

GK Project takes tumble

Farmers now opt for self-arranged irrigation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, JESSORE

After about fifty years of its commissioning, the Ganges-Kababik (GK) Project -- the largest irrigation scheme in the country's south-western region -- now seems set to fumble in realising its long-cherished goal due to continued revenue losses and failure to properly irrigate the arable lands under its command.

It is reported that the project has so far failed to command any profit, rather it suffered losses worth Tk 40 crore every year on an average, thus leaving no chances for its own subsistence.

Besides, arbitrary withdrawal of water from the Ganges by India over the years has been one of the major causes for the project's failure.

According to official sources, work on the project began in 1954 with an ambitious programme to bring a total of 3 lakh acres of land in greater Jessore and Kushtia districts under its net.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) financed the project worth Tk 212.56 crore.

According to another source, implementation of the project started in 13 upazilas of the two greater districts in 1954 in a bid to control flood and help boost cultivation in the region.

Though the irrigation began in the 1961-62 fiscal, its full-fledged works started from the 1982-83 fiscal year. During this period, the 193-kilometre main irrigation canal, 895-kilometre branch canals and 971-kilometre-long

sub-canals were excavated in the command area to facilitate smooth irrigation.

A total of 2,184 sluice gates were built on these canals. But surprisingly enough, the project, following its commissioning, could not reach the irrigation target in the command area.

According to statistics, only 17,267 acres of land was brought under irrigation coverage in 1963, which is only 5 per cent of the target.

During the second term, a total of 12,000 acres of land was covered. It was 34 per cent of the goal. In the next season, the project irrigated 2,25,000 acres, which was again only 64 per cent of the target. It is learnt that the GK Project Rehabilitation Programme included overhauling of the Bheramara pump house, repairing of the irrigation canals, installation of modern telecommunication system, power generation centre, mending of road and construction of a regulator at Magura to preserve water for the downstream areas.

But after a year, the Tk 18 crore telecommunications system collapsed and the regulator installed at a cost of Tk 7 seven crore along with the main pump house became unseparable.

A visit to the project command area will now show that having failed to get irrigation services from the GK Project, the farmers have launched tube well-run irrigation programmes on their own.



PHOTO: STAR

It's harvesting hour: Farmers harvest IRRI paddy at a field at Mollahpara village under Sadar upazila in Jamalpur district. Some 97,000 hectares of lands were brought under IRRI-Boro cultivation to produce 2.57 lakh metric tons of paddy in the district this year. The growers expect bumper production, thanks mainly to favourable weather condition.

Arsenic panic in Bagerhat

UNB, Bagerhat

prolonged drought. BSS from Satkhira reports: Arsenic contamination in the tubewell waters has taken a serious turn in five unions under Debhata upazila of the district, threatening the health of about 129,520 people.

As many as 65 people of 22 villages in the five unions have so far been affected with arsenic poison, according to different sources.

Water of 72 per cent tubewells under the upazila was found to have a high percentage of arsenic.

To detect arsenic in the tubewell water, Community Health Development Society (CHDS), with the help of Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and an NGO, recently conducted a survey.

According to the survey report, water of 8,678 tube-wells out of the total 9,276 under the upazila was tested, of which water of 6,666 tube-wells was found to contain arsenic

beyond permissible limit.

Debhata upazila PHED has put red mark on the arsenic contaminated tube-wells and advised people not to drink water from those tube-wells.

It was learnt from the upazila Public Health Engineer's office that the water of 943 tube-wells out of 1314 of Shokhipur union was found arsenic-contaminated.

Arsenic was found in the waters of 560 out of 1008 tube-wells in Debhata, sadar union, 901 out of 1599 in Noapara union, 2206 out of 2282 in Kulia union and 2056 out of 2211 in Parulia union.

Upazila Public Health Engineer M Qudrat-e-Khuda said with the assistance of UNICEF a programme has been taken up to install 67 arsenic-free deep tube-wells and 112 shallow tube-wells in different areas of the upazila.

River groynes built by India threaten 5 villages

UNB, Panchagarh

Five villages in Tetulia upazila of Panchagarh district stand threatened by river erosion due to construction of groynes by India in the Mahananda.

India constructed over 30 groynes in the river after every 15 metres in a bid to change the course of the river. Of them, 11 were set in Bangladesh territory, violating the 1975 Indo-Bangla treaty.

A delegation of Water Development Board, led by its Executive Engineer Matia Rahman, recently visited Bangladesh area and later submitted a report to the authorities in this regard.

Land Secretary M Shahidul Islam also visited the area.

One killed over land dispute in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

A man was killed and ten others were injured in a clash at Mongolpara village under Sherpur upazila in Bogra district on Friday.

Police and witnesses said supporters of Shukur Ali and Abdul Monnaif locked in clash over land dispute, injuring 11 people. One of the injured, Abdul Monnaif, 32, succumbed to his injuries on his way to Bogra Mohammad Ali Hospital.

A case was filed. Injured Shukur Ali was arrested in connection with the killing.

Rain threatens haor protection embankments

UNB, Sunamganj

The haor (water body) protection embankments in three upazilas of the district are in danger due to last few days' rainfalls.

The embankments may collapse anytime due to heavy rain or rush of water from across the hill, if necessary protection measures are not taken immediately, local people said.

Farmers living around 10 haors in Jamalganj, Tahirpur and Dharmapasha upazilas are apprehending possible damage to their standing crops.

The embankments along the Halir haor, Dhankonia, Sonamorol, Shanir haor, Kaliani, Joydhona, Kalapuja and Kashipur haor are already facing huge pressure of water.

Meanwhile, rain and hailstorms in last several days caused extensive damage to some 575 houses and about 40 per cent boro paddy in these areas.

Road repairing works hinge on fund dearth in Bandarban

UNB, Bandarban

Besides, he said, the government allocated only Tk 1.85 crore against the estimated cost of Tk 10 crore for the maintenance of five badly-damaged roads: Bandarban-Keranihat (25 kms), Chiranga-Lamai-Alikadam (43 kms), Bandarban-Chimbu-Ruma (54 kms), Bandarban-Roangchhari (23 kms) and Azinagar-Gazalia (32 kms).

The R&H engineer said these roads could be brought under a developed communication network in three years if the government allocates Tk 3 crore each year.

Bipul Chandra Shaha, executive engineer of the department, said the Communication Ministry has approved a Tk 7 crore project to bring Bandarban-Keranihat road under a developed communication network.

The ministry has assured of providing Tk three crore for the development and maintenance of seven roads in the current fiscal, he said adding that initiative has also been taken for the development of the Bandarban-Chimbu-Ruma and Bandarban-Roangchhari roads with assistance from ADB.

Besides, work on the 217-metre Ruma bridge is progressing fast at a cost of Tk 7.30 crore, which is expected to be completed by 2003.

164 community clinics to be set up in Sherpur

UNB, Sherpur

The second phase have also begun.

Health workers at 38 community clinics of the first phase started providing health services to the poor people on April 10.

Upon completion of the programme, some 6,000 rural people will be able to receive medical services from each community clinic, officials said.

Another report from Magura says: The government has allocated Tk 2,61 crore for setting up of 95 community clinics in four upazilas of the district.

Local Government Engineering Department is constructing the clinics to reach the healthcare facilities to the doorsteps of rural people.

Construction works on the clinics are likely to be completed soon.

880 small schemes to be implemented in Comilla

UNB, Comilla

Some 880 small projects under Rural Infrastructure Maintenance Programme will be implemented in 13 upazilas and five municipalities of Comilla district this fiscal spending Tk 1,674 mt of foodgrain.

The project works include construction of mosque, temples, madrasahs, schools and colleges.

Upazila-wise breakup of the projects and allocations: 152 mt of grain for 59 projects in Sadar, 114 mt for 52 in Chandina, 148 mt for 64 in Daudkandi, 138 mt for 114 in Debbari, 85 mt for 59 in Homna, 163 mt for 64 in Muradnagar, 112 mt for 94 in Barua upazila.

Besides, 88 mt of grain have been allocated for 42 projects in Brahmapara, 108 mt for 36 in Birurhang, 140 mt for 51 in Choudhogram, 178 mt for 91 in Laksam, 119 mt for 54 in Nangolkot, 37 mt for 28 in Meghna.

Eight more projects will be implemented spending 15 mt of grain in Laksam municipality 18 projects costing 19 mt in Borura municipality two projects at a cost of four mt of

NEWS SNAPS

Two die in road accidents

UNB, Manikganj

Two people were killed and several others injured in three road accidents on Dhaka-Aricha Highway on Saturday, police and witnesses said.

A Manikganj-bound trolley from Nayadengi overturned in front of local livestock hospital at about 9 am leaving trolley driver Saidur Rahman, 30 dead and some others wounded. In another incident, Pyiar Ali, 45, a passer-by, was knocked down by a bus at Tepra bus stand at about 10:30 am. He succumbed to his injuries on way to sadar hospital. Shibala thana police later seized the bus. Police said a head-on collision between a bus and a tempo at Aurangabat at Singair left seven people critically injured. Three cases were filed with respective police stations.

Three unnatural deaths

UNB, Kishoreganj

Three unnatural deaths have been reported in separate incidents in Pakundia upazila in Kishoreganj district.

Police said Akura Khatun, 18, wife of Milon Miah of Char Teki village, took her life by taking poison last week. On the same day, Selina Akther Koli, 16, daughter of Sirajul Haq Bhuiyan of Shreeramdi village, also allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself at her house. On April 29, Nazrul Islam, 32, a power-tiller driver of Nurbaranay village was electrocuted while working in an electric line at Pulerkhat bazar. Separate UD cases were filed.

Body exhumed

UNB, Jhalakati

The body of Altaf Hossain of Awraubina village in Kathalia upazila in Jhalakati was exhumed last week, a month after his death.

Police exhumed the body in presence of Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nikhil Chandra Das upon a directive by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka. The body was sent to Dhaka for autopsy. According to the death certificate, Altaf died of cardiac arrest in Dhaka on March 31 and was buried at his family graveyard. Apprehending a foul play behind the death, Altaf's family member filed a case with the CMM court on April 13 and urged for investigation into the matter. The CMM ordered to exhume the body on April 24.

Jubo League man's wrist severed

UNB, Gazipur

A Jubo League activist lost his right wrist in an attack by his rivals in Gazipur town Thursday night.

Witnesses said Khorshed Alam Khushi came under attack while he was gossiping with his friends at a tea stall near Rani Bilashmoni High School. The miscreants stabbed him indiscriminately before severing his right wrist. He was first admitted to Sadar Hospital and then shifted to Pangu (Orthopedic) Hospital in Dhaka. Locals said the attack might be the sequel to an internal conflict of the party. No case was filed yet.

Girl raped

UNB, Narayanganj

A teenage girl was gang raped in Narayanganj town Saturday night.

Police said a group of about eight culprits picked up the girl from North Satipara in the town at about 8pm. They took her to an abandoned factory and violated her there overnight. Local people rescued the girl in an unconscious state Sunday morning and took her to local police station.

Two get life term

UNB, Satkhira

A special court in Satkhira has sentenced two people to life term in jail in a women trafficking case.

The convicts, Harun Rashid and Minhajul Huq tried in absentia, were also fined Tk 10,000 each in default, to suffer two years more. According to the prosecution, police rescued five girls when they were being smuggled out to India by the convicts on January 28, 1994. But both the traffickers managed to flee. Later, police framed charges against six people, including Harun of Jessore and Minhajul of Jamalpur district. After examining the records and witnesses, the judge found the two guilty of human trafficking and handed down the judgement recently. He, however, acquitted four others, as the allegations brought against them were not proved.

Course for female UP members

BSS, Comilla

State Minister for Rural Development and Cooperatives Advocate Rahmat Ali Sunday said 'one-house-one-farm' project launched by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is a coordinated programme for achieving the socio-economic development of the rural people.

He was speaking at the concluding function of a special training and orientation course designed for female members of union parishes to implement the programme. Thirty-four women members of 17 unions of Sreepur and Kaliakoir upazilas under Gazipur district, took part in the course organised by Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BAR). He said Sreepur and Kaliakoir upazilas have already set up examples of success of the programme.



PHOTO: STAR
People of all ages formed a human chain in Mujib Sarak area in Sirajganj town recently to condemn the Ramna Batamul carnage and demand punishment to the culprits.

Sanitation now makes sense to people in Gaibandha

NAIMUL HAQ, back from Gaibandha

Two years ago, most people in Pashuram union under Shahghata upazila in Gaibandha district would not think of having a hand-pumped tube well or toilet of their own, but now the majority of them in Sardarpura and Baratkhalai villages practise hygiene and enjoy proper sanitation and safe drinking water.

This, of course, has been possible due to efforts by local NGO Samaj Kallayan Sangstha (SKS) which launched a campaign on use of sanitary latrines, safe drinking water and practice of hygiene with NGO Forum for Drinking Water and Sanitation as its partner, providing technical assistance. The NGO Forum is also supporting 61 such partner organisations in 328 villages covering eight districts in the northern region.

"We have formed village development committee (VDC) and every month we motivate people to sink tube wells and install sanitary latrines through group discussions," Md Kazimuddin Sheikh, chief of Sardarpura VDC, told a group of journalists during their recent visit to

the village.

"We get almost interest-free loans from SKS to buy tube wells and materials for latrines," said Zulekha Begum, a housewife in Sardarpura.

Abdul Latif, one of the VDC members, said, "Two years ago there had been very high incidence of water-borne diseases in the area but after the introduction of sanitation, prevalence of the diseases has come down satisfactorily."

A total of 282 groups have so far been formed since 1997 in