

Once a bane now a boon

Bhogai river rubber dam has changed life in 20 villages in Nalitabari. Re-excavation of only 1.5 km canal can bring more 5000 acres under IRRI-Boro cultivation

JAHANGIR ALAM *back from Sherpur*

NETRAKONA: Once a bane, the Bhogai river, flowing from hills across the border, is now a boon for the people of Nalitabari upazila in Sherpur district.

A rubber dam built at Jamirakanda, has changed life in 20 villages.

In Jamirakanda and adjoining villages, around 95 per cent farmers are now well-off from cultivation of IRRI-Boro and vegetables with irrigation water provided by the rubber dam at a nominal cost. The rest five percent who are landless have also work round the year.

The situation was different earlier as flooding by the river damaged crops almost every year.

A 12-member Bhogai River Rubber Dam Management Committee manages the irrigation project. A farmer have to pay only Tk 400 to irrigate one acre of IRRI-Boro land in a season, which would have

cost at least Tk 25,00 if done through shallow or deep tube well. Farmers pay the money to the management committee, which utilises it to pay the small number of staff and further development of the project.

This year, over 5500 acres of land have been brought under cultivation of high yielding varieties of rice and vegetables.

The rubber dam was set up by the Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) in 1997. The dam at Jamirakanda obstructs the flow of Bhogai, swelling the water. The swollen water is then channelled to croplands through 160 big and small drains. The rubber dam is the third of its kind in the country.

The command area of the project can be increased easily, Nalitabari Upazila Engineer Ashraful Haque told this correspondent during a recent visit.

Now the water is allowed to swell up to 3.75 feet because five kilometres of both banks of the river are low. Water will overflow the banks if swelled further.

If the height of the banks can be increased by only two feet, the water can be swelled to almost double the command area.

A Tk 68 lakh proposal has been submitted to the authorities to raise the height of banks. But money is yet to be sanctioned.

Aminul Islam Jinnah, president of the rubber dam managing committee said re-excavation of only 1.50 km of the 2.50 km Buri Bhogai, a tributary of Bhogai, could bring another 5000 increase under irrigation in Ramchandrakura and Kakorkandi unions.

One kilometre of the tributary was re-excavated during the past Awami League government.

Fatama Begum, one of the directors of the management com-

mittee, said before setting up of the dam around 80 per cent of the people in the area were poor. The rubber dam has changed their life.

Answeruddin, 45, a farmer in Jugania village, said he has only two acres of cultivated land which yielded hardly 40 maunds of paddy a year earlier. Now he can produce 150 to 160 maunds. His two sons are students at Nalitabari College and the daughter goes to Nalitabari High School.

Abdul Khalak of Kakorkandi village said he produced 310 maunds of Boro from four acres last year. He expects to produce more this year. He used to only around 75 maunds earlier.

When contacted, Jatiya Sangsad Whip from the area Jahad Ali Chowdhury said he is trying his best for re-excavation of 1.50 km of Buri Bhogai under the Food for Work Programme. He hopes to accomplish the job soon.



PHOTO: STAR

Water flowing over the rubber dam at Jamirakanda (left) being taken to IRRI-Boro lands through a canal.

SNAPS

Outlaw arrested with shutter gun

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

An outlaw was arrested by the members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) from Paharpur village in Dumuria upazila on Saturday. Arrested Diness Mistry, 24, son of Rabi Mistry is an armed cadre of the outlawed NBCCP. A shutter gun and two bullets were also recovered from his possession, according to police. He was handed over to Dumuria police for interrogation.

Firewood seized from brick fields

A CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

Madaripur Sadar Upazila administration in a raid conducted recently seized 5,100 maunds of firewood from different brick-fields, according to official sources. In separate raids conducted by the Fisheries Department, fishing nets worth Tk one lakh were seized from the Aial Khan and 'Jatka,' small size Hilsa worth Tk 2, 500 were seized from Puran Bazaar area in the municipality. The teams were led by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abdul Matin. Later, the fishing nets were burnt and money earned by selling 'Jatka' and firewood were deposited to government treasury.

Manikganj JCD demands trial of Kibria murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Ruling BNP's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal brought out a procession and held a rally in front of the Press Club yesterday demanding trial of the murder of former minister SAMS Kibria. The processionists paraded different streets of the town. Speakers at the rally said opposition parties are cashing in on the murder and urged the government to nab the killers. It was addressed by, among others, JCD district president Motaleb Hossain, Kazi Raihan Uddin Tuku, Kazi Mostaq Hossain Dipu, Reaz Mahmud, Golam Abedin Kaiser, Zohurul Alam and Bazlur Rahman.

White canes distributed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

White canes, educational implements and economic assistance were distributed to 41 disabled persons here by local NGO, Shapilaful Mahila Sangstha on Saturday. Patuakhali Sadar Upazila Social Welfare Officer Motiur Rahman handed over those at a simple ceremony held at the conference room of the NGO. Economic assistance amounting Tk 7,500 were distributed to 10 disabled persons for their treatment. White canes worth Tk 7,500 were given to 14 disabled persons, Tk 7,500 were given to 12 disabled persons for income generating activities and educational implements worth Tk 2,500 were distributed to five disabled persons.

Accept failure, step down

Rajshahi opposition parties, professionals urge government

RU CORRESPONDENT

Four opposition political parties and the Rajshahi Peshajibi Parishad (a body of professionals) brought out separate processions and held rallies in the city during hartal hours yesterday demanding resignation of the government, saying it has lost people's confidence.

Awami League (AL), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) held its joint meeting in front of Rajshahi Press Club.

Leaders of the four parties urged

the workers to prepare for an all-out agitation to oust the government.

They also called upon all 'progressive forces' to join the oust-government agitation.

Rajshahi city Awami League President Mahabubul Haque Dulu presided over the rally, addressed by, among others, city AL General Secretary Khairuzzman Liton, doctors' association president Sayed Shafiqul Alam, city JSD General Secretary Abdullah Al Masud, city CPB President Abul Kalam Azad, BSC General Secretary Lutfuruzzman Babu, Chhatra League leaders Rashidul Islam, Abdul Momin, Habibur

Rahman Babu and Chhatra Union General Secretary Sajal Biswas.

Earlier, the opposition parties paraded different city streets.

Rajshahi Peshajibi Parishad held its rally at the Zero Point.

Speakers at the rally also demanded arrest and trial of the killers of former finance minister and Awami League (AL) lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria. Its leader Dr Shafiqul Alam presided over the rally.

They said the government has no right to stay in power as it could not arrest and try any of the culprits behind the bomb and grenade blasts.

Ensure security of newsmen

RUJ holds rally, procession

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi journalist yesterday brought out a mourning procession in the city and held a rally at Moni Chatter protesting the murder of Khulna journalist Shaikh Belal Uddin.

The programme was organized by Rajshahi Union of Journalist (RUJ).

Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalist (BFUJ) Assistant Secretary Rejaul Karim Raju presided over the protest rally, addressed by, among others, Liyakot Ali, Rajshahi Editors Forum Convener and Editor of local daily Sonali Sangbad, Sonar Desh Editor Abu Hossain Abdul Hossain Malek, BFUJ member and human rights activist Jahangir

Alam Akkas, RUJ Vice President Abdus Sabur, its member SM Shaju, Rajshahi City Press Club General Secretary Julfikar Ali and Jatiya Sangbadik Sangstha General Secretary Rafik Alam.

They demanded proper investigation into all bomb attacks on journalists, punishment of culprits and security of journalist in the country.

NEGLECT TO DUTY

Probe body for action against 2 Jessore Hospital doctors

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Two physicians of Jessore 250-bed Hospital will face departmental action for their negligence of duty.

A three-member probe committee has recommended the action after one and a half months of investigation. The probe body's recommendation was sent to the Director General (DG) of Health on Sunday.

BNP activist Bellal of Bajadanga village died without treatment at the hospital due to negligence of duties of Dr Sirajul Islam and Dr Harun-or-Rashid on December 30 last year. He was admitted to the hospital following a road accident on December 29.

The probe body was formed by the hospital superintendent following submission of a prayer by Bellal's relatives.

Interest-free loans for women

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The Social Welfare Directorate has disbursed Tk 10,000 interest free loan each to 42 poor women in Fulchari upazila for self-reliance through income generating activities.

The loans will be utilised for small trade, raising poultry and goat rearing.

Gaibandha Deputy Commissioner Tapon Chandra Majumder, Fulchari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Gautom Kumar Bhattachariya, Social Welfare Deputy Director Mozammel and Kanchipara Union Parishad Chairman Akber Hossain were present among others.

Teesta project farmers' woe

15 breaches in embankments since commissioning: Farmers allege faulty construction and repair

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Repeated breaches in embankments of canals under Teesta Irrigation Project has become a bane for farmers in its command area in Nilphamari and Dinajpur districts.

IRRI-Boro crops on vast areas are damaged almost every year.

This has raised a concern among farmers, and many of them are now questioning the project's viability.

At least 15 major breaches took place in embankments on different canals since the project was commissioned on June 30, 1998.

Each breach either floods fields or keeps irrigation suspended for days, which affect IRRI-Boro crops, they said.

The embankments give in due to faulty repair and use of sand instead of soil in the work, many of the farmers alleged while talking to this correspondent during a recent visit.

But project officials allege sabotage. They also filed cases.

The latest breach took place on Saturday in the Dinajpur Irrigation Canal embankment. Waters gushing through the 100 feet breach inundated 15000 hectors of IRRI-Boro

lands in Dakhkin Desibai village in Jaldhaka upazila in Nilphamari. The canal also breached at Deviganj village in Chichirbandar upazila in Dinajpur on the same day.

The same canal breached at Champatoli village in Dinajpur on February 1, inundating 1000 hectares of Irri-Boro lands.

Local people in both the areas alleged that the embankments gave in due to faulty construction.

But the Water Development Board (WDB) authorities blamed local people, saying stealing of canal water through underground pipe was the cause.

The Teesta Irrigation Project has 3,81,000 acres of land under its command area in 12 upazilas in Nilphamari, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts.

The project aimed at producing 4,87,000 tonnes of paddy and 82,000 tonnes of wheat worth about Tk 452 crore.

But the target is still far away. It was gathered that breach in canals started after commissioning of the project in 1998.

On September 1, 1998, embankment of the main irrigation canal breached at Dundibari village in Jaldhaka upazila in Nilphamari district.

In February 1999, the

Rangpur Irrigation Canal embankment breached at six points at Magura, Balagram, Nautara and Khalishe Chapani villages in Nilphamari.

In 2000, the Dinajpur Irrigation Canal embankment was damaged at Kalitala village near Nilphamari town.

Next year, on February 21, the same thing happened to Rangpur Irrigation Canal at Dumuria village in Kishoreganj upazila in Nilphamari.

The same canal breached at Arasi Kathali village in Jaldhaka upazila in August 2003 and at Dolapara Magura village in Kishoreganj in March 2004.

This correspondent while visiting embankments of the main irrigation canal, Dinajpur Canal and the Rangpur Canal found those vulnerable at different points.

Local farmers alleged that the embankments breached as those were not repaired properly.

WDB men responsible for their alleged negligence are not punished but farmers have to flee homes as they file cases after damage, they alleged.

They demanded a probe to ascertain why breaches take place often.

Lands of 14 Hindu families occupied in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The members of 14 poor minority families are allegedly being tortured by local 'Siddique Bahini,' at a remote village here.

They allegedly occupied about 12 acres of land including the land of a temple and a crematory at Kapalipara village village, about 15 kilometre west of Dashmina upazila headquarters, according to 3 affected persons, Shakhi Charan Howlader, Monoranjan Howlader and Jugal Chandra Howlader.

'Siddique Bahini' men are also allegedly trying to evict them from their homesteads, according to sufferers. They lodged a complaint with the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) on February 6. The UNO said to this correspondent that he had asked the Dashmina Police Station Officer-in-Charge to take necessary action after proper investigation.

Dashmina PS OC Ranajit Kumar told The Daily Star, an investigation has been progressing.

Text of Indian

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

13. While democracy remains India's abiding conviction, the importance of our neighbourhood requires that we remain engaged with whichever government is exercising authority in any country in our neighbourhood. Our sympathy will always be with democratic and secular forces. We will promote people to people interaction and build upon the obvious cultural affinities that bind our peoples together. We need to go beyond governments and engage the peoples of South Asia to create a compact of peace and harmony throughout our region. To remain relevant, SAARC must begin to function as an effective vehicle to facilitate such contacts, bringing scholars, artists, scientists, youth and sportsmen together in regular events.

14. India is fully aware that its destiny is inseparable from what happens in its neighbourhood. For our own sustained economic development and the welfare of our people we need a peaceful and tranquil periphery. We also believe that the establishment of a peaceful neighbourhood is integrally linked to economic development in our neighbouring countries, an objective that would be best served by India giving access to its neighbours to its huge and growing market. Economic integration in the sub-continent must restore the natural flow of goods, peoples and ideas that characterized our shared space as South Asians, and which now stands interrupted due to political divisions.

15. India wishes to reassure its neighbours that it respects their independence and sovereignty. What it regards as unhelpful is the display of narrow nationalism based on hostility towards India that often becomes a cover for failure to deliver on promises made to their own peoples. This inhibits the development of normal relations, including economic cooperation, and prevents our region from emerging as a region of both political stability and economic dynamism.

16. The people of South Asia are one of the most talented and creative people anywhere in the world. They have won honours for their motherland in distant climes. If these creative energies of over 1.3 billion people were pooled together what heights could we not achieve? Let us make a new compact, therefore, among the countries of South Asia. Let us exorcize the ghosts of the past and join hands together across our borders, to unleash the immense energies of our peoples in a shared pursuit of collective prosperity. Our peoples deserve nothing less.



A partial view of the audience at the discussion meeting on Sundarbans, held in Satkhira yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR