

BRDB closes rural uplift project in 5 N dists

24,000 'group members' face uncertainty, Tk 50 lakh savings returned: Staff withdrawn

A CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Closure of BRDB's poverty alleviation project in 20 upazilas in greater Rangpur due to alleged fund crisis has thrown its 24,000 'group members' into uncertainty.

The BRDB (Bangladesh Rural Development Board) has also withdrawn its 97 staff from the area and returned three-fourths of the Tk 50 lakh it took as 'savings' from 'group members'.

But it did not give any micro credit to the members in two years since launching of the project in 2001, official sources said.

Leaders of different political parties including ruling BNP and its allies and of social organisations criticised closure of the project in the mona prone areas. (mona is a situation when rural people have no work before harvest in October-November.)

The project styled Polli Darida Bimochon Karmasuchi (PDBK) was

launched in 20 upzilas out of 26 in Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gibandha, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts in 2001.

It is however continuing its poverty alleviation project in six upzilas, launched in 1994.

The aim of the project was to alleviate poverty by training people in different income-generating activities like poultry, dairy, pisciculture and giving micro credit.

It enrolled 24000 numbers, 20 in one group. It gave them training and realised 'savings', promising them micro credit.

The project in the 20 upzilas was closed in March this year without any prior notice to the members.

BRDB Deputy Director Abdul Hakim Sarker at Rangpur when contacted however told The Daily Star that the project has been "suspended".

The LGRD ministry, under which BRDB operates, has a plan to start "some other poverty alleviation

projects in the region", he said.

"This is why the (BRDB) board has decided to keep all activities of the project suspended and withdrew its staff from its command areas for the time being."

But another official at BRDB's Rangpur regional office preferring unanimity said that the project has been "closed due to fund shortage". Re-launching of the project work in the area is uncertain, he claimed.

Asked why new poverty alleviation projects would be introduced instead of PDBK, the Deputy Director Said, "The reasons are best known to high officials".

Regarding withdrawal of staff, he said they were recruited for LGRD ministry's Rural Development Project-9 (RDP-9). As the project tenure expired in 1995, they became unemployed.

Later, the government absorbed them in PDBK in 2001 and expanded poverty alleviation activities to 26 upzilas from six upzilas in the

region.

Halima Khatun, a member at Kazi Para in Badarganj upzila said she was given training on tailoring and she deposited her weekly savings with PDBK's fund. But the savings were returned without giving any loan and showing any reason.

Sumi Begum of Nobdiganj in Pirgacha upzila asked why BRDB took money from them in the name of giving loan and why it withdrew its activities from Rangpur.

Mojibur Rahman Pramanik, an Awami League leader in Gangachara said the decision to close the project in the mona prone area was "very unfortunate".

Kazi Mohammed Zunnun, outgoing Chairman of Rangpur municipality said, "Government committed to provide financial support to poor people of mona prone areas in Rangpur. But the poverty alleviation project has been closed. This is self-contradictory".



An untimely flood brought havoc for the people of Netrakona haor areas. Amiruddin and his three sons are trying to salvage paddy from his field submerged under 12 feet water at Paboy village in Mononganj upzila. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

Deluge dents their fortune

70 per cent Boro crops damaged in three Netrakona upazilas : Crop loss at Tk 100 cr: Over 10 lakh people affected

JAHANGIR ALAM, Netrakona

It was an endless sheet of water. Amiruddin and his three sons with sickles in hand were taking dips from a small boat, desperately trying to salvage paddy from under water.

But their efforts turned futile under 12 feet water. Flash flood submerged 80 per cent of their Boro paddy at Paboy village in Mohongonj upzila.

"We will have nothing to eat. The lone rice crop in a year has been destroyed", he lamented while talking to this correspondent during a visit to the affected areas on Friday.

Most of the farmers in Mohongonj, Khaliajuri and Modan upzilas face the same fate.

At least 70 per cent of the ready-for-harvest Boro crops on about 1,30,000 acres in the haor areas in the three upzilas have been destroyed, according to local AED (Agriculture Extension Department) officials. They said crops on about 45,000 acres have gone under water in

Khaliajuri, 48,000 in Mohongonj and 37,000 acres in Modan.

Their statements were corroborated by Netrakona Water Development Board (WDB) officials.

The district administration estimated the loss at over 100 crore taka.

The floodwater is rising as Donu and Kongsha rivers burst embankments at several points including Asharkona and Kirthankhala. Rain in the last four days and water from upper hilly reaches across the border aggravated the situation.

Farmers, rich or poor, have hard days ahead as the lone crop in a year is gone.

Abdur Rahman a rich former at Gaglajur village in Khaliajuri upzila said he got about 4,000 mound of Boro paddy last year. This year, he got only 600 maunds as flash flood damaged 85 per cent of the crops.

He needs around 300 maunds of paddy a month for his 40-member joint family and farm labourers. He is fully dependent on Boro for the whole year.

"I have no alternative to taking loan from creditors at high interest rate, he said.

"I will have to give away almost half of next year's harvest to the creditors to repay loans", he said.

Sharecropper Nirmal Chandra Sarkar of Chakua village in Khaliajuri upzila said he got only 60 maunds this year against 300 maunds last year.

"I will have to run my family by taking loan at high interest rate and repay with paddy", he said.

Crop loss in a season has a chain affect which lasts several years. Small and marginal farmers become indebted and then turn landless. This is why the number of landless people is increasing in the haor areas, they said.

Local people including political leaders urged successive governments several times earlier for construction of flood protection dams on the rivers and at certain points in the haor areas.

This year's flood began after several breaches in the WDB

dam built on the Dhonu river at Khaliajuri last year, they said.

People led by leaders of all political parties formed a human chain in front of Netrakona Deputy Commissioner's office last week demanding interest-free agriculture loan to the affected people and construction of flood protection embankments.

Political activists including Netrakona district BNP vice-president Abdul Mannan and Awami League president Shamsuzzoha joined the human chain.

State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar during a recent visit to the district assured of agricultural loan but local people say that will trickle down to a very few of the needy because of ruling party 'touts' who reap benefit from such programmes.

There is no micro-credit activity by any local non-government organisation (NGO) in the haor areas, the local people said.



PHOTO: STAR

A partial view of a sit-in demonstration by landless people in front of Satkhira DC office on Sunday.

Sit-in before Satkhira DC office

Eviction of landless people protested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Satkhira Zila Bhumihin Samity, an association of landless people, on Sunday staged a two hours sit-in demonstration in front of Satkhira deputy commissioner's (DC) office.

The demonstration was organised in protest against eviction of landless people from government 'Khas' land and demanding realisation of landless people's 8-point demands.

Earlier, a big procession was brought out where over 3,000 landless people paraded the main streets of the town.

Presided over by Wahab Ali Sardar, president of Satkhira Zila Bhumihin Samity, the rally was

addressed, among others, by advocate Abdur Rahim, Saifullah Laskar, Abul Khair, Pran Ballav Mondal, Ashke-e-Elahi and Ashrafuzzaman.

The speakers alleged that land grabbers in connivance with some corrupt officials on April 18 had evicted 84 landless families who lived in the Jamuna shoal in Romjan Nagar union of Shyamnagar upzila for the last 30 years.

Upazila court convicts 3 high officials

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

An upazila court awarded six months 'civil jail' to three high officials including former Deputy Commissioner of Gaibandha for contempt of court.

Gobindaghanj Upazila Senior Assistant Judge Abu Zafar Md. Kamuzzaman passed the verdict on Saturday.

The four are former Gaibandha deputy commissioner Safar Raj Hossain now Establishment Secretary, former Gaibandha ADC (Rev) Abdus Satter now Deputy Commissioner Mymensingh, Assistant Commissioner Farakuzzaman and Tahsilder (revenue collector) Upendra Nath Bamman.

The then Gobindaghanj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abdul Hannan Chowdhury was also accused in the case but he died.

According to court sources, one Dilip Kumar Chakravarti had filed a case with the court in 1996 alleging that some people were trying to grab lands donated in the name of a Hindu goddess at Raja Biratin Gobindaganj upzila.

The court had issued an injunction on transfer of the property.

But the court order was violated by the officials.

Later, a contempt of court charge was brought against them.



PHOTO: STAR

Unabated erosion by the Jamuna in Sariakandi (left) and villagers shifting their homes elsewhere (right). The river devoured several hundred acres of land last one week.

Sunday's twister kills 3 in Barisal division

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The twister that battered different areas of Barisal division in the early hours of Sunday killed at least three people and injured 20 others.

The dead are Puspa Begum, 50, of Jhopkhali village and Bipul, 35, of Chardoani village in Barguna district and Ali Dorji, 60 of Ilisha in Bhola Sadar upzila. They were killed in house collapse.

The twister damaged crops, betel leaf plantations, several hundred houses and uprooted many trees and electricity poles, disrupting road links and snapping power and telephone lines.

In Amtali in Barguna district, at least 17 educational institution, three mosques and several hundred houses were damaged.

The district administrations granted Tk 5,000 for each victim's family. The damage is yet to be ascertained, official sources in the districts said when contacted.

Reports from Mollarhat in Nalchhity upzila in Jhalakati district said several educational institutions and at least 100 houses were damaged by the twister.

TALA BNP LEADER MURDER AL men nabbed to save killers, leaders allege

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Satkhira district Awami League leaders at a press conference on Sunday alleged that police are arresting their party activists by falsely implicating them in Altaf Hossain murder case.

Tala thana BNP president ABM Altaf Hossain was killed by unidentified men at Patkelghata bazaar in Tala upzila on May 4 night.

AL Convenor Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a written statement at the press conference held at the party office here claimed that Altaf was killed due to intra-party feud in BNP and the wife of the slain leader had refused to file a case fearing reprisal by party men.

But police are arresting AL workers and innocent people to hide the killers and divert the case.

It is mysterious that Abdur Rahman, Altaf's opponent in the local BNP and accused in several cases, filed a case after the murder.

Shikh Mujibur Rahman demanded neutral probe into the case, arrest of the culprits and release of AL leaders and innocent people arrested.

Other AL leaders were present at the press conference.

ICT course opens at Govt Azizul Haque College in July

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A one-year Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) course on information communication technology will be opened at Government Azizul Haque College in Bogra in July.

This will be the first PGD course at a government college in the country, its principal Dr. Mosir Uddin told newsmen on Sunday.

This would be a pilot project and could be turned into a three-year course. The Ministry of Science and Information Communication Technology took the decision recently.

Any graduate aged up to 45 who got second division will be eligible for appearing at admission test for 35 seats.

Students will have to deposit a refundable security money of Tk 10,000 to ensure regular attendance in class. The money will be refunded after completion of course.

Teachers will be appointed and tender for purchase of computers and other equipment will floated soon, the principal said.

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