

Acute shortage of foodgrains prevails in Kurigram

UNB, Kurigram

Almost a famine-like situation has been prevailing in some parts of the country. It is not because of scarcity of foodgrains, but people have little or no scope of earning to buy food.

Successive bumper crops have given the country a surplus of 10.5 lakh tons of rice this year. Having a comfortable stock, the government is looking for markets for export of rice, particularly of the finer variety.

The worst of it: Hundred of families have lost home and hearth as well as cultivable lands in river erosion. The mighty Brahmaputra devours croplands and homesteads along its banks and in shoal areas every year rendering the people of the area pauper.

Five villages in a union of Ulipur upazila have been devoured in the recent past. And nearly 4 kilometres of embankment with regulators, which were constructed at a cost of about Tk 22 lakh, also went to the river.

Official estimate shows 1,653 families have been rendered homeless while about 6,000 families affected in one way or other by the erosion.

Some 5,500 people in Hatia union, 12-kilometre from Ulipur upazila headquarters, now live in makeshift huts on embankment in inhuman condition. There is no tube-well for safe water. Stinking smell pervades the area in absence of sanitation.

Mojibur Uddin Mia, 55, of Telipara, told this correspondent that the river has devoured all his 10 bighas of croplands and homestead. He has now taken shelter on the embankment. Rahim Bux, 48, works in others fields and his wife Rani Bibi in houses of landowners. With three children, they hardly manage their livelihood.

Utter poverty brought Rabeya, 18, to Kurigram town along with her old father a year ago. One day, she lost track of the father. Now she became a street prostitute having no shelter to live in, Rabeya told this correspondent.

Such also is the tale of Ali Hossain, Bacchani, Jalli, Dhiren Das, Kokila, Pares, Chuni Sheikh and Salaiman. They all are victims of river erosion. Rendered pauper, they work in others field, pull rickshaw, pushcart or whatever odd jobs that come their way.

"A situation of silent famine continue to loom large in the area," admitted 72-year-old Union Parishad chairman Babar Ali.

He said the children here are deprived of even primary education. There is hardly any tube-well here. The residents use water from the river, canal or pond. About 75 per cent of the people suffer from water-borne diseases.

"Yes, NGO activists sometimes come here and do something for them. But how they will survive depending on others. What they need most is opportunity to work and earn a livelihood," said the chairman.

Launch accidents claim 2,000 in S districts in 15 years

AROOP TALUKDAR, Barisal

At least two thousand people drowned in launch accidents in the southern districts in the last 15 years.

According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) sources, some 24 major accidents occurred in different rivers in the region during the period. The accumulated loss has been estimated at Taka 30 crore.

Official sources said the major riverine accidents took place in the Kirtan Khola in Barisal; Paira, Lohalia and Tetulia in Patuakhali; Sandhya and Sugandha in Jhalakati; Bishkhali and Agumukha in Barguna; and

Kalabadar and Meghna in Bhola.

In most cases, carrying of passengers beyond capacity led to the tragic accidents in the region where riverine routes are widely used as the largest mode of communications. Besides, reckless driving has also been attributed to the accidents.

However, after every major disaster enquiry committee was formed, but recommendations of the report were not implemented. In some cases, reports remained in darkness.

'Queen of Patuakhali', a passenger double-decker launch, sank thrice in different times in different rivers, leaving many people dead. After salvation, the launch was

renamed and illegally kept operative in other routes.

It is learnt that many vessels both passenger and cargo carriers have no updated fitness report and other documents.

Besides, there are many unregistered vessels which ply in waterways of different districts, alleged a BIWTA source. Even many have no valid licence, the source added.

According to official sources, over 150 passenger launches are plying on 40 routes in the southern districts. Many of these passenger launches cross big rivers particularly the Meghna in the night time without necessary safety measures and equipment like life buoys, fire extinguishers and first aid kits.

Passengers said owners of the launches and even the BIWTA do not pay any heed to their safety. Flouting rules launches frequently carry passengers beyond capacity, they added.

Traditional equipment and lack of skilled sareng (boatswain) are responsible for the accidents. Still boatswains have to use manual driving wheels instead of modern hydraulic ones. There is no SOS sending wireless system or echo sounder device to detect and locate under water shoals.

Moreover, the rescue measures are not adequate. Had there been adequate rescue measures the loss of lives would have been reduced in accidents, said many.

Massive Boro farming scheme in 11 dists

BSS, Barisal

A total of 2,93,650 hectares have been brought under high yielding varieties of Boro cultivation here in 11 Southern districts under Barisal Agriculture Extension Zone (BAEZ) during this winter season.

The districts to be brought under this programme are: Barisal, Jhalakathi, Bhola, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Barguna, Faridpur, Gopalganj, Madaripur, Rajbari and Sharaiptapur.

According to an official source, the production target of Boro has been fixed at 12,25,560 metric tons of paddy this year in these districts.

Of the total, 2,48,000 are being brought under "High Yielding" variety of Upashya Boro while the rest 45,650 hectares under "High Yielding" variety of local Boro.

Of the total, 52,800 hectares will be brought under Boro Cultivation in Barisal district, 16,200 hectares in Pirojpur, 7,850 hectares in Jhalakathi, 35,200 hectares in Bhola, 12,300 hectares in Patuakhali, 500 hectares in Barguna, 17,400 hectares in Rajbari, 35,500 hectares in Faridpur, 55,200 hectares in Gopalganj, 35,500 hectares in Madaripur and 25,400 hectares in Sharaiptapur districts.

Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) has taken

up a comprehensive programme to distribute 31,75,000 kgs of different variety of fertilisers and 98,10,000 of high yielding varieties of Boro seeds among the farmers of this region.

Besides, BADC will install 12,480 power pumps, 233 deep tube wells, 23,467 shallow tube wells, and 281 hand driven tube wells and 6,747 other mechanisms for irrigation purposes in this zone for boosting productions.

Meanwhile, different government and Krishi Bank have taken up programmes to disburse necessary loans among the farmers for making this programme a success.

Another report from Kurigram says: BADC has taken up a programme to distribute 3,786 tons of seeds of different Rabi crops in five districts of greater Rangpur including Kurigram during this winter season.

According to a BADC source, distribution of these good quality seeds is nearing completion. A total of 13 sales centre of BADC and its 115 seeds dealers are selling these seeds directly to the farmers. The seeds include 500 tons of Boro seeds, 23 tons of mustard seeds, 2.5 tons of pulse seeds, one ton of sunflower seeds, 12.5 tons of ground nut seeds, two tons of motor pulse seeds, 22 tons of maize seeds, 680 tons of potato seeds and 2,546 tons of wheat seeds. Though BADC supplied seeds are not sufficient to meet the demand of the local farmers, there will be no problems of seeds as the farmers have enough stocks of the same.

33 murders in Khulna city last year

QUAIZI AMANULLAH, Khulna

At least 33 people were murdered in Khulna city last year.

Most of the murders were committed due to political enmity and dispute over land property. Some 25 murders were committed because of political rivalry. Many cases are under investigation. Besides, final reports of some of the cases have been sent to courts, said sources with police stations.

According to sources with Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP), of the murders, 13 were committed in Khulna police station, eight in Sonadanga police station, five Khalishpur police station, three in Daulatpur police station and four in Khanjahan Ali police station.

Local Awami League leader SMA Rab was gunned down on August 11 last year. Rab was a prominent figure in local politics.

Most of the accused in the 33 murders could not be arrested due to political interference, said reliable sources.

Meanwhile, police have miserably failed to contain criminal activities in the metropolitan city and Khulna district during the period.

Police said activists of outlawed PBCP and BCP are involved in murder, extortion and robbery, contributing to deterioration in law and order situation.

NEWS SNAPS

Book procession

UNB, THAKURGAON

The guardians of primary and secondary school students brought out a procession in the town on Saturday demanding immediate supply of textbooks.

Most of the schools remained closed unofficially due to lack of books. Headmaster Yakub Ali and assistant teacher Ashraf-ul-Alam of River View School in the town said the students were losing their interest for education, as they failed to reach new textbooks to them till the end of the current month. District Primary Education Officer said that only 1,62,362 sets of textbook were supplied against the demand of over 5.8 lakh sets for 960 primary schools.

Boy killed in road mishap

UNB, JOYPURHAT

A boy was killed and his mother suffered critical injuries in an accident on Bogajoypurhat Road in Kalai Upazila on Thursday.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred in Panchsira area when a speeding bus hit a rickshaw-van on which they were travelling. The deceased, Shahin, 3, died on the spot while his mother Morium, 27, suffered critical injuries. She was rushed to local thana health complex. After the incident, agitated people put barricade on the road suspending traffic movement for a few hours.

Tragic!

UNB, BRAHMANBARIA

A 55-year-old man lost his genital organ at Bhitidaudpur village in Sadar upazila on Wednesday when he went to collect loan-money from two borrowers.

Witnesses said a group of people led by Oli Mia and Dulal attacked Asmat Ali and cut off his penis. Asmat created pressure on Oli and Dulal, who took Tk 6,000 as loan from him long ago, to repay the same. He was admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital in a critical condition.

Chilli cultivation gains popularity

UNB, PANCHAGARH

The cultivation of chilli has gained popularity among the farmers than any time in the past.

Once the farmers in five upazilas of the district used to cultivate chilli either on fallow lands or courtyards of their houses. Despite the short supply of seeds this year by the BADC the farmers cultivated chilli on a vast tract of land after procuring seed from other sources. Besides, the growers have become interested to cultivate chilli as they get reasonable price and earn good profit. Some farmers told this correspondent that cultivation of the crop is not spreading due to shortage of working capital and lack of modern technology. The farmers said they cultivated chilli this season exceeding the target of 3,300 hectares set by the Department of Agriculture Extension.

BRAC education programme progresses

UNB, COMILLA

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) under its education programme has imparted primary education to 528 dropout and poor students.

The students completed their primary course recently through 25 BRAC schools at Munshirhat in Choudhram upazila. Upazila Nirbahi Officer at a simple ceremony at BRAC school premises gave away certificates to the students who completed the course.

Rabi farming on 2.5 lakh hectares

BS, TANGAIL

A total of 2.5 lakh hectares of land were brought under Rabi cultivation during the current season.

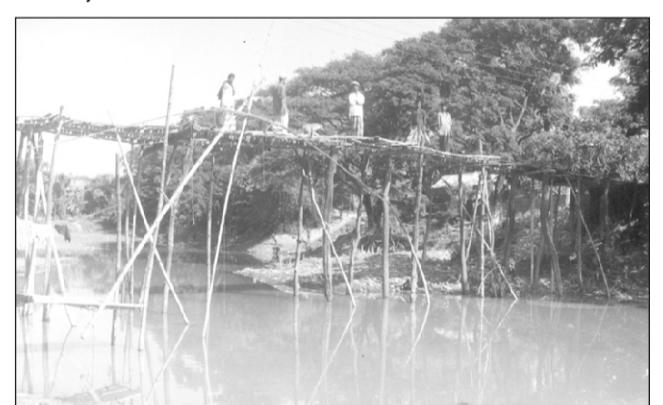
According to Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) sources, 1.44 lakh hectares have been brought under Boro cultivation and 11,000 hectares have been brought under wheat cultivation.

Fund crisis hampers development

UNB, BOGRA

Implementation of nine development projects hangs in balance due to fund crisis.

The projects are enhancement of beds at Muhammad Ali Hospital and construction of Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College, Circuit House, Judge Court Bhaban, a dairy farm, Customs office, Social Handicapped Centre, an 800-square-foot quarter at Police Lines and Chandan Bhaban Police Investigation Centre. The projects were taken up in between 1990 and '98, according to officials. They said authorities had allocated over Tk 59.72 crore for implementation of the projects of which only Tk 27.52 crore was disbursed.



People of Phulbaria upazila in Mymensingh district have been demanding for a long time to replace this risky bamboo bridge situated in front of the local Food office immediately, but the authorities concerned are not taking action in this regard.

Potato under blight attack

UNB, KURIGRAM

Potato fields in the district came under massive blight attack, fading the chances of another bumper output.

According to agriculture officials, farmers cultivated potato on vast tracts of lands following last year's bumper production. But the blight attack has dashed their hopes. The outbreak of blight has been attributed to massive farming of diluted cordinal, a popular variety of seed. Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) had targeted to bring some 3,000 hectares of land under potato cultivation with an output target of 30,000 mts. But its target is poised to fail. Meanwhile, DAE officials have started instructing the farmers to spray tetracycline and ridomil gold to combat the disease.

Growth centre work goes on

UNB RAJBARI

Construction work on four growth centres in four upazilas here is underway under the Roads and Hat-bazar Development Project.

Islamic Development Bank is financing the project being implemented at a cost of Tk one crore under the supervision of Local Government Engineering Department (LGED). Local MP Kazi Keramat Ali inaugurated the project by initiating the construction work on one of the growth centres at Suryanagar in sadar upazila on Thursday. LGED Executive Engineer Abu Bakar Bishwas and local elite were present.

Smuggled wheat seized

UNB, BAGERHAT

Police seized 100 sacks of smuggled wheat raiding two engine boats at a canal in Sadar upazila on Thursday.

On information, police caught the wheat-laden boats in Putimari canal while the consignment is allegedly being smuggled out. Sensing police presence, the boatmen and the criminals immediately deserted the boats. A case was filed.