

TEESTA IRRIGATION PROJECT

Inflated service charges fatten up lessees

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Lessees of different canals under Teesta Irrigation Project are illegally realising about 10 times higher service than the official rate, depriving the government.

They are extracting the exorbitant service charge allegedly in connivance with a section of Water Development Board (WDB) officials taking the scope of improper leasing policy, farmers and other sources said.

Farmers under the project area have to pay additional Tk 29 to 30 crore this year.

They said the official rate of irrigation service charge fixed by the Water Development Board (WDB) is Tk 60 per bigha (30 decimal land) for a year but from the beginning, the lessees have been realising service charge much higher than this.

This year, the lessees, who are influential people, are realising Tk 500 to 600, which is 10 times the WDB rate. They have formed a syndicate, the farmers alleged.

The exorbitant charge is realised on pleas of fuel price hike and poor rainfall this year, the farmers said.

The lessees try to justify that supply of water was increased manifold to meet the demand during the current Amon season due to less rainfall.

Fuel price hike is a lame excuse because big irrigation pumps are run by electricity, not by fuel, they said.

Farmers Ishwar Chandra Roy and Aminul Islam of Kamar Para village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila said, some musclemen engaged by a lessee of a portion of Dinajpur Canal in Nilphamari stopped water supply to their lands as they refused



The Dinajpur Canal of Teesta Irrigation Project in Nilphamari.

to pay Tk 600 per bigha. The water supply was resumed after they made payments as demanded, they said.

Syed Ali and Abdul Mannan of the same village said they complained to a Section Officer (SO) during his recent visit to the area. But the official did nothing to resolve the dispute.

Tayob Ali and Munsed Mia of Harish Chandra Path village in Jaldhaka, Rafiqul Islam of Chak Gabindo village in Chirir Bandor upazila in Dinajpur also made similar complaints.

When contacted, WDB's Chief Irrigation Extension Officer in

Rangpur Osman Gani said the authorities have neared the irrigation target of irrigating is 73,000 hectares this year, of which 19,000 hectares are under WDB Nilphamari division.

Sources at his office said the annual official figure from 120 lessees would be around Tk 3.5 crore at the WDB-fixed rate of Tk 480 per hectare by irrigating the 73,000 hectares but in fact they would realise at least Tk 30 crore.

But the government is deprived of the extracted extra money, they said.

This year the WDB got only about Tk 50 lakh from the lessees, Tk 13.5 lakh of it from lessees

under is Nilphamari division.

Tofazzal Hossain, who leased the T1-D canal of Teesta Irrigation project at Chander Haat village in Nilphamari Sadar Upazila denied the allegation of realising Tk 500 to 600 as service charge. He however admitted that he realises Tk 250 to 300 per bigha. The additional money is realised for maintenance of the canal, he said.

WDB executive engineers in Nilphamari and Saidpur Abdur Razzak and Azharul Islam said they received complaints from farmers regarding realisation of higher charges. The matter will be looked into, he said.

PHOTO: STAR

CIVIC BODY'S DEMANDS

Hartal called for Sept 20 in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Rangpur Nagorik Committee, a local civic body, yesterday called a hartal for September 20 in the district to press its demand for formation of Rangpur division, pipeline gas supply and setting up of a university and an education board in the district.

The committee declared the programme at a public rally held at Jahaj Company More point in the town.

The speakers called upon the people to make the hartal a success to realise the demands.

They said the four-party alliance before 2001 election had pledged to fulfil the demands but they flouted their promise.

2 Jubo Dal men held with arms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Police yesterday arrested two Jubo Dal activists - Md. Badal Talukder and Kazi Abdur Hamid - with a US-made pistol and four bullets from in front of Government Azizul Haque Collage in the town.

Bogra Police Superintendent Motiur Rahman said the two, riding an unregistered motorbike knocked a rickshaw from behind in front of the college. The incident drew police, who searched them and recovered a pistol. They told police that they were activists of Jubo Dal, student front of ruling BNP.

Police said the arrestees could be involved in the stabbing of Chhatra League leader Subhasis Podder Liton on Sunday last.

Bogra Jubo Dal organizing secretary Ataur Rahman Sambu however said the arrestees are not their party men.



PHOTO: STAR

SUPRO, an NGO, formed a human chain in Bogra town yesterday demanding reform of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as regards assistance to developing countries like Bangladesh.

New Kailashtila well set for gas production

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Gas extraction from well no. 5 in Kailashtila gas field will start within a fortnight.

The well under Sylhet Gas Field Limited will add 20 to 25 mcmcf gas to the National Grid, a senior official of Sylhet Gas Field Limited (SGFL) said yesterday.

Flow test of gas well at Golapganj upazila began Tuesday night. It will continue for about a week more with intervals, the official told the Daily Star.

"We are satisfied with the preliminary test findings", he said.

However, local people got panicked as flame from the gas well rose up to 50 feet during the test that began at 6-30 pm Tuesday. Later gas field officials allayed their

fear by explaining the process and assured that there was nothing to be worried.

Drilling of the well began April 16 this year and was completed two weeks ago. The well no. 5 has been drilled at location no. 1.

State-run drilling company Bapex drilled the well up to 10,700 feet. With successful completion of the drilling, the SGFL will now go for drilling well no. 6 in the gas field.

Drilling of the well is expected to be completed by December or January next year, the official said. The well may supply 25 mcmcf gas to the National Grid.

Besides, the SGFL had also completed fresh drilling in well no. 3 at Kailashtila gas field to augment its supply. The well, drilled in 1988 went into production in 1995 but

was sealed in May 2004 after gas production for about nine years. The authorities stopped its production as water and sand started coming out from the well. Now, gas will be extracted after drilling in another zone in the well, the officials added.

The authorities have also planned for fresh drilling in well no. 4 to increase its production.

The SGFL has four gas wells in its Kailashtila gas field. About 75 mcmcf gas is being supplied to the National Grid from these wells now. The production may rise up to 95 mcmcf after fresh drilling, they said.

Besides, condensates like petrol, diesel and NGL are also being produced as by products.



Dr. Mohammad Ali

NETRAKONA-5 CONSTITUENCY

BNP aspirant calls party lawmaker 'inefficient'

JAHANGIR ALAM, Netrakona

BNP leader Obaidul Haque, an engineer-turned politician, has declared his candidature from Netrakona-5 constituency, calling the incumbent lawmaker inefficient and unpopular.

Incumbent lawmaker Dr. Mohammad Ali has lost his popularity due to inefficiency and autocratic behaviour, said the former engineer at a press conference on Thursday at Netrakona Press Club. He said will seek four-party alliance nomination from the constituency com-

prising Purbadhala upazila in Netrakona and Dhubaura upazila in Mymensingh district.

A large number of BNP leaders and workers from Purbadhala and Dhubaura upazilas were present at the press conference. Obaidul was additional chief engineer of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC).

Obaidul alleged that Mohammad Ali did little development work in the area during his five-year tenure.

The incumbent lawmaker has also isolated himself from the

people and party workers because of his inaction, he said.

After retirement in 2001, Obaidul join BNP at a function in presence of party chief Khaleed Zia and sought nomination in the last election but was denied.

Obidul criticised Dr. Mohammad Ali for what he called not fulfilling aspirations of local people and defaming BNP in the area.

He urged the party chairperson to nominate him in the next election 'to restore the party image'.

Dr. Mohammad Ali was elected twice from Netrakona-5 with BNP tickets-- in 1996 and 2001 by defeating Awami League candidates Warasat Hossain Balal Birpratik and Mosaraf Hossen.

When contacted, Dr. Mohammad Ali MP said, Obaidul Haque is a 'cheat and corrupt person'.

"I have done many development works in Purbadhala and Dhubaura upazilas and I am still popular in my constituency," Mohammad Ali claimed.

Lightning kills 6 in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Lightning killed six people in Cox's Bazar yesterday and injured eight others.

The tragic incident took place at Khachopiya Bazar in Gorgoniya union in Ramo upazila in the afternoon. Those killed are Amir Hossain, 20; Monjur Alam, 28; Shirajul Islam, 20; Mostaque Ahmed, 70; Mohammed Shaha Alam, 29 and Abdur Rhaman, 25. All hailed from Khachopiya village in the upazila.

Crime increases due to police corruption

Says Krishak Dal leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

President of Rangpur Krishak Dal, farmer's front of ruling BNP at a meeting of district law and order committee yesterday

denounced alleged harassment of innocent people by police by filing false cases in the name of maintaining law and order.

He urged Deputy Commissioner Nazrul Islam Khan to take steps against this. The comments by Krishak Dal leader Taher surprised all in the meeting. Besides officials and public representatives, media men also attended the meeting.

"Crime increased in the district due to corruption by police," he told the meeting.

"Police never record any case without bribe, implicate innocent people in cases for money and finally drop the so-called accused from charge sheet for money", he said.

B'baria cleric passes away

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Maolana Sirajul Islam, known Bara Huzur in Brahmanbaria district, died a his Bhadughar here yesterday. He was 122.

A translator of the holy Quran, Sirajul Islam was the Principal of Jamia Younsia Madrasa.

Thousands of people including State Minister Abdus Sattar Buiyan and Red Crescent President Haron-Al-Rashid attended his Namaz-e-Janaja held at Zila Eidgah Maydan at 5:30 yesterday. He was buried at his family graveyard at Bhadgher.

At least 15 people were injured when a wall collapsed in Zamia Younsia Madrasa compound due to rush of people.



PHOTO: STAR

After an intra-party clash and rampage of shops, rival activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at Chitragong Polytechnic College swoop on a police van when the law enforcers arrived to quell the violence yesterday.

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