

News snaps

Loadshedding hits hard students

CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Apr 7: Local people are reeling under manifold problems due to growing mosquito menace and erratic power supply, reports UNB. The students face serious problem in continuing their studies and production in mills and factories disrupted seriously due to erratic power supply. Local people said their electric and electronic gadgets like TV set and refrigerator are being affected by frequent power disruption and voltage fluctuation. Many factories and industrial units cannot continue their production due to power problem causing financial losses to them. Hundreds of irrigation pumps remained inoperative for this reason threatening the cultivation of IRRI-Boro paddy this year.

Acid thrown on Dakhil examinee

NATORE, Apr 7: A Dakhil examinee, Kakoli, is presently fighting for her life after being burnt by the acid thrown at her by some miscreants recently, reports APB. The incident took place at her residence at about 2:45 am on March 16, while the victim was sleeping. She was immediately taken to the Sadar Hospital. When her condition deteriorated, she was shifted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. The local opinion is that Kakoli's refusal of the proposal of one of the concerned miscreants brought upon her this tragic misfortune.

Large scale farming of hemp

PABNA, Apr 7: Hemp is currently being grown on a large scale in nine thanas in Pabna, reports APB. Growers of hemp claim that though its cultivation requires less work, it is more profitable than other crops. Consequently it has replaced other food crops in arable land. A hemp grower asserted that if it is grown on a large-scale it yields lakhs of takas in profit. Another claimed that the gain from growing rice per acre was meagre compared to that from growing hemp. Extensive cultivation of hemp has given young boys in Pabna greater access to the drug. Locals fear unconstrained farming will lead to more extensive drug addiction.

Property worth Tk 20 lakh gutted

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 7: Property worth Tk 20 lakh and eight houses were gutted in a fire at Charshatbaria village in Ullahpara thana here on Thursday night, reports APB. The fire originated from a stove, according to Fire Brigade sources. Seven persons were scorched and injured while trying to control the blaze.

Pry edn being hampered

MADARIPUR, Apr 7: Primary education in all the four thanas here is being seriously hampered due to inadequate supply of textbooks, reports APB. According to government rules, old books have to be collected from students while supplying new ones, which, teachers say, is a difficult task as the books are either worn out or lost by students. Official sources told that about one-fourth of students have been supplied with new books in the district. They could not say when the rest of the books will be made available. Many guardians have alleged that there have been gross irregularities and malpractice in distribution of textbooks.

Govt deprived of revenue

SYLHET, Apr 7: Illegal occupation of four sand and stone quarries of the district by influential quarters for the last two years deprived the government of revenue income of about Tk 8 crore, reports UNB. Taking advantage of the lack of coordination between the ministries of Land and Mineral Resources, the influential quarters have occupied these quarries one after another. Jalang, Goain, Plain and Bichhanakandi sand and stone quarries comprise 14,000 hectares of land. According to the law one person can take maximum 30 hectares of quarry land as lease. Some 446 people can take lease of the quarry land. As a result the government is to get Tk 44.60 lakh each year as fee and about Tk four crore as revenue.

Assailants kill man

PIROJPUR, Apr 7: Assailants killed a man after gouging out his eyes at Uttar Poikkhali village in Bhandaria thana on Sunday, reports UNB. Police said Amin Kazi, 32, came under attack while he was travelling with his wife in the evening. The miscreants beat him mercilessly tying him with a tree and then gouged out both of his eyes. Hearing the hue and cry of the wife of the victim, people rushed to the spot and sent him to the hospital where doctors declared him dead. Previous enmity was said to be the reason behind the brutal murder.



JHENIDAH: A sequel from a drama titled "Akkel Alir Adalat" which was held at Saikupa Shilpakala Academy on the occasion of Ekushey February. — Star photo

Sequel to cow lifting : 50 hurt

JESSORE, Apr 7: Some 50 people, including women and children were injured and 25 houses were ransacked by the armed terrorists at village Laxmipur in Avyonagar thana on Thursday, reports UNB. Police said the incident occurred as a sequel to lifting of a cow allegedly by local terrorists from the cow-shed of one Sarad Sardar. Earlier, some unidentified assailants exploded bombs when a village arbitration was on in this regard. On the day, the assailants attacked the villagers in the early morning and ransacked 25 houses and looted valuables worth about Tk 10 lakh. The injured were admitted to the thana health complex and different clinics.

Meeting of uplift committee

PIROJPUR, Apr 7: A meeting of the district development committee was held at the DC's conference room on Monday to review overall development activities, reports UNB. Progress of different on-going projects under pourashabha, Health Department and different engineering departments also came up in the meeting. Presided over by Deputy Commissioner ATM Zulfiqar Haidar Chowdhury, the meeting was also attended by district and thana level officials.

Customs godown in bad shape

CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Apr 7: The Customs godown at Shibganj thana here is in deplorable condition and needs shifting as early as possible, reports UNB. Official sources said the building was constructed long ago using outdated construction material. After a slight rainfall water leaks through the cracks of the rooftop causing damage to the necessary papers and articles. The surrounding walls of the go-down have already been collapsed and rodents made innumerable holes on the floor. The officials and employees have to keep themselves busy in protecting the materials kept in the dilapidated godown.

Oath taking ceremony

KOCHUA (Chandpur), Apr 7: The newly elected Chairman and 12 Commissioners of Kochua Municipality took oath at a simple ceremony here recently, reports APB. Deputy Minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, attended the function as chief guest. The commissioners include three women, elected from reserved seats. Later Dr Alamgir laid the foundation stones of the Shaheed Shetu and the zonal office of the Chandpur Rural Electrification Board.

Body recovered

PATUAKHALI, Apr 7: Police recovered the dead body of an unidentified teenage girl from Joinkathi town area here on Monday, reports UNB. The body was found in a brick-field of the area wearing 'salarwar' and 'kamiz' in the morning. Police sent the body to hospital morgue for autopsy. The victim's body bore marks of injuries on her face. Police suspected that she was killed after rape.



Drought and prolonged hot spell have caused misery all over the country. Photo shows buffaloes protecting from the scorching heat of the summer at a place near Magura town. — Star photo

Northern region reeling under drought, heat

By Staff Correspondent

The northern region is now reeling under drought and heat.

Our Pabna Correspondent reports: Unprecedented drought has posed a severe threat to IRRI-Boro cultivation in Pabna, Natore and Sirajganj.

Production of IRRI-Boro may fall short of target if there is no rainfall within a week.

Underground water level has already fallen much rendering thousands of Tara pumps and hand-driven tubewells choked up. As a result an acute scarcity of drinking water is prevailing. Lakhs of people in the rural areas, especially in the riverine shoal areas have been crying for drinking water.

According to Deputy Project Director of Irrigation of PANASI, Paksey in Ishurdi thana, the water level has gone down to 35 feet in Pabna sadar thana to 33 feet and in Faridpur thana also the level has gone down to 33 feet. Similar fall has been reported from all other thanas of Pabna district. In these areas, most of the shallow tubewells have gone out of service.

About 20 per cent of the shallow tubewells have gone out of order, seven per cent in Ullahpara thana of Sirajganj district and six per cent of the STWs in

Pabna district have already gone out of order.

The alarming fall in underground water-level posed a threat to the entire irrigation network.

A total area of 32,678 acres of land had been brought under irrigation through shallow tubewells in Pabna district, 1,26,316 acres in Natore district and 56,895 acres in Sirajganj district.

Production of fish has also been affected due to drying up of rivers, canals and beels.

Acute scarcity of fish is now prevailing everywhere.

Normal life has also been affected badly due to ongoing drought. Hats, bazars and other commercial centres are no more seen busy with the traders and consumers.

A few number of rickshaws is seen plying on the streets due to scarcity of heat in the town. People hardly come out of their houses at day time for adjoining unbearable heat.

The situation has further aggravated by frequent loadshedding and extremely low voltage of electricity.

APB from Panchagar reports: Hot winds are parching the people and covering the

fields with dust. Even the grass has withered due to heat.

Small rivers, swamps, ponds and canals have dried up and there is virtually no source of surface water. The problem has been aggravated by the Farakka Barrage as many tributaries of the Padma have dried up, local people say.

The groundwater level has fallen so much that even deep tubewells can not pump out water at places.

IRRI-Boro crops are being affected and if there is no rain immediately, crops will wither away, farmers said. Fields have turned brown at places.

This is high time for sowing jute seeds. But fields are bone-dry and cracked, unfit for cultivation, they said.

Vegetables are in short supply in markets because their production is hampered due to lack of irrigation. There is no fish at all in the markets.

Another UNB report says: Frustration gripped the farmers in 16 northern districts due to the prevailing drought and various problems in irrigating their IRRI-Boro fields.

Price spiral of diesel and lack of maintenance of deep

and shallow tubewells across the region are the main problems for them, said the farmers.

According to official sources, cultivation of the targeted 1.75 lakh acres of land in the region is being hampered seriously as a large number of deep and shallow tubewells went out of order due mainly to lack of care and maintenance.

They said about 1,344 deep and 6,089 shallow tubewells remained out of order hampering irrigation in the croplands.

District-wise break-up of disordered deep and shallow tubewells is as follows: Dinajpur 193 deep and 341 shallow tubewells, Panchagarh 23 deep and 73 shallow, Thakurgaon 53 and 171, Nilphamari 104 and 87, Rangpur 208 and 655, Gaibandha 115 and 26, Kurigram 33 and 140, Lalmonirhat 56 and 174, Bogra 114 and 910, Joypurhat 77 and 113, Natore 66 and 2,058, Pabna 54 and 897, Sirajganj 107 and 43, Rajshahi 70 and 197, Chapainawabganj 13 and 187, Naogaon 58 and 517.

Growers of the region urged the authorities to take immediate steps to bring down the price of diesel and repair the tubewells to mitigate their sufferings.

Drought hits tea output

From Our Correspondent

MOULVIBAZAR, Apr 7: The ongoing spell of drought poses a threat to tea production.

The target of its production may not be achieved this year in Moulvibazar and Hobiganj districts. Country's three-fourth tea gardens are located in this two districts.

This correspondent recently visited different tea garden of Moulvibazar and Hobiganj to see the situation in plantation areas. Tea buds and leaves are being dried up due to continuous drought which has been sweeping all over the two districts. If such drought continues further, there will be severe damages to the tea buds and leaves. Consequently the production of tea would suffer enormously, tea industries sources apprehend.

According to the Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI) at Srimongal office source, there has been no rainfall from November last year. However, over the last 10 days of March, Moulvibazar district experienced sporadic rainfall. If the apprehension published in different national dailies regarding weather proves right, the tea gardens of Moulvibazar and Hobiganj districts will find difficult situation, experts says.

However, due to prolonged drought, tea industries will suffer a heavy loss. In different plantation areas green tea leaves are being dried up and

turned yellowish. Cracks have appeared in the tea plantation land in Aminabad tea garden, Karimpur tea garden and Sakera tea garden under Rainagar thana of Moulvibazar district. On the other hand, tea gardens in Lakerpur, Balishira and Longa valley areas are worst affected by drought.

According to growers, irrigation facilities are existing at a few gardens which are under foreign company's management. But local gardens have no irrigation facilities due to lack of source of water though country's maximum number of tea gardens are under local management. Scientists disclosed that tea gardens of the country had faced such drought during late sixties and early seventies.

Another side-effect of drought is that tea plants are being attacked by white ants, red spiders and Hemitelia in considerable number of tea gardens. As a result, roots of tea plants are being damaged seriously. Rats are also causing heavy losses to the owners, said a factory worker of a garden at Srimongal.

For want of rainfall and due to cutting of shady trees, tea buds and leaves are being damaged by pests and insects causing losses to the owners. Ecological balance is also being affected by cutting of trees at random.

Fall in water level of Jamuna Bera, Koutala pump stations have lost effectiveness

PABNA, Apr 7: The Bera and Koutala pump stations, constructed at a cost of Tk 400 crore in '91-'92 for irrigation, have lost their effectiveness due to fall in water level of the Jamuna, reports APB.

As a result crops, which are wilting from lack of water, may be extensively damaged.

The project director of Pabna Irrigation and Rural Development Project (PIRDP) said that at normal times, the five pumps of Bera pump station used to distribute about 2,500 cusecs of water, but now these can distribute 1,000 to 1,500 cusecs. The Koutala pump station has been affected as badly.

A source in the Water development Board, talking on condition of anonymity, blamed bad planning, lack of foresight, faulty design and corruption for failure of the total project which cost more than 1,000 crore taka.

The first phase of the PIRDP was initiated to prevent water-logging in nine thanas in Pabna, two thanas in Natore and one thana in Sirajganj districts. About 51 per cent of farmlands in these areas had remained submerged for six months under 0.6 to 3 metres of water.



JHENIDAH: Some rural children fishing from a muddy pond at village Shitail in Sajirupa thana here. The pond has become waterless during the current spell of drought. — Star photo

Acute fodder scarcity in rural areas

By Staff Correspondent

Acute scarcity of fodder has been prevailing in some districts due to severe drought.

Our Kushtia correspondent reports: Shortage of fodder has been prevailing in six thanas here.

Cultivators here normally preserve one year's stock of straw from the harvest of Boro, Aus and Aman. But this year they could not preserve it because of natural calamities. As a result the cultivators are unable to feed their domestic animals properly. Moreover, almost all the traditional grazing fields have been turned into agricultural fields.

According to local farmers, green grass for milch cows is rarely available in the rural areas. Most of fallow lands have also been brought under cultivation. The crop pattern has also been changed.

Prices of oil cakes and other varieties of fodder have increased. Besides, a large number of cattle have fallen prey to various diseases. Others have become malnourished due to constant starvation. Many cultivators are selling their cattle at nominal prices as they are unable to feed them.

APB from Rangpur reports: Cattlehead population in the four districts of greater Rangpur has reduced drastically due to scarcity of hay and other cattle feed.

Besides, some 40,000 cattle die every year due to various diseases.

Prices of cattle and poultry birds have also been falling, because of scarcity of cattle feed and various diseases. Farmers have been selling away their cattle at almost throw-away prices because they can not feed them. Some farmers said the crisis began after loss of the Aman crop in last year's flood.

Farmers said an acute crisis of cattle feed is prevailing in Kurigram, Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat and Rangpur districts.

Sources in the district Animal Resources Department told that the number of cross-breed animals in Kurigram district alone was 20,364 and that of local variety of cows was 604,749.

During the last floods, some 357,787 cows and buffaloes were attacked with various diseases.

According to official sources, there were 22 registered cattle farms in the district. At the moment, however, there are no traces of the 22 registered farms which received grants.

Allegations have it that some well-to-do people took loans in the name of raising cattle farms but did not go for this business.

In the post-flood days, a grant of Tk 4.10 lakh was given for arranging cattle feed, which was distributed among 450 people in nine thanas. But there were allegations that the grants did not reach the affected farmers.

UNB from Kurigram reports: Number of cattle in the district is decreasing due to acute scarcity of fodder.

Farmers are being compelled to sell out their cattle and poultry birds due to the acute scarcity and high price of fodder and poultry feeds.

Besides, the prices of wheat and 'kakai' husk, oil cake, dry fish, maize grain, oyster shell and other fodder are also very high.

Per hundred bundle of dry straw is being sold at over Tk 100 which is beyond the buying capacity of the poor farmers.

The onslaught of the worst flood during the last year that hampered the normal production of Aman paddy is one of the reasons behind fodder

scarcity.

Local elite said during the fiscal 1992-93, government sanctioned grants for the dairy and poultry farms, established in private sector, to boost production of milk, meat and egg.

But now, 22 registered farms, including 15 which got government grants, are non-existent.

People here alleged that the influential people after getting grant sold out their cows secretly while others were forced to shut down their farms due to lack of fund.

After the devastating flood, many affected farm owners could not get financial assistance from the government.

The farm owners urged the government to ensure the supply of fodder and poultry feed to them at fair prices without further delay.

UNB from Kishoreganj says: The farmers of all the 13 thanas here have been facing acute shortage of fodder since the long lasting deluge last year.

Different types of fodder including hay are in short supply as the flood water engulfed almost all the land area hampering the production of Aman and Aus.

The production shortage of forage has caused the price hike of hay, grass, oil cake, bran, bean and pumpkin in different village bazaars across the district. Market sources said that the price of 100 bundles of hay cost Tk 100-120, which is too high for the poor growers.

Many villagers said that their domestic animals like cow, ox, bullock, goat and sheep are in malnutrition, as they cannot provide adequate fodder. Meanwhile, various cattle diseases have already broken out in the district.

Desperate farmers in some of the worst flood-affected areas are collecting animal food from far away only to keep their cattle alive.

But, many farmers are forced to sell their cows at throwaway prices due to acute scarcity and high prices of fodder.

Mat industry on verge of closure in 2 dists

PIROJPUR, Apr 7: Lack of government patronisation and bank loan as well as inadequate marketing facility have been leading the cottage industry of mat towards extinction, reports UNB.

People engaged in producing and selling the mat popularly known as 'Shital Fat' said these problems coupled with the price hike of the raw materials forced many of them to leave their ancestral occupation.

They said about 1,000 families in Kawkhali thana are now involved in the trade. Once the thana was specially known to all for superior quality of the product.

But due to various problems, the situation has changed altogether and the producers of raw materials lost their interest to produce it in their lands.

"Now a days we do not produce it as the return is not encouraging enough," said the owner of a local mat industry.

He said the traders from far-flung areas used to come here to buy mat for marketing across the country. But he maintained that those days seem to have gone.

The soil here is suitable for cultivation of the plants used for making the mat and it was a profitable profession then, said a grower adding that although the soil remained unchanged, the production cost has been increased manifold.

Once over 1,000 bighas of land in the thana used to be brought under mat plant cultivation in each year. But now, it has come down to only a few hundred bighas.

The demand was high then and the farmers would get fair price of their product.

Now the cottage industry owners have lost their interest for various reasons including lack of government patronisation and bank loan, local people said.

The Department of Youth Development and NGO Grameen Bank provide loan for mat plant cultivation, but the growers said the amount is too small to cater to their needs.

Local people have urged the authorities to take necessary steps for resolving the problems and make arrangement for adequate bank loan for the growers in order to save the traditional cottage industry.

Another report from Madaripur says: Traditional mat industry in Rajor thana is on the verge of closure due to lack of patronisation and shortage of necessary raw materials.

Once the mat, produced in the thana would meet the demand of southern regions and it was even exported to India after

fulfilling the local demand. But now the producers are facing manifold problems due to shortage of working capital in absence of bank loan and proper marketing facilities.

About 1,000 mat producers now prefer cultivating jute and paddy to growing plants used as raw material for mat.

Meanwhile, a section of money-lenders are engaged in earning windfall profit by lending money to the poor mat producers on condition to sell the commodity to them at throwaway prices. They later sell those to different markets at high prices.

Poor producers of the traditional cottage industry urged the authorities concerned to provide them with necessary bank loan and other marketing facilities to continue their age-old occupation.

Smuggled fertiliser seized

From Our Correspondent

CHUADANGA, Apr 7: Chuadanga thana police seized 253 bags of smuggled Indian Potash and TSP fertiliser on Monday night from the godown of a trader of local Kederganjpara. The value of the fertiliser is Taka 75,900.

Police acting on secret information seized the smuggled fertiliser.

A case has been started in this connection.

Three persons have been made accused and they are Abdul Hannan, Abdul Mannan and Shahidul and they are absconding.

Sunflower farming gains popularity

PANCHAGAR, Apr 7: Cultivation of sunflower, a good oil seed crop, is gaining popularity among farmers in Dinajpur district, reports APB.

Demand for sunflower seed has gone up with the rise in the demand for edible oil produced from it.

Some local farmers told that if the government patronises its cultivation, import of soybean oil and palm oil will be reduced substantially.

They said they feel encouraged to cultivate this crop because it can be grown round the year and in almost all weather conditions and the crop can be harvested with 90 to 100 days of sowing.



PABNA: The river Ichhamati flowing through here has dried up. Many people are engaged in cultivation through illegal encroachment. — Star photo