

Severe drought continues

11 lakh acres of land remain uncultivated in Khulna Div

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Sept 19: About 11 lakh acres of land remain uncultivated in 10 districts of Khulna Division due to severe drought persisting since last three months.

According to an official source, the regional office of Agricultural Extension Department had fixed a target to cultivate aman paddy on 16,79,775 acres of land throughout 10 districts of Khulna Division. The districts are Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat, Jessore, Narail, Magura, Jhenidah, Kushtia, Meherpur and Chuadanga. However, most of the farmers in the region could not achieve the target due to prolonged drought. Only 5,90,912 acres of land could be used for aman cultivation with the help of irrigation and 10,88,863 acres remain uncultivated. Meanwhile, aman seedlings all over the region worth more than Taka 200 crore have been damaged due to extreme heat following drought.

According to farmers, production of aman in the last few consecutive years in this region was bumper. This year, the farmers say, loss was quite heavy and they also expect the situation will remain same the following years.

The aus paddy cultivation in Khulna Division was also hampered for want of adequate rain as well as poor water

supply from the G K Project command area as the pump houses could not be switched on due to low flow of water level in the river Ganges following unilateral withdrawal of water by India through Farakka Barrage. The farmers in the region, meanwhile, are passing hard days. Over 95 per cent of the farmers directly depend on income from selling their produce. The competitive market too became difficult for them.

The experts further said that the income from the additional crop production will be around Taka one hundred crore in aus seasons and Taka one hundred and fifty crore in aman seasons. The experts also suggested to expand the area of canal network of GK Project at the tail end, provided the floating pump house is commissioned.

In view of the experience gathered resulting from scanty rainfall recorded in last five or more years and non-operation of G K pump houses during aus seasons, experts strongly feel that the G K Project authority needs an alternative plan of rehabilitating the project area in a manner which suits the present demand.

The experts also said that the subsidiary pump house at Bheramara could be re-installed lowering its depth so the pump holds capacity to pull water from even deep in-

side to be supplied to intake channel in the lean periods. At the same time, explaining, dredging of the river Ganges at Hardings Bridge point as well as at the intake channel point will have to be continued, the experts said. Simultaneously, a floating pump house should be commissioned immediately for large scale pumping of water from the river Ganges for feeding 1655 kilometer long canal network spreading over Kushtia, Chuadanga, Jhenidah,

Magura and Jessore districts. The cost of a floating pump house, including commissioning would be about Taka 200 crore which the experts say, can certainly benefit the farmers in lean periods who sustain heavy losses every year since 1989.

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The GK Project command area has no deep or shallow tubewells. Irrigation is provided in those areas from network of canals as per water management arranged by the Irrigation Extension Department of G K Project, both, in phase I and phase II.

Meanwhile, drought has also affected Jute producers for want of water in these districts. The growers have faced immense difficulties in processing their jute fibres for want of sufficient water. Consequently, the quality of their products deteriorated.

Drought has also affected supply of drinking water in the region as ground water level further fell. The hand tubewells are reportedly not working, mostly in rural areas of the region. About 70 to 80 per cent of the tube-wells have become inoperative, said one source. The rest of the tube-wells which are still in operation, pump out little water, said some villagers.

According to Health Department Sources, about 2000 people were attacked with diarrhoea and dysentery during last four months in the region for want of pure drinking water.



A GOOD INITIATIVE: A dam is being constructed across the river Mrigi in Jugnumura union under sadar thana of Sherpur district. The local Member of Parliament, SM Rafiqul Bari Chowdhury and the Union Parishad Chairman, Shahjahan Ali took the initiative to construct the dam. Hundreds of people, including school children volunteered in the work. Water from the reservoir will be pumped to neighbouring cropland through small canals for irrigation on about 10,000 acres of land. The district experienced one of the worst droughts this season. Standing aman paddy worth more than Taka 11 crore were damaged this season in the district. After completion of the dam, local farmers hope risks of losses (crop) would be greatly reduced. Clockwise from top left: A strong barrier, made of bamboo, is holding water. Volunteers dropping sand bags and lumps of earth across the river. Farmers carrying lumps of earth to the dam site. — Star, photos by Ratan Chowdhury

Great expectations for a bright future

From Rafiqul Islam Montu

BARGUNA, Sept 19: Bilkis Begum, 30, mother of three sons, leads a happy life.

She has lately become a member of the sadar thana co-operative society. Her husband sells rice in the market. She makes puffed rice at home and sells to the customers coming to her.

Bilkis Begum is one of the 20 members of the Women's Samity established recently.

Membership of the samity has changed their lives. "Otherwise we would have been carried away by the waters of the 'Pairsta', said Bilkis.

"I remember at one time there was no peace in the family. I never saw my husband smile and could not think of sending the boys to school. And two meals a day were a dream."

Samity membership has not only changed her lot but she has learnt many things. She was not educated enough. Now she can read and write. She is also conscious about health and nutrition these days as she can

learn by reading on her own. Bilkis can trust her husband now. She says, "most of the poor women need support of their husbands or brothers to run any business. And because of the extra income, 'wives are no more a liability.' Moreover, she adds, "the extra income has contributed to the peace and happiness in the families and the husbands have become more loving and caring."

Jakia Khatun, the President of the samity, says, "sewing machines — bought with loan provided by the samity — contributed much to the generation of income for members of their samity. 'All women' Jakia says, "trained in sewing, have bought sewing machines with the money. 'Everyone of them is earning, on an average, Tk 500 to 700 a month. The biggest advantage is that women do not need to go out. They can sell the materials sitting at home."

"We need some more time to be self-reliant. Though we plan and implemented the programmes on our own, we

still feel a little shaky," Jakia says.

Explaining the impact of the programmes taken by the samity, Jakia says, there was a time when women were ashamed of giving thumb impressions in presence of others. "Now we can put our signatures and feel proud. You can say it is a pride for poor women like us."

The members of the samity have started going to the banks and operate the bank accounts themselves. Farida Begum, cashier of the samity, says, when it was decided that the members would operate the bank accounts they did not feel confident. They felt the bank would take away their money. Now the situation has changed, the members maintain their own accounts, they go to bank to deposit or cash the money.

Farida believes, the poor would have to establish their rights for themselves. "Nobody would come to us to inform that our rights have been established," says Bilkis. "Earlier our husbands did not

allow us to go out. Now, they don't mind. We are earning. I can afford private tuition for my children now. I can also supplement the family budget. These are his real gains. He did not marry an earning wife, nor was it expected."

Jakia Khatun says, they need more skill for development. These trainings, she adds, help the members to plan things in a better way. "Moreover, under the present system we attend training sessions according to our own time and it does not affect our household activities."

Jakia says, samity membership has given them a new vision of life. They know how to maintain the family, and they are no more swayed away by superstitions. She says, samity members do not seek the help of quacks and sorcerers any more. "For any health problem we go to a doctor."

Jakia says, as things are changing, so are the relationships between husbands and wives.

Sharp fall in water level

Ferry services at Aricha, Daulatdia threatened

MANIKGANJ, Sept 19: Ferry services between Aricha-Daulatdia and Mawa-Charzamat have been threatened following the sharp recession of water in the river Padma. BIWTA officials said Sunday, reports UNB.

One of the three ferry ghats remained in operation for the last five days causing untold sufferings to the people, officials added.

The ferries are plying through a narrow channel where depth of water is only 9 to 10 feet while 12 to 15 feet depth of water is necessary for easy plying, the sources added.

Every day water level in the river is reducing by 10-12 cm. If the recession continues the

ferries will not be able on these routes any more.

Meanwhile, plying of vehicles between capital Dhaka and 18 south-western districts are being hampered due to delay in ferry services.

BIWTA dredged only 15,000 cubic metres in the river mouth at a cost of Taka 5.25 lakh in the last fortnight which is inadequate to remove the massive siltation.

BIWTA officials said plying of roll on roll off ferry service has been hampered due to want of required navigability of the river.

The water level of the river Padma registered sharp fall in the last few days as the water flow is being controlled.

Universal edn programme gets poor response

From Our Correspondent

JESSORE, Sept 19: The universal education programme presents a dismaying picture in ten districts of Khulna division following massive drop-outs of children from primary and other schools, said a source.

It is learnt that about three lakh children have dropped out of schools out of about seventeen lakh admitted to different schools this year.

According to a statistical report, the district-wise drop-outs are 69,050 from Jessore, 17906 from Jhenidah, 20164 from Magura, 18267 from Narail, 63067 from Khulna, 7270 from Bagerhat, 14,440 from Satkhira, 54134 from Kushtia, 29362 from Chuad-

nga and 13609 from Meherpur districts.

Another three lakh twenty thousand four hundred twenty four children could not be admitted in schools in the division this year, the source added.

Reports received here say that only 143584 children are going to schools out of 20,42531 school-going children.

Reports also say that literacy rate in the division is very poor following slow progress in implementation of the educational programmes in the region.

A detailed information says that 462019 people including males and females can read and write out of total population of 1.6 crore. The percentage of literacy is about 37.72.

The district-wise literacy rate is 33.40 per cent in Jessore, 25.90 per cent in Jhenidah, 20 per cent in Magura, 37.71 per cent in Narail, 43.90 per cent in Khulna, 28.20 per cent in Bagerhat, 30.53 per cent in Satkhira, 30.75 per cent in Kushtia, 25.20 per cent in Chuadanga and 23.10 per cent in Meherpur districts.

Teen-age girl gang raped

MAGURA, Sept 19: A teenage girl of Boralidah village in Sreepur thana was kidnapped and raped by some armed miscreants, police said Sunday, reports UNB.

According to hospital sources, Alomoti Begum 18, daughter of Mohammad Ali Sheikh was rushed to the hospital in unconscious state after she was gang-raped by the miscreants.

Family sources said, some unknown miscreants at night kidnapped the girl while she was sleeping in her room.

Jute market dull in Chuadanga

From Our Correspondent

CHUADANGA, Sept 19: The jute market throughout the district seems to be very dull. The price of jute in the district is decreasing every week.

Jute is being sold between Taka 250 and 260 per maund. Only ten days' back jute was sold between Taka 310 and 320 per maund.

This year a total of 8,000 hectares of land in four thanas of Chuadanga district were brought under jute cultivation and for want of water thousands of tons of jute were left untouched.

This year, it is expected that about four lakh maunds of raw jute would be produced from the district.

The Adamjee Jute Mills Corporation in Narayanganj is purchasing jute from the district through an agent, at Gokulkhali Bazar under Alamdanga thana of the district.

A few jute traders are allegedly getting the facility of selling jute, at the centre.

The jute cultivators in sadar, Alamdanga Damurhuda and Jibannagar thana are reportedly not getting the facilities to sell their produce at the jute purchasing centre as the purchasing centre itself has been opened six miles away from Chuadanga on Chuadanga-Meherpur bus route. Alamdanga town is 18

miles off Gokulkhali bazar. Damurhuda is 12 miles and Jibannagar thana town is about 26 miles away from the purchasing station at Gokulkhali.

In of the cases traders in markets of Dingedah, Sarajganj, Munshiganj, Alamdanga, Jibannagar, Hashadah, Darsana and Chuadanga were found buying jute on credit. Some of the jute farmers in these bazars said, they get their money returned at every weekly markets.

No other alternative arrangement has so far been made in the district to purchase jute directly, from the farmers.

Pisciculture training course ends in Faridpur

FARIDPUR, Sept 19: A five-day comprehensive Pisciculture Extension Training Course for thana fisheries officers under Rural Pond Fish Culture Extension Programme concluded at the Institute of Fisheries Training and Extension here Thursday, reports UNB.

A total of 20 thana fisheries officers of Faridpur, Rajbari, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Dhaka and Narsinghdi districts participated in the course.

The course was inaugurated by AKM Nuruzzaman, Member Director Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) on September 10.

The course was conducted by Dr Dilip Kumar Chakabarty, a FAO consultant.

Abdul Khaleque, officer of Narayanganj Fisheries Department imparted training as resource person.

Training was imparted on the methods to increase fish production and effective transfer of appropriate aquaculture technology suited for the country's ponds and numerous water bodies.

Contraband worth Tk 20.75 lakh seized

COMILLA, Sept 19: Bangladesh Rifles of 19 rifle battalion arrested 11 alleged smugglers and seized smuggled goods worth about Tk 20.75 lakh in the past month, reports UNB.

The contraband include Indian saree, sugar, pulses, bamboo, timber, luxury items, bicycles, phenyl, syrup, liquor, ganja etc.

The goods seized also include hilsha fish, mug dal, betelnuts, contraceptive materials worth Tk 68,020.



CHANDPUR: A charitable dispensary for poor people run by the district unit of Rotary Club. — Star photo

They badly need food, medicines, shelters

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Sept 19: Erosion of different rivers has seriously affected different areas of Bhola district rendering thousands of people homeless.

Continuous erosion of the mighty Meghna river has already eroded vast tracts of land in Shibpur of Kotwali thana while river Tetulia eroded huge areas in Gangapur and Dighaldi unions.

Families who once lead peaceful lives are now reportedly living in sub human conditions with their children, on the embankments under the open sky.

According to the local people of Tajumuddin thana, about one kilometer land along the embankment of Malang Chara union has been devoured in the Meghna river during last two and a half months.

People of Gangapur union of Borhanuddin thana urged to the concerned authority to take immediate measures to protect the unions from the threat of erosion of Tetulia river.

Chairmen of these unions also urged to the government

to rehabilitate those homeless people on the government owned khash land.

Thousands of people, meanwhile, have taken shelters on the embankments of Ilsha of sadar and Tajumuddin thanas. These embankments now seem to be a permanent living space for these people for about last twenty years.

During last twenty years thousands of acres of land in Bhola, a delta district, have been devoured in Meghna and Tetulia erosions. Meanwhile, many homeless people have also occupied the char areas of Laxmipur and Noakhali districts seeking shelters. Now these people have no permanent living places who are poorly fed and doing all sorts of odd jobs. It is a lifestyle beyond people's expectation — half of the year they do some sort of job and rest of the time they remain half fed. Condition of the children belonging to these families are even worse.

Many of the children have been infected with various diseases. Except few exceptions, most of the inhabitants are left

without any care. Occasionally, there are news of deaths from malnutrition and similar diseases. The government, perhaps, could do better providing these people with proper medical care and shelter.

Our Kushtia Correspondent adds: With the fall in water level of river Padma and Gorial flood situation in Kushtia has considerably improved but miseries of those flood-hit victims is rising everyday.

The people in the affected areas now faces threat of being infected by various deadly diseases. Sufferings are already visible. For want of drinking water, sufficient grains, fodder, medicine, thousands of people are reportedly fighting for survival.

The relief materials and cash grant allotted for the victims were too inadequate to meet the needs, it was alleged. Meanwhile, distribution of relief goods among the flood-hit people of three thanas of Kushtia have been further strengthened following widespread allegations. Rehabilitation of the flood victims were

done recently but too was allegedly little. It was learnt from an official source that all possible steps have been taken to make the relief goods available to the victims leaving no scope for mishandling.

Most of the people in the flood-hit areas were forced from doing any work. These people have become dependent on relief materials for survival.

Hundreds of cattlehead have died due to serious scarcity of fodder and other food in the affected areas, the correspondent was informed.

Cholera, diarrhoea and dysentery have broken out in the flood areas in an epidemic form. Scarcity of drinking water has further worsened the picture in the areas. The local government officials claim that a number of medical teams were recently working in the flood-hit areas giving vaccination to fight against diseases. However, some of the victims deny having seen any medical team members who also said medicines have not reached them yet.



Jute fibres are being processed in Brahmaputra char area in Kamerer Char Union of Sherpur district. — Star photo