

Army repair Teesta embankment temporarily

Gangachhara villagers still in panic



Members of Bangladesh Army repairing the erosion threatened Teesta embankment at Gangachhara in Rangpur.

Nawsha's case is not unique. Over 20 families of his villages also lost their homesteads during the period. Erosion panic grips the vil-

lages in the upazila every year, as the Tk 1,500-crore Teesta Barrage Project could not yet be implemented. But the donors were learnt to have withdrawn Tk 600 crore as works on the gigantic project are not progressing as per its main profile. Over 12 kms area of the

Gangachhara upazila went into the grip of the mighty river since '70s.

Recently, Teesta changed its course hitting hard the Kolokando area on June 29-30. As the situation deteriorated on July 8, the government sent army at the request of the Deputy Commissioner of Rangpur to assist the labourers of WDB to save 600 metres cracked parts of the embankment.

The army personnel were given the responsibility to save 300 metres of the cracked parts while WDB labourers repaired the remaining 300 metres. Some 100 troops on average worked a day on the embankment along with the civilians.

WDB provided the resources while Bangladesh Army gave the physical labour to save the embankment from the recent erosion using 21,150 sandbags, 192 corcupines (made of bamboo to protect sandbags), 1,285 cube blocks and 409 brick crates.

M Afzal Ali, sub-divisional engineer of WDB, said some places like Bashantapur, Kishoreganj and Syedpur still remain vulnerable as some tertiary and secondary works could not yet be finished.

In the summer, the embankment facilitates irrigation to 30,000 acres of land against its target of 2,74,000 acres under

Teesta Irrigation Project, while 1,60,000 acres in the rainy season, M Afzal said.

Locals alleged that the government have failed to come up with effective steps to protect the area from erosion by the river and their repeated appeals to construct a groyne embankment there fell into the deaf ears.

"The government can make the people of the area feel safe by constructing a permanent groyne embankment: at least over 2400-meter area," WDB official said.

According to WDB, Rangpur, Bogra and Nilphamari districts have become an erosion-prone area with the construction of a 60-gate Gojaldova barrage by India at the upstream of Teesta Barrage at Dalia, defying international laws.

There have been allegations that India releases waters opening up all the 60 gates of the Gojaldova barrage during monsoon causing severe flooding in the frontier districts.

Another WDB official told that Bangladesh officials measure water in the Teesta twice a day at 6 am and at 6 pm. The Indian authorities too release water two times everyday, at 9 am and at 9 pm. So Bangladesh officials cannot collect any evidence to produce before the international authorities.

News snaps

Hotel waiter slaughtered

NAOGAON, July 28: Unidentified assailants slaughtered a waiter of a hotel in the town early Tuesday, reports UNB. The dead was identified as Mohsin, 22, a waiter of Hotel Proshant and son of Tofazzal of Kittipur area in Sadar upazila. Police said the hoodlums entered the hotel at dead of night and killed him sequel to Police suspected that the miscreants might have killed him sequel to disputes over flesh trading at the hotel. Meanwhile, police arrested the hotel manager and a night guard of the area for interrogation. The body was sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy. A case was filed with the police.

Scholarship for wards of FFs

BARISAL, July 28: Barisal district unit of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad, organisation of freedom fighters, awarded scholarship to the wards of freedom fighters of the district this year under the laws enacted by the present government, reports BSS. A total of 100 students from ten upazilas of the district were awarded this scholarship this year at the rate of Taka 1,000 each. Chief Whip of the parliament Abul Hasanat Abdullah distributed the cheque of Taka 1,000 to each of the students in a simple ceremony on the first week of this month which was presided over by Sheikh Kutubuddin Ahmed, commander of Barisal district command.

Nine rescued: One trafficker held

BAGERHAT, July 28: Police rescued nine people, including housewives and kids, from a microbus on Rupsha-Mongla highway at Katakhal area Tuesday while allegedly being taken away outside the country, reports UNB. Acting on a tip-off, police intercepted the microbus at the area and rescued the people who were being trafficked into Pakistan via India. Police arrested one Akter Hossain, 38, of Kutubdia upazila of Cox's Bazar district in connection with the trafficking. He was taking them to Pakistan in the name of giving jobs. The rescued people were identified as Anjuman Ara Begum, 55, Rehana Akhter, 26, Rehana Begum, 20, Ashia Khatun, 15, Laila Begum, 14, Abu Bakar Siddique, 9, Khurshida Begum, 25, Rasheda, 4, and Nurul Islam, 38. All of them hail from different parts of Cox's Bazar district.

Good news for eco-tourists

SYLHET, July 28: Good news for eco-tourists. Country's first eco-park is going to be set up on 1,500 acres of forestland in Moulvibazar district at a cost of Tk 11 crore, reports UNB.

The park, to be surrounded by waterfalls of Madhabkunda and Muraichhara hills in Kulaura, aims at protecting the biodiversity and checking the degradation of the environment.

The other objectives of the project, titled 'Madhabkunda-Muraichhara Eco-Park', are to protect and preserve rare plant species and orchids, set up a sanctuary for wildlife and develop eco-tourism.

Its aims also include creating opportunity for education and research, and protecting the Madhabkunda and Muraichhara waterfalls.

The ambitious project has been taken up after an expert team, following an extensive feasibility study, declared Madhabkunda-Muraichhara and Hakaluki haor as vulnerable areas.

The Environment and Forest Minister accompanied by the Environment Secretary visited the area last year and decided to set up the park in Madhabkunda-Muraichhara area.

The project proposal was approved at an ECNEC meeting on July 11. According to competent sources, physical works on the project will start soon after the floating of tender.

Upon completion of the project, the government will be able to earn over Tk one lakh in revenue every year.

Anti-illiteracy programme in Comilla starts Sept 1

COMILLA, July 28: A massive anti-illiteracy programme, involving Tk 25 crore, under the government-sponsored Total Literacy Movement (TLM) is likely to be launched on September 1 this year, reports UNB.

Officials said the programme would be completed by December 2001. According to government statistics, there are 8.04 lakh illiterate people of 16-45 age group in 12 upazilas of the district. Of them, women account for 4.38 lakh.

Under the programme, the illiterate people will be given the knowledge of letters through 27,023 centres in 1,826 blocks. The process of centre selection is underway.

Respective Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) will appoint supervisors while teachers will be appointed by UP chairmen. Supervisors will get Tk 1200 each while teachers Tk 500 each as allowances per month.

According to officials, there will be 30 illiterate people under one teacher in every centre and female illiterates will be taught for 2 hours a day before evening while men after evening.

They said evaluation examinations would be held in each centre after every six months. Meanwhile, arrangement has been made to impart training to the supervisors before launching the programme.

Of the total budget, Tk 12 crore has been earmarked for salaries of the supervisors and the teachers while Tk 10 crore for buying educational materials and Tk 3 crore for campaign and monitoring.

A pilot project under the TLM was launched here in July 1999.

Under the project, some 5,700 illiterate people learned reading and writing through 190 centres in 12 upazilas, including five municipalities.

The evaluation examinations of these centres were held on February 29, 2000. The success rate was said to be satisfactory.

Another report from Laxmipur says: A three-day orientation course on TLM was held recently for providing guidelines to local opinion leaders to make the programme a success.

A total of 150 representatives from various leading organisations, including NGO workers, cultural activists, imams of mosques, Ansar, VDP, scouts, BNCC members and girls guides attended the orientation course.

Held at the local circuit house, the training programme dealt with teaching techniques, inspection and monitoring of the programme, and ways to contain dropout rate.

The procession paraded main thoroughfares in the town.

Gunmen killed Shamsur Rahman, a journalist of the Janakantha, at his office in Jessore on July 16.

Later the journalists submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner demanding punishment to killers.

Some district BNP leaders seeking anonymity said central leaders should resolve the conflict immediately for the greater interest of the party. They added if this situation continues, the party will face serious setback in the next general election.

50,000 fishermen face unemployment

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, July 28: About 50 thousand fishermen are facing unemployment due to drastic fall in production of hilsa fish in the rivers Padma and Meghna in the current season. Production of hilsa fish has suffered a serious setback due to fishing of hilsa fries called 'Jatka'.

Besides fish production is also affected due to massive siltation in the rivers. Consumption of hilsa fish has become a luxury for the common people due to abnormal price like. Previously hilsa was available abundantly in the local markets during the rainy season. But now-a-days a few hilsa are found in the markets. At present each kilogram of hilsa is being sold between Taka 180 to 200 in the local markets.

According to Chandpur Fisheries Department, indiscriminate use of current nets to fish hilsa fries is the main cause of abnormal fall in hilsa production in the rivers. Despite government ban on fishing of 'Jatka', it is being continued unabated in the rivers Padma and Meghna. Thousands of current nets are being used everyday to fish hilsa and other fries.

According to Chandpur Fisheries Institute, about 400 current nets worth about Taka 20 lakh had been seized by the mobile courts during the last three months. Mobile courts headed by magistrates raided from Neilkamal of Haimchar upazila to Shatnail of Matlab upazila in the rivers Meghna and Padma. Mobile courts are also in action at different hats and bazars here to arrest unscrupulous fishermen who are selling 'Jatka'.

Almost everyday a huge quantity of current nets are seized and set on fire on the banks of the rivers in front of public. Hilsa fries measuring four cm to 15 cm called 'Jatka' are prohibited for fishing. Two major nursery grounds of hilsa fries have been detected between Haimchar and Matlab along the River Meghna.

Jatka grows in fresh water in the River Meghna and Padma from the month of February to July. Hundreds of fishing trawlers and boats carrying hilsa anchored the fish ghats in Shariatpur, during the period, but the fishermen could not reap the benefit of it due to acute crisis of ice across the region.

The adjoining areas of Asarchar, Kuakata, Fatrarchar, Alipur, Sureswar, Chandipur, Dularchar and Shibchar are some of the main fish markets, where power outage is a regular feature.

Abdus Salam, a fish trader, said ice is the main component for proper preservation and marketing of hilsa as it dies soon after netting.

"A huge quantity of hilsa perished in five districts this year simply for lack of ice although there are 150 ice factories in the region," he regretted.

Sources at Power Development Board (PDB) said power supply in the region was severely disrupted during the period, due to two major technical problems in the national grid, plunging over 30,000 poor fishermen of the region into a deep crisis.

After the period they migrate to sea water. During the growing period they are netted by unscrupulous fishermen. The average catch of total 'Jatka' in the area is estimated to be about 4 thousand tonnes in a year.

If 30 per cent of 'Jatka' can be protected annually, an additional production of hilsa worth about Tk 100 crore can be obtained.

UNB from Shariatpur says: When hilsa crisis has prompted a section of business people to import the delicious fish, some 1,500 maunds of hilsa perished in just one week in greater Faridpur district for lack of ice.

Market sources said hilsa worth about Tk 75 lakh perished in Shariatpur, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Rajbari and Faridpur due to ice crisis attributed to low production caused by erratic power supply.

Although the country saw a poor output of the delicious fish this season, there was a huge catch of it in the region during mid-July, flooding the local markets.

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