

# GK Project takes tumble

## Farmers now opt for self-arranged irrigation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jessore*

After about fifty years of its commissioning, the Ganges-Kabadak (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-kilometer 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 seven crore along with the main pump house became unserviceable.

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.

# Arsenic panic in Bagerhat

UNB, *Bagerhat*

People in Bagerhat district are poised to embrace the worst pure water crisis in history as arsenic continues to contaminate ground-water.

According to a survey, 80 per cent tube-wells in the district have been detected with high prevalence of arsenic, posing a serious threat to public health.

It said some of the tube-wells were pumping out arsenic eight times higher than the tolerant level.

Despite high prevalence of arsenic, the town dwellers were still using tube-well waters, as they cannot consume supply water due to presence of unhygienic elements.

There has been allegations that fish fries are occasionally found in the water supplied by the municipality.

Meanwhile, most water bodies of the district have dried up due to

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 Qudrut-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 of in Bangladesh territory, violating the 1975 Indo-Bangla treaty.

A delegation of Water Development Board, led by its Executive Engineer Matiar 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 Monnaf locked in clash over land dispute, injuring 11 people. One of the injured, Abdul Monnaf, 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 onrush 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, Joydihona, 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.



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.

# Road repairing works hinge on fund dearth in Bandarban

UNB, *Bandarban*

Crippled by fund shortage, the authorities in the district failed to repair 11 important roads of the district.

The roads are Khanhat-Dhopachhari-Bandarban (8 kms), Baroaulia-Tongkaboti (19 kms), Alikadam-Baishari (32 kms), Baishari-Naikhongchhari-Ghumdhum (40 kms), Thanchi-Remacri-Madak (45 kms) and Alikadam-Janalipara-Poamuhuri (42 kms).

Sources at the Roads and Highways Department said the government allocated only Tk 2.55 crore for the reconstruction and renovation of the roads in the current fiscal. Of this, Tk one crore has already been spent on fuel and maintenance works of its machinery.

"It's quite impossible to repair the 11 roads with the rest of the money," said an R&H engineer preferring anonymity.

He said an estimated amount of Tk 80 crore would be needed for completing the unfinished works of six roads but the government allocated only Tk 70 lakh.

With the allocated amount of Tk 70 lakh, earthworks on three-km road, construction of three culverts and HBB works of two-km road could be completed.

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), Chiringa-Lama-Alikadam (43 kms), Bandarban-Chimbuk-Ruma (54 kms), Bandarban-Roangchhari (23 kms) and Aizinagar-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-Chimbuk-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*

A total of 164 community clinics will be set up in 52 unions in Sherpur district at a cost of Tk 4.38 crore under a government's countryside programme.

The government has decided to set up 13,500 community clinics across the country in two phases to reach the healthcare facilities to the doorsteps of rural people.

According to officials at Health Department, 72 clinics will be constructed in the district in the first phase costing Tk 2.08 crore while 92 in the second phase spending Tk 2.30 crore.

Meanwhile, 68 clinics of the first phase have been completed while works on the rest two are nearing completion. Works on the clinics of

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 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 Debidar, 85 mt for 59 in Homna, 163 mt for 64 in Muradnagar, 112 mt for 94 in Barura upazila.

Besides, 88 mt of grain have been allocated for 42 projects in Brahmanpara, 108 mt for 36 in Burirchang, 140 mt for 51 in Choudhagram, 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

grain in Chandina municipality eight projects at a cost of 12 mt in Daudkandi upazila.

Meanwhile, 24 projects have been taken up under Annual Development Programme in five upazilas of the district involving Tk 1.49 crore.

According to officials, Tk 29.99 has been allocated for implementing seven projects while Tk 29.69 for six projects, Tk 29.99 for three projects, Tk 29.99 for four projects in Borura and Tk 29.98 for four projects in Nangolkot.

## Tiger skins seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Twelve pieces of hides of Royal Bengal tiger were recovered at Shodpur village under Kaliganj in the district on Sunday.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel seized the skins from a rickshaw van. Details could not be known as BDR men declined to answer to any query.

# 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, Pyjar 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. Shibabaya 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 Akhter 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 Nurbanarayan 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 Awrabunia 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 Bilasmoni 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, *Narsingdi*

A teenaged girl was gang raped in Narsingdi 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, Harunur Rashid and Minhajul Huq tried in absentia, were also fined Tk 10,000 each in default, to suffer two years more RI. 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 parishad to implement the programme. Thirty-four woman members of 17 unions of Sreepur and Kaliakoir upazilas under Gazipur district, took part in the course organised by Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARĐ). 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.



PHOTO: STAR

People cross the flood-damaged bridge on the Nakaihat-Gobindaganj road in Gaibandha. The bridge has failed to draw attention of the authorities concerned, though it has been in this state for quite a long time.

# Bumper paddy expected in Sunamganj, Naogaon

AGENCIES

Farmers in Sunamganj and Naogaon districts are expecting bumper harvest of paddy this season.

In Sunamganj, the growers are expecting a bumper harvest of Boro crop as they had made extra efforts this year to cover up the losses caused by early flooding last year.

Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) officials said over 5,000 acres of land in ten upazilas of the district would produce 30,000 maunds of excess yield.

This year, cultivation target was surpassed by 165,000 hectares of lands.

In Naogaon, farmers of the district are poised to reap another good harvest this season.

According to DAE, over 1.69 lakh hectares of land were brought under cultivation of high yielding variety of paddy against its target of 1.56 lakh hectares this year.

The output target was fixed at 4.67 lakh metric tons but officials say that the production may hit 6.36 lakh metric tons.

"If all goes well, the farm output will surpass all previous records of the district this year," said an official.

Another report from Pirojpur says: Some 17,798 hectares of lands in the district have been brought under Boro farming this

season exceeding the target of 16,200 hectares.

Agriculture officials are expecting a bumper production this year due to favourable weather and smooth supply of seeds, fertilisers and insecticides.

They said Ufshi variety has been cultivated on 17,023 hectares of land this year surpassing the target of 15,500 hectares while local variety on 755 hectares showing a rise by 700 hectares.

Upazila-wise break-up of the cultivated land: Sadar-1,600 hectares, Kawkhali-35, Nesarabad-2,350, Nazirpur-10,385, Bhandaria-58 and Mathbaria-3375 hectares.

# 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 Sardarpara and Baratkhal villages practise hygiene and enjoy proper sanitation and safe drinking water facilities at their homes.

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.

In the early 1999, Sardarpara had only 18 hand-driven tube wells and 23 makeshift latrines. After two years, the village now boasts over 150 sanitary latrines and some 175 tube wells installed in private households.

In neighbouring Baratkhal, where the SKS office is located, the achievement is quite stunning. Excepting a very few, none responds to the call of nature in the open, which was a common practice two years ago. Sanitary latrine and tube well coverage in the village is over 80 per cent whereas the national average is 42 per cent.

"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 Sardarpara 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 Sardarpara.

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 Gaibandha by SKS, which has also set up two village sanitary centres from where the organisation reaches out to people living in remote areas.

Besides other activities, SKS has its focus mainly in two areas – health and sanitation – and it is now working mostly in the flood-prone areas, covering 42 villages in six unions in

Gaibandha district and involving some 2,37,000 people of about 44,353 families who are largely dependant on agriculture.

"There was a time when people would insist us not to interfere in their private affairs, but we have broken the ice with our patience," said Russel Ahmed, Executive Director of SKS.

Ahmed added, "I chose this region as my area of activities because there were hardly any sanitary latrines or hand-pumped tube wells in the region."

"We target women first and form groups for discussion and motivation. Others have nowadays shown their interest in such group discussions, but not all show interest in becoming members of village committees which monitor the activities," said Ahmed.