

Teesta irrigation project turns virtually useless

Political leaders demand release of equitable share of water in dry season

RAFIQUE SARKER from Rangpur

The Teesta Barrage, the largest irrigation project in the country, has virtually failed to supply irrigation water in its command area during dry season due to less flow of water in the river.

Thousands of farmers in its command area have become frustrated, as they did not get water in their lands since commission of the First Phase of the barrage in 1998.

According to records with the Water Development Board (WDB) office in Rangpur, the Teesta in Bangladesh turns into almost a "dry channel from November to March".

The lowest flow of water in the Teesta at Dalia point was about 4000 cusec in March 22, 2003, 3470 cusec in March 22, 2002, and 4050 cusec in March 22, 2001.

The Teesta Barrage project was built at a cost of about Tk 1000 crore.

About 70,000 farmers in 12 upzilas in Nilphamari, Rangpur and

Dinajpur districts have left the hope of getting irrigation water from the project through canals.

A highly placed official of the project on condition of anonymity said farmers in Rangpur and Dinajpur districts under the project's command area will not get water in dry season unless India releases an equitable share of water through the river.

India has constructed a barrage across the river at Gozaldoba about 100 km upstream and diverts a lion share of the Teesta water during dry season, ignoring the demand in Bangladesh, he said.

The 615 metre barrage has 44 outlets, 110 metre canal head regulator with 8 outlets, a silt trap on 45 hectares of land, 2470 metre closure dam. The constructions include 80 km flood control embankment, 33.67 km main canal, 275 km major secondary canal, 1450 km primary canal, 2720 km tertiary canal and other structures.

The purpose of the barrage was to supply 283 cusec water to 79378 hectares of land in 12 upazilas in Rangpur, Dinajpur and Nilphamari districts during the dry season.

But the water level in Teesta decreases so much during dry season that the barrage could hardly discharge 50 cusec of water to its main canal. Hence, most of the canals under the project remained useless during dry season.

Only a few hectares of land under Nilphamari district could be brought under water supply.

Already, some parts of the secondary, primary and tertiary canals and some major structures of the project have been damaged as those could not be utilised. Some of the iron structures have been stolen as those were left inoperative.

"Only equitable share of water through the Teesta can make the barrage functional," said GM Kader, a Jatiya Party lawmaker elected from Rangpur-3 constituency.

"We hope the government will arrive at an understanding with the India government soon for equitable share of water through the Teesta", he added.

Awami League legislator Azaduzzaman Noor elected from Nilphamari-2 constituency when contacted regretted that the largest irrigation project in the country has become useless to farmers for whom it was constructed.

He blamed the then government for constructing the barrage before reaching an accord with India.

"I doubt whether the government's sincerity to make India agree to sing an accord for equitable share of the Teesta water", Noor said.

Ruling BNP's Rangpur district unit president Rahim Uddin Bhorsa said, "The secretary level meeting of the Joint Rivers Commission today (September 14) in Dhaka must be fruitful. An accord should follow the meeting", he hoped.

Flash flood in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Flash flood submerged Aman seedlings on vast low-lying lands in four upazilas in Gaibandha district.

With sudden swelling of the Brahmaputra following onrush of water from across the border, about 5,000 hectares of Aman land have been inundated in Gaibandha Sadar, Sunderganj, Fulchari and Saghata upazilas.

The affected unions are Fazlupur, Arendabari, Fulchari, Gajaria Kanchipara, Uria, Kholahti, Moller Char, Gideri and Kamrjani.

As the the water level of the river continued to rise yesterday, erosion took an alarming turn in Gaibandha Sadar, Fulchari and Shaghata along western bank of the river, displacing about 500 families.

Truck with smuggled goods caught, released

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

A truck loaded with smuggled Indian goods valued at about Tk 43 Lakh was caught in Jessore town Sunday night but was later released.

Sources and witnesses said a team of customs officials led an Assistant Commissioner (VAT) chased a Dhaka-bound truck from Palbari area on the outskirts of the town. The truck was loaded at Benapole. The driver drove the truck through the town to evade arrest.

As police intercepted it on a road in Ghope area, the high customs official came and told police to go. By this time the owner of the goods came and talked to the official.

The witnesses said there was understanding between the official and the owner.

The goods were then loaded in another truck (Chudanga Ta 05-0012), which left for Dhaka at about 1:45 am yesterday.

Resist fanatics, BSD rally told

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Demanding fair investigation into the August 21 grenade attack on Awami League rally in Dhaka, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) Gaibandha held a protest meeting at the Shaheed Minar here on Monday.

Speakers at the meeting said fundamentalists could be behind the attack. They are gaining more power under the protection of the government.

There is no alternative to a united movement by progressive and democratic movement to resist the "evil forces", they said.

They also demanded supply of agri-inputs for free to flood affected farmers.

Presided over by Gaibandha BSD Convener Ahsanul Habib Sayeed, the rally was addressed by, among others, Sudhangshu Chakravarti, Monjurul Alam Mithu, Golam Sade Lebu and Nowshaduzzaman.

The rally was followed by a procession in the town.

Barguna lawyers boycott magistrate courts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Barguna lawyers are boycotting magistrate courts protesting alleged inaction by the administration in taking steps for speedy disposal of cases.

A team from the Barguna District Bar Association met the Deputy Commissioner on Saturday and urged him to appoint a sufficient number of "qualified first class magistrates" in contingency courts for speedy disposal of cases. But the DC allegedly ignored them, sources alleged.

The Bar Association later held an emergency meeting and decided to boycott all magistrate courts.

'Rotten' wheat imported knowingly

Case after test report, officials say

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Unloading of the consignment of "rotten and stinky" wheat imported from India was completed at Syedpur railway station yesterday under police guard.

As the administration has no suitable place to store the huge quantity, it has been kept at the godown of the importer at the BSCIC industrial estate at Saidpur. The godown has been sealed and police have been deployed there, official sources said.

Haji Mostaq Ahamed imported the consignment of 2020 tonnes of wheat. He has a flour mill in the BSCIC estate.

These were carried to Syedpur by 30 Indian wagons on Friday. Police seized 11 truckload of the wheat on Sunday when it became known that the food grains were rotten. About 70 tonnes were unloaded before police intervened.

Samples of the wheat have been handed over to BADC (Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation) for test.

Nilphamari Police

Superintendent Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun told this correspondent that all papers have been seized from the importer and a case will be lodged if BADC says the wheat is unfit for human consumption.

The Deputy Commissioner, the SP, and district food department officials were present when the consignment was seized at the railway station on Sunday.

Officials said yesterday the wagons of Indian railway will be released in a day or two because Bangladesh government will have to pay demurrage of Tk seven lakh per day as per international law if those are detained.

They said the argument placed by the importer that the wheat could be damaged by rainwater on way is not acceptable. As per law, food grains imported from abroad in railway wagons must be covered with water resistant things like polythene. But no such arrangement was seen in the wagons.

"So, there is reason to believe that rotten wheat was imported knowingly", one official said.

Meanwhile, tests by the district food department revealed that the moisture content in the wheat was much higher than the normal range.

The importer also argued that he was cheated by the Indian exporter-LMJ International of Punjab.

To this, officials said that, had it been so, he should have informed the bank concerned and officials before unloading. But a large portion of the wheat was unloaded and taken away before police intervened, they said. The LC for the import was opened through Islami Bank, Saidpur.

Asked why he did not inform police before starting the unloading, the importer said he was out of Syedpur at that time, the officials said.

"It is acceptable that he was out of Syedpur while such a big consignment was being unloaded?" said an official.

The import price of the wheat was Tk 6 pet kilogram, according to the papers seized. The market price of good quality wheat is between Tk 11 and 12 in Bangladesh now, sources said.

SNAPS

Tk 1.29 cr for Netrakona primary schools

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

The government has sanctioned Tk 1.29 crore for repair of 778 flood damaged government, non-government and registered primary schools in Netrakona district. According to District Primary Education Officer (DPEO) Mohammad Azizul Haque, Tk 18 lakh nine thousand will be spent for repair of 112 primary schools in Netrakona Sadar upazila, Tk 16 lakh for 96 in Kaimakanda, Tk 19 lakh 54,000 for 115 in Kendua, Tk 12 lakh 55,000 for 71 in Madan, Tk 6 lakh 90,000 for 36 in Purbadhula, Tk 10 lakh nine thousand for 54 in Atpara, Tk 13 lakh 55,000 for 77 Barhatta, Tk seven lakh 55,000 for 59 in Khaliajury, Tk 14 lakh 65,000 for 81 in Mohongonj and Tk 8 lakh 55,000 for 55 primary school in Durgapur upazila.

Return local govts' power

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Bandarban district unit of the National Union Parishad Forum (NUPF) demanded return of local governments' power to lease markets, government waterbodies, river terminals and other toll collection points. This will strengthen local governments and enhance rural development, Hla Thoai Hree, Bandarban NUPF president told a press conference here on Sunday.

Disability no problem for Sumi

Walking on crutches since childhood, she is now a BA student and computer operator

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Sumi Gour was physically disabled when she was one and a half years following attack with polio.

Walking on crutches with the left leg paralysed, she is now educated and self-reliant. Now she is a student of BA at Muktagachr Shaheed Smiriti Government College at Muktagacha and working as a

computer operator and accountant at the Community Centre for the Handicapped (CCH) in the district town. Sumi attends office at the CCH, travelling about 15 kilometres every day.

Daughter of Shyamol Gour and Arati Gour, Sumi was eager for studies and started going to school with the help of her father.

After completing primary education, she entered local Nogendra

Pilot Girls High School and passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination in 1998 in Second Division. Sumi gratefully remembers the care and affection of her parents, her uncle Kashia Gour and Selim Jahangir, a teacher at the primary school who encouraged her to continue studies. She passed the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination in 2001. Now she is a final year student of BA.

"As I am disabled, I have to do something to be self-reliant. I got the job by dint of merit", she told this correspondent at her office recently.

She participated in a training course on computer at the Centre for Rehabilitation of Paralysed (CRP) at Savar in Dhaka in 2002.

"After the training I was convinced that disability is no problem", a confident Sumi said. "Any body with disability like me can be educated and self-reliant".

Sumi wants to be lawyer because this will upgrade her social position and help her to work for the underprivileged in the society.

"I want to do some thing for the disabled so that people remember me after my death", Sumi said.

She is also working with CRP self-help group in her area (in Muktagacha upazila) since 2001 as a volunteer.

"I spend my holidays with disabled people in my area and organise them, discuss how disability can be overcome. I encourage disabled people to be educated and trained to become self-reliant. I have sent some of them to the CRP for training".

Second among a brother and two sisters, an unmarried Sumi said she wants to lead a life with honour so that no one can ignore her.

But she feels that not all in the society appreciate her struggle, Sumi regretted. People should change their attitude towards. The physically disabled should get equal opportunity like others in the society in all walks of life, she said.



Disabled Sumi working at her office CCH in Mymensingh town. PHOTO: STAR

After completing primary education, she entered local Nogendra

'Preserve Sundarbans bio-diversity'

Govt, NGOs urged to take up joint steps

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Speakers at a discussion meeting yesterday said, Satkhira district is blessed with a unique World Heritage Site -- the Sundarbans.

But the biggest mangrove forest in the world is being threatened now because of plunder.

Sundarbans' existence with its natural diversity and resources is essential not only for Bangladesh but also for the world, they said.

The discussion on "Life and livelihood of the people living on the outskirts of the Sundarbans" was jointly organised by Biswas Foundation and Coastal Development Partners. It was held at the conference room of the Biswas Foundation.

The speakers said the forest is being plundered in the name of earning livelihood now. This must stop.

Former chairman of Debhata Upazila Parishad Abdur Rahman

presided over the discussion, participated by, among others, Parulia Union Parishad Chairman Golam Faruk Babu, and its members Siful Islam, Moazzem Hossain, Abul Hossain, Salma Mahabbat, Basonti Rani, Fatema Kulsum, Alfatunnesa and Zahangir Alam.

They emphasised the need for creating awareness among the people living around the Sundarbans to preserve its resources and the bio diversity.

A social movement should be launched to protect the Sundarbans and its resources because if the plunder continues unabated, the forest will be destroyed some day.

They also stressed the need for concerted efforts by government and non-government organisation to create awareness among the Sundarban beneficiaries to utilise its resources more gainfully maintaining the bio-diversity.



Samples of the rotten wheat (left) and bags being unloaded at Syedpur railway station, snapped yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

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