila. But supplies from there failed to meet the present demand, they claimed.

Sources in Nilphamari Agriculture Extension Department office said they demanded 8500 tonnes of urea for the district for the current month. But the allotment is 7,622 tonnes.

Nilphamari district president of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA), Abdul Wahed, told this correspondent that despite the big gap between demand and supply, they did not get even the allotted 7,622 tonnes. Till 19 February, the dealers got 4,500 tonnes of Urea, he said.

Wahed said Bangladesh

Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) has raised the transport cost to Tk 170 from Tk 130 per tonne, which also contributed to the price hike of Urea.

Fertiliser dealer Pijush Roy said yesterday that he got only 73 tonnes in four installments against allotted 103 tonnes for February.

He said that due to short supply, urea is being rationed to the 74 dealers in the district.

Nilphamari BFA General Secretary Bappi Bhoomik alleged that in some northern districts, bigger allotments of urea were given at the influence of some ministers and state ministers. Dealers in those districts have hoarded their Urea.

"Dealers in those districts used to sell their surplus urea to us but

they are not disposing of the surplus quantities now as the government has restricted inter-district movement of the item", Bappi said.

The BFA leaders said demand for urea would increase next month when IRRI-Boro seedlings will mature in fields.

Talking to newsmen yesterday, Nilphamari AED Deputy Director Sakawat Hossain admitted the short supply and said he has written to higher authorities for immediate steps.

Nilphamari Deputy Commissioner Robindra Nath Roy Chowdhury held a meeting with BFA leaders yesterday and discussed possible measures to ease the situation.



A building being constructed by encroaching the Bairan river in Gopalpur in Tangail.

PHOTO: STAR

Grabbers turn Bairan river into a narrow canal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Bairan river flowing through Gopalpur town in Tangail has turned into a narrow canal within a few years due to land grabbing along its banks.

The grabbing continues despite protests by people and environmentalists, who are demanding steps by the administration to stop this.

As the river is dying due to encroachment, Gopalpur town, once a flourishing trade centre, is also losing importance, local people and traders said.

A Jamuna tributary, the Bairan originates in Dubail in Sarishabari

upazila in Jamalpur district, flows through Gopalpur municipal area and Bhuapur and falls into the Louhojong river, another tributary of the Jamuna.

Influential people, most of whom big traders, are building houses and business offices by grabbing lands on both sides of the river. Garbage dumped by people is also silting it up.

Talking to this correspondent, freedom fighter Tara Miah, said most of the land grabbers are very influential, many of them having political clout.

Mohammad Abdul Malek, a noted businessman at Gopalpur Bazar, said encroachers should be

evicted and the river's normal flow restored for development of trade and business in Gopalpur.

Only a united efforts by public representatives and politicians in the region can save the river but they did not take any steps so far fearing loss of vote, he said.

When contacted, chairman of the Gopalpur Poursabha AK Kabir Uzzal said, the river should be freed from grabbers in the interest of people. He raised the matter at meetings of upazila development committee several times in presence of local lawmaker Abdus Salam Pintu. He however promised to launch an eviction drive in the municipal area.



A Juba League procession (left) and the Deputy Commissioner's office besieged by CPB in Nilphamari yesterday demanding adequate supply of diesel and fertiliser for farmers.

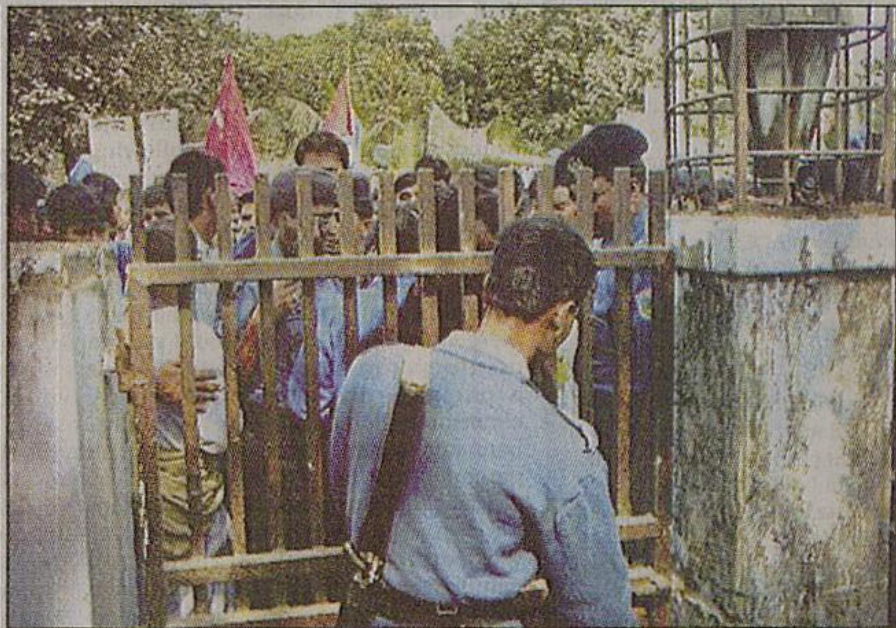


PHOTO: STAR

No aid, only hollow promises

Gobindakati poultry village yet to see power supply, better road

ABU AHMED, Satkhira

Gobindakati, a remote village in Kaligonj upazila, known as a poultry village in Khulna division, is still without power supply, link roads and other facilities despite promises by government leaders, high officials and lawmakers on several occasions.

Almost all the families in the village have poultry farms, which together supply over 40,000 eggs a day from the 238 units. Traders from far flung areas flock to the small village.

The villagers had started it with bare hands without any financial assistance from any quarter. Poultry farming has removed poverty but their road to prosperity

has hit snags because of lack of facilities.

This correspondent during a recent visit to the village saw men and women of all ages working in their farms on courtyards or nearby lands, either collecting eggs or feeding chickens or cleaning farms.

They have formed an organisation styled Gobindakati Poultry Farm Owners Multipurpose Cooperative Society.

Many political leaders, people's representatives and government officials visited the village in 2004 and promised to supply electricity, construct a road and provide financial assistance for further development. But nothing has been done.

"Days were very hard for them a few years ago, when they could not

even send their children to school. But those days are gone due to their determination and hard work.

Unemployed youth Porimal Kumar Mondal, son of Keshab Lal Mondal had married Jharna Mondal of Daulatpur in Khulna in 1990.

Inspired by his father-in-law, Parimal brought 125 layer chicken and started a small poultry farm in 1991, Jharna told this correspondent.

After three months the couple started earning a profit of Tk 3000 to 4000 a month. After expansion of the farm, they now earn a profit of Tk 12,000 to 14,000 a month, she said.

On May in 2004, District Livestock Officer Mrinal Kanti

Mitra visited the village and declared Gobindakati a poultry village.

Some days later, the then Kaligonj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Delwar Haidar, Upazila Live Stock Officer Kiron Chandra Roy and Upazila Youth Development Officer Abdullah Al Mamun visited the village and submitted a report to the Deputy Commissioner narrating the problems faced by the poultry farmers and suggesting remedies.

In August 2004, the then Satkhira DC AYM Ekramul Haque visited the village. He asked Rural Electrification Board (REB) under its network and assured the villagers that their problems would be solved.

Local lawmaker of ruling four-party alliance Kazi Alauddin visited the village last year and assured them to solve the problems.

"But nothing has been done", Harudev Mondal, President of the cooperative society told this correspondent.

On contact, District Livestock Officer Mrinal Kanti Mitra said, people of Gobindakati village have brought about a revolution in poultry farming on their own initiative, which deserves praise.

He said he submitted written applications to departments concerned several times to supply electricity and provide other facilities but to no effect.

Due to lack of good communication, particularly in rainy season, price of eggs decreases by 30 to 40 percent as motorised vehicles do not reach the village while transport cost increases by at least 20 percent, said Dilip Sarkar, general secretary of the cooperative society.



Jharna Rani Mondal, one of many poultry farmers collecting eggs from her farm at Gobindakati village.

PHOTO: STAR

Road barricades in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

People put up barricades on the Moulvibazar-Shamsernagar road at Shamsernagar, Munshibazar, Chaitraghat and Matarkapon from 6 am to 12 noon yesterday protesting Saturday's death of two persons from blows when they hit an archway while travelling on a roof-abut.

At least 20 archways were erected on the road to welcome Finance Minister Saifur Rahman.

Construction workers Juned Mia, 18, died on the spot and Motai Mia, 16, at Sylhet MAG Osmani Hospital and six others were injured when they dashed an archway.

6 held in JCD leader murder case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Kotwali police on Friday arrested six accused in JCD leader Shafique Murder Case in Ruppangj Police Station from a house in Jessore town.

The arrestees are Akhtar Hossain, 27, of Kazipara, Ruppangj, Narayangonj, Abul Bashar, 26, of Baniali, Ruppangj, Abdur Rouf, 35, of Howlipara, Ruppangj, Sayed Hossain, 25, of Howlipara, Ruppangj, Mokbul Hossain, 32 of Baniali, Ruppangj and Akhtar Hossain, 30, of Howlipara, Ruppangj in Narayangonj.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided Asia Manzil in Nirala Cinema Hall area at night and arrested them. The accused were living there for the last one and a half months identifying themselves as NGO officials, police said.

JCD leader Shafique of Ruppangj, Narayangonj was killed on the night of November 8, 2005.

Jute needs a boost for new life

Boragari villagers in Nilphamari produce fashionable items without assistance

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Golden fibre jute may have a new beginning, thanks to the innovative skill of some people in a remote village in Nilphamari.

They have diversified the use of jute and are producing carpets, blankets, shopping bags and other fashionable items and crafts with simple bamboo and wooden tools.

Boragari village in Domar upazila on the bank of Doani river, 25 kilometres from Nilphamari town, is known for jute products.

The work is done mainly by females. They produce the items manually without use of any modern machine.

The work needs much concentration which is suitable for females, elderly artisan Giri Bala told this correspondent during a

recent visit.

Promila said they can produce the finest yarn from raw jute to make fancy goods. A woman takes only a week to produce a carpet measuring five meters in length and 1.5 meters in width. To produce such a carpet, a worker needs raw jute and dye worth only Tk 150.00. The product is sold at between Tk 300 and Tk 350, Promila said.

A woman artisan can make four to five such carpets a month that earns her a profit of Tk 500 to Tk 1000, said Ayesha.

Their expertise and fine products have attracted traders, but not any government official to patronise the initiative.

Talking to this correspondent, president of Domar Chamber of Commerce Monsurul Islam said

the products would open up great prospects for diversified use of jute and export if patronised.

Chairman of Boragari Union Parishad Asheque Ali said the government should extend financial support and arrange proper training for the jute artisans to improve their skill. An export promotion drive will definitely create good foreign markets for the items, he said.

Talking to this correspondent, some workers lamented that Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) never took any initiative to patronise the jute diversification programme.

When asked, BSCIC Deputy Manager Azharul Islam said BSCIC has no plan to go for any project in Boragari in near future.



A market of jute products at Boragari village in Domar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Two units of Kaptai plant inoperative

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Two units of the 230-megawatt (MW) hydroelectric plant at Kaptai are inoperative for lack of renovation.

Each of the units could produce 50 MW of electricity.

At present, three units are in operation. They can yield only 110 MW to 125 MW of electricity daily, sources at the plant said.

This situation is causing frequent load shedding in three hill districts and the industrial city of Chittagong.

The authorities produced a record 125 MW of electricity by operating three units on Friday.

The Unit No 4 remained inoper-

ative since July 2003 as a massive crack developed due to aftershocks of July 27 earthquake.

Dam Project Manager office sources said that the authorities have decided to replace it soon.

A new machine is awaiting unloading at Chittagong Port, they said.

Unit No 5 of the power station remained non-functional due to mechanical fault since September 9, 2004.

Although its renovation work is going on, yet the authorities won't be able to operate it in less than two months, sources said.

On the other hand, units 1, 2 and 3 have become 'older' as those were set up at the very beginning of the dam in the 60s, they said.

'Govt indifference' blamed for Monga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

President of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturing and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Tipu Munshi yesterday criticised the government for what he called its indifference towards greater Rangpur as regards supply of pipeline gas, adequate power and introduction of cargo service from Saidpur airport.

This region has great potentialities but entrepreneurs are reluctant to set up industries because of lack of gas and power supply.

Development of Saidpur airport and introduction of cargo service could boost export from the region, he said.

Addressing members of

Rangpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry at its auditorium, Tipu Munshi said he urged a number of entrepreneurs to set up industries in Rangpur and adjoining districts but none agreed because of lack of these facilities.

He said, "Being a man from Rangpur, I feel sad when I see thousands of unemployed people. They want work, not food assistance from government." He said monga persists in the region because of government's indifference in providing facilities for setting up industries.

Leaders of different business bodies in Rangpur attended the meeting, presided over by RCCI President Mostafa Azad Chowdhury Babu.

Water filters by villagers earn forex



Water filters being packed for marketing at a factory in Madhobpur.

PHOTO: STAR

SHEIKH SHAHIDUL ISLAM, back from Madhobpur (Habiganj)

BRAHMANBARIA: A water filter made by a villager only to have pure drinking water is now an export item and a good business for many.

It costs only between Tk 360 and Tk 600 depending on variety and is attractive and user friendly because of simple mechanism.

Besides market at home, the filter produced manually in a small hut in Madhobpur is exported to India and some Middle East countries in small numbers, said factory owner Keshdub Roy.

The cheap filter can be a good export item if produced in large scale. But that needs mechanisation of the production process, which involves a sizeable investment, he told this correspondent during a visit.

Inside the filter, there is a filter

carbon innovated by themselves, a round shaped disk and a micro-hole sieve, Keshdub Roy, owner of HL Roy Water Filter said. The filter carbon is made in a special method by using clay, sand and paddy husk and then burning the small apparatus in high temperature, he said. The exterior is polished with beautiful mosaic stone and white cement.

A filter can contain 20 to 40 litres of drinking water.

At least 20 families, who once worked in HL Roy Water Filter, have also started producing water filters in Madhobpur in Habiganj district. They employ about 300 people.

"This can be developed into an industry. But finance is the main problem", Keshdub Roy said.

Sanjoy Lal Roy, owner of another factory said they can not expand factory due to lack of space.