

Erosion displaced 5 lakh families in 30 years in 16 N districts

PABNA, Aug 12: It sounds ideal when the government urges the people to face natural calamities with courage. But the poor people who have long been fighting a losing battle with riverbank erosion in northern region have little patience for such suggestion, reports UNB.

According to official statistics, country's four major rivers Padma, Teesta, Jamuna and Brahmaputra devoured over 500 villages in 70 upazilas of 16 northern districts in last 30 years, displacing over five lakh families.

Official records showed that government had taken up various programmes on various occasions to rehabilitate erosion-hit people of the region. But many of the programmes could not be implemented for reasons unknown, forcing one-fifth of the northerners to lead a subhuman life.

In an attempt to help rehabilitate the erosion-hit people, the government had taken up a massive programme in 1975. Under the plan, the erosion-affected people were supposed to be provided with boats and fishing nets.

But the ambitious programme was shelved after the 1975 political changeover. During the last 18 years since 1980, no government took any initiatives to rehabilitate the erosion-hit people.

Sources at Water Development Board (WDB) said 500 villages of 70 upazilas in Pabna, Sirajganj, Bogra, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Kurigram, Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi and Natore districts went into the gorges of the four rivers and their tributaries during the period.

The worst affected upazilas are Sadar, Bera, Sujanagar and Ishwardi in Pabna, Sadar, Belkuchi, Shahjadpur, Chouiali and Kazipur in Sirajganj, Sarikandi in Bogra, Chilmari, Bhurungamari, Roumari and Ulipur in Kurigram, Sundarganj, Fulciania, Saghata and Sadar in Gaibandha, Kaunia and Gangachara in Rangpur, Sadar and Godagarhi in Rajshahi, Lalpur in Natore and Sadar



Erosion by the Jamuna river has taken serious turn at Gopalpur upazila in Tangail district. At least 300 people were rendered homeless in the upazila in the last one month. -Star photo

upazila in Chapainawabganj districts.

Riverbank erosion in the region is nothing new. But its havoc, according to experts, grew worse after the country's independence.

According to a survey conducted by River Research Institute in 1999, 204 points of the country's 12 major rivers were hit hardest by erosion during the 1997-1999 period. Some 420, 484 meters of land in the areas, including 2.91 lakh meters in the Sirajganj town have disappeared in the river.

The town protection embankment in Rajshahi, which was constructed spending crores of taka, is also under threat of erosion by the Padma.

This year the riverbank erosion in the region reappeared in rather worse manner, rendering some 1,000 families living on the vicinities of the Padma, Teesta, Jamuna and Brahmaputra homeless last month.

Some two lakh families in the

moderate rainfall triggering erosion.

Of the five lakh families, who lost their homesteads in the last 30 years in riverbank erosion, 95 per cent are farmers while the rest are business and working people, according to the survey.

The mighty Jamuna devoured Nakala River Port in Pabna in 1998. The upazila bhabans of Kazipur and Belkuchi in Sirajganj and 50 per cent of the Sirajganj town have disappeared in the river.

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16 northern districts lost their homesteads in the devastating flood of 1998.

BSS from Mymensingh says: With the sudden rise in the water level of the River Padma, erosion has started playing havoc with vast tracts of homestead and farmlands along the riverbank.

Seventy-one families in Hasalbari and Dighirpar unions under Tangbari upazila have already shifted to safer places in the river.

According to official sources, the district administration has so far sanctioned a grant of Taka 20 thousand for immediate distribution among the erosion victims of the affected areas.

Meanwhile, the abnormal rise of the water level has submerged the low-lying areas of the six upazilas. The river Padma at Bhagirathi is flowing 76 cm above the danger level, according to the Water Development Board.

Meanwhile, there is allegation that unscrupulous traders are selling non-iodised salt labelling those as iodised salt.

Production, storage and sale of non-iodised salt were banned in 1989. But most of the factories are not producing iodised salt, local people alleged.

Meanwhile, a recent survey by a non-government organisation

Failure of TLM: Probe demanded

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Aug 12: A high powered probe body has been demanded to investigate into the alleged corruption, irregularities and mismanagement in the Total Literacy Movement (TLM) programme named Prodipro Sirajganj here.

Speakers demanded this at a meeting held at Bhasan Auditorium here recently. They deeply regretted for total failure of the programme.

Abdul Latif Mirza MP, and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Manpower Ministry who was the chief guest in the meeting expressed his anger for total flop of the programme.

The meeting was presided over by A F M Saiful Islam, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Sirajganj. It was addressed, among others, by Md Shahruddin, Commissioner of Rajshahi division as special guest, Md Mostafizur Rahman SP, Sirajganj, Chairman of

Sirajganj Municipality and Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Rajganj.

They alleged that an amount of Taka 18 crore 90 lakh was sanctioned in six months for implementation of the programme for making six lakh people literate while in reality less than one lakh people became literate. They

alleged that the concerned officials and three so-called journalists had been involved in the corruption. The corrupt officials allegedly purchased inferior quality of materials like duster, khata, black board, umbrella, sign board and lamp. They allegedly submitted fake Travelling Allowance (TA) and Dearness Allowance (DA) without showing necessary papers for the purpose.

However, when this correspondent contacted with Abdul Mannan, ADC (General) about his comments regarding the corruption, he flatly denied all the allegations.

Sale of non-iodised salt goes on unabated in Kushtia

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Aug 12: Defying government ban a section of unscrupulous traders are selling non-iodised salt in markets in the district.

Ignorant people are buying the banned salt due to cheaper prices. According to market sources, one kg of iodised salt is being sold between Tk 10 and Tk 12, while the non-iodised salt sells Tk 8 and 9 a kg.

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Bio-gas becomes popular

SHARIATPUR, Aug 12: Use of bio-gas in household works has increased considerably in the district, reports BSS.

So far a total of 33 bio-gas plants have been installed in different upazilas of the district.

Consumers have been saving their hard earned money by using bio-gas. The bio-gas plants not only produce cooking fuel but also produce fertiliser. It is also helpful in keeping the environment free from pollution.

According to official source, the government allocated Taka 65 thousand to support installation of bio-gas plants in the district. The total cost of installation of a bio-gas plant is estimated at Taka 11 thousand.

People of the rural areas demanded an increase in the

government allocation so that they can easily install a plant.

They also demanded installation of bio-gas plant in each and every union parishad here.

Installation of bio-gas plant started in Sharaiatpur district in 1997. The project was first built at the house of M Mohsin Khan, a school teacher of village Palong in the Sadar upazila.

The sub-assistant engineer of the bio-gas project said that the production capacity of this bio-gas plant was 150 cft. An amount of Taka 5 thousand was granted to M Mohsin Khan by the government. The rest of the amount was borne by him. His family members have been using bio-gas from this plant for two and a half years.

Unguarded border in CHT, Satkhira worries BDR DG

From Abdul Monayem Khan

COX'S BAZAR, Aug 12: Director General (DG) of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Maj Gen Fazlur Rahman said that special measures have been taken to check smuggling, especially drug smuggling in the border areas of the country.

The DG was talking to local journalists at 16 Rifle Battalion Headquarters here recently. He also said that plans are underway to double the strength of BDR and add a helicopter fleet to it to step up border vigilance, curb smuggling and check inflow of arms and narcotics.

Its strength is likely to be increased to around 70,000 in 61 battalions from the present 37,000 in 41 battalions, adding some 20 battalions.

He also declared that 10 per cent of money after selling the smuggled goods would be distributed among the BDR jawans.

He asked the BDR jawans to check border smuggling, especially drugs and phenyl smuggling with iron hand with a view to saving our youths.

The BDR chief expressed concern over 559 km unprotected borders of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Satkhira. It was necessary to set up BDR camps on every 20 km of the unprotected CHT border and at least 4 helipads in the region.

He said 449 km border of Chittagong Hill Tracts remained unprotected following signing of peace accord with PCJSS on December 2, 1997. The government has withdrawn all BDR and Army camps from 379 km border with India and 100 km border with Myanmar in Chittagong Hill Tracts, he added.

He expressed concern that armed rebels and international drug traffickers might intrude into the deep jungles of CHT through the unprotected borders and set up camps there.

Of the western border, the DG said 80 km border from Kalkhali in Satkhira district to north Talpatti remained unprotected. Nobody will be aware if any foreign ship intruded into Bangladesh territory through the Sundarbans.

Maj Gen Fazlur Rahman also planted a sapling in the Battalion headquarters of 16 Rifles Battalion area during his visit.

News snaps

Another electrocuted

NAOGAON, Aug 12: One person was electrocuted at Nazirpur in Patratula Upazila recently, reports BSS.

The ill-fated person, Rafiqul Islam, 22, was a carpenter. He was working at his shop when he was electrocuted.

Robbery

COMILLA, Aug 12: An organised gang of muggers looted over 100 tolas of gold from a jewelry shop in Daulatganj bazaar here on Friday night, reports UNB.

Police said four to five hoodlums boarded at the residential hotel 'Laksam Plaza' in the bazaar in Laksam upazila registering fake names. The criminals came to the 'Amin Jewelers' on the ground floor of the market and looted the gold by making the manager of the shop and the guard senseless after tactfully feeding them poisonous food. A case was filed.

Separate incidents claim 2

MADARIPUR, Aug 12: Two people including little a boy died in separate incidents on Friday, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said Moshred Ali, 55, of Karnapara village in Kalkini upazila was run over by a speeding Faridpur bound bus on Faridpur-Barisal highway. The victim met the tragic end while crossing the road. The body was sent hospital morgue for autopsy and a case was filed with the police. In another incident a little boy drowned at Chhargobinda village in Sadar upazila. Family sources said the victim Saiful Islam, 6, son of Yunus Madbar drowned in a nearby pond while he was bathing alone. Later his floating body was recovered from the pond.

Criminal convicted

MUNSIGANJ, Aug 12: A young man was convicted and awarded 10 years rigorous imprisonment by a court here on Monday in arms case, reports UNB.

The convict was identified as Kazi Farhan Ahmed, son of Kazi Muniruzzaman of Narayanganj town. The prosecution, in brief, was that police arrested him along with four others from Dakkhinpara Government Primary School polling center in Sirajdikan upazila while casting fake votes in favour of a chairman candidate in the 1997 union Parishad elections. Police also recovered a foreign 32-bore revolver from his possession and filed an arms case against him. After examining the witnesses and records District and Sessions Judge and Judge of the Special Tribunal Court M Golam Moula awarded the punishment.

Spurious cement seized

BAGERHAT, Aug 12: Police seized 30 bags of spurious cement from two shops on Madrasa Road in the town on Thursday, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided Bhai Bhai Store and Al Amin Enterprise and seized the adulterated cement. None was arrested in this regard. A section of dishonest traders have long been selling King brand cement of Meghna Cement Factory at Mongla after mixing with soil, police said.

Arms looted

KHULNA, Aug 12: A gang of terrorists looted arms and other valuables from the house of a shrimp farm owner at Batiaghata upazila on Tuesday night, reports UNB.

The gang entered into the house of Mohor Ali at dead of night and poured poison mixed milk into his mouth, leaving him unconscious. The terrorists then took a gun, 55 rounds of bullet, gold ornaments and cash Tk 5,000 and left the place safely. A case was filed with Batiaghata police.

Two killers get life term

KISHOREGANJ, Aug 12: A court here on Wednesday found two siblings guilty of murder and sentenced them to life term in jail, reports UNB.

The court also fined the convicts, Kala Mia and Jinnah of Astagram upazila, Tk 5,000 each with a provision to suffer one year more in default. According to prosecution, Kala Mia and Jinnah of South Abdullahpur village killed Si Abul Kashem when he along with his force went to arrest Kala Mia on March 2, 1990. After examining the records and witnesses, the Additional Sessions Judge (acting), S M Helal Uddin, handed down the verdict. The court, however, acquitted 44 other accused of the case while four others died during the trial.

Govt official's eyes gouge out

MYMENSINGH, Aug 12: Having failed to catch his son, an identified group of terrorists gouged out one of the eyes of a retired government officials in Gouripur upazila on Thursday, reports UNB.

Witnesses and hospital sources said the miscreants, looking for their rival Mustafa, burst into Mostafa's house and gouged out an eye of his father Abul Kashem after being failed to reach him. Earlier on Wednesday, they said, Mustafa had a quarrel with them over a cricket match in Jugaipur area. Kashem was admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Rehabilitation programme

RANGAMATI, Aug 12: CHT Refugee Rehabilitation Taskforce has taken up a massive programme to rehabilitate over 1.36 lakh internal refugees in three hill districts, reports UNB.

Officials of the taskforce has already sent a requisition of Tk 192 crore to Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry in this regard. Of the internal refugees, 90,208 are tribal and 146,107 Bangalis, they said.

NIP concludes

COMILLA, Aug 12: The second round of National Immunisation Programme (NIP) to eliminate tetanus and polio from the country concluded here on Friday, reports UNB.

The five-day vaccination programme in 40 vulnerable unions and 24 slums of the municipality started on Monday.

Municipality Chairman Kamaluddin Chowdhury inaugurated the campaign by administering polio vaccines to babies at Baludhun slum in the town. During the drive, all under-five children were given polio vaccines while women of 15-49 age group given TT vaccines through 24 centres in each union.

Forest official suspended

BAGERHAT, Aug 12: A forest official has been suspended here for his alleged involvement in smuggling of timbers from the Sundarbans, reports UNB.

Khulna Divisional Forest Office suspended forest officer Sibani Ranjan Das of Dasek Dharan Camp of Sharankhola range of the forest on Thursday. His suspension followed a series of complaints by locals against him.

Afforestation campaign

COMILLA, Aug 12: Rotaract and Interact Club has launched a campaign here to make people aware about the necessity of planting increased number of saplings to protect the environment, reports UNB.

As part of its programme, the club officials