

BPC fuel depots in Balashi, Chilmari empty for 3 weeks

IRRI-Boro in Gaibandha, Kurigram affected

REZAUL HAQ, Gaibandha

Two floating fuel depots in Gaibandha and Kurigram districts are dry for about three weeks as oil tankers can not approach them because the Jamuna channel has silted up. Lack of fuel supply from the depots has hit cultivation of



PHOTO: STAR

BPC's floating fuel depot at Balashi in Gaibandha is empty for about three weeks as tankers can not approach it because of the silted Jamuna channel.

IRRI-Boro and Rabi crops in their command areas, sources said.

The two floating depots at Balashi in Gaibandha and at Chilmari in Kurigram with a capacity to store four lakh litres of diesel each were set up by Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to supply diesel to farmers in the

areas round the year at low transport cost.

No oil tanker could reach the depots since December 14 as the silted Jamuna channel lost navigability, depot officials told this correspondent yesterday.

Matiur Rahman, in-charge of Balashi depot, said MV Shamira

carried six lakh litres and MV Taposh carried four lakh 16 thousand litres to the two depots on December 14 and that was the last supply so far.

At least seven feet depth of water is needed for oil tankers to ply while the water level is three to four feet at certain points of the Jamuna channel now, he said.

Usually, at least 90 lakh litres of diesel is needed to be supplied from Balashi depot to meet the demand in its command area during the peak Irri-Boro season during January-March, he said. So supply of fuel oil should be restored through dredging silted channel, he added.

When contacted over cell phone, Mohammed Ali, in-charge of Chilmari depot, said the depot is empty for over three weeks.

BPC sources said its Bagabari depot in Pabna has a stock of 3.91 crore litres of diesel against a requirement of about 7.71 crore litres for 16 northern districts during the current month.

"Bagabari depot is supplying half of the requirement and we are anxious for diesel supplies to meet the demand during the peak Irri-Boro season", said Shahajada Anwarul Kadir, president of North Bengal Fuel Distribution Association.

Unabated illegal sand lifting from Meghna, Titas river beds

SHEIKH SHAHIDUL ISLAM, B'baria

Illegal sand lifting from Meghna and Titas river beds near Brahmanbaria town is threatening the river banks with erosion and damaging the ecology. The course of the rivers in the area may be changed if the illegal activity continues, local people and environmentalists apprehend.

Sand lifters enjoying political clout are doing a brisk business while the government is being deprived of revenue due to the illegal sand lifting.

Several groups of unscrupulous sand traders are lifting sand by dredging Meghna river beds near Ashuganj (North), Ashuganj (West), Kederkhola, Bancharampur and Daskandi areas and Titas beds in West Uzanishar, Rajabariakandi, Gukarna Ghat, Chandura and Bancharampur. The two rivers flow through the district.

The lifters are informing the local people that they have permission of high authority to lift the sands from the riverbeds.

Most of the sand traders use mechanised dredgers and dredge the river beds in an unplanned way. This will aggravate erosion and cause flood in the rainy season, locals in the areas told this corre-

spondent. Locals said they protested the illegal activity but to no effect as most of the sand lifters are locally influential and have links with major political parties. At Shahbajpur point, a dredger is in operation in Titas river for more than one year.

The sand lifters tell locals that they obtained permission from authorities but the district administration said they did not give permission to any of the sand lifters.

They dredge the river beds up to 100 metres or more, locals said at Shahbajpur, Rajabaria Kandi, Budhumti, Islampur, and Chandura areas in Sarail and Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila. Such unplanned dredging will cause erosion of river banks and floods, they said.

It was gathered that one company lifted about one corer cubic feet sand at Shahbajpur with out paying any revenue to the government. On information, a team from the Deputy Commissioner's office went to the spot and collected Tk 20,00,000.00 as revenue from the party.

Last year, some sand lifters lifted sand and soil from Kederkhola, Daskandi, Bancharampur and Ashuganj points of Megahan river. On information, Nabinagar Upazila and Brahmanbaria district administra-

tions stopped the unauthorised dredging there.

But the illegal sand lifting from Meghna river beds was started again at several points between Brahmanbaria and Narsigdi districts.

When officials from Brahmanbaria district administration rushes to the spot, the sand lifters shifted their dredgers to Naringdi district areas and came back again.

At Charlapang vailage in Nabinagar upazila, Meghna erosion devoured at least 20 houses and 100 trees as its bank weakened and collapsed due to dredging of its bed, said Md. Gulam Kibria, chairman of West Nabinagar Union Parishad.

Some locals including Sadekur Rahman and Ashrafur Karim told this correspondent that they lodged complaints with the district administration but the illegal sand lifting continues.

The sand lifters have created several huge dumping points along the river banks. This correspondent during a visit saw sands piled up at several points including Ashuganj, Meghan Ghat, Shalgong Ghat, Kalishima Ghat, Titas Ghat and Kurulia.

Sub-divisional Engineer of Brahmanbaria Water Development

Board said they have no plan to dredge the river in Brahmanbaria area. When asked, he said he does not know who allowed the sand lifters to lift sand from the river beds. Sources at the Deputy Commissioner's office said giving permission for sand lifting is stopped.

There are six spots for sand lifting. These are Lohor Nadi Balumahal (sand field in the river bed), Dharkhar Mauja Titas Nadi Balumahal, Chinai

Nadi Balumahal, Haura Nadi Balumahal, Bijoy Nadi Balumahal and 'Bijani Nadi Balumahal. These spots were not leased to any one, the sources said.

They said they received several complaints from villagers against sand lifting.

It is learnt that last year, all Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) under the order of Deputy Commissioner of Brahmanbaria submitted a report about the situations of lifting sand of the respective areas of the district.

When contacted, Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner Sayed Ahmed Safa said he took over few days back and knew about illegal sand lifting. He said steps will be taken soon to stop illegal sand lifting.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Fashionable horse carts, used by Zaminders and affluent people in the past, are now lost in the race with motorised vehicles. But many in Rajshahi city still try to cling to their forefathers' profession. The photo was taken from near PN Girls High School in the city.

AL-BNP CLASH Ex-state minister Milon among 129 sued

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

At least 129 leaders and activists of Kochua BNP and front organisations including former state minister for education A N M Ehsanul Hoque Milon were sued in three separate cases filed with a magistrate court here following BNP-Awami League (AL) clash in Kochua Sadar upazila on January 4.

In one case filed on January 7, former state minister Milon and 51 others were accused. Milon allegedly fired shots from his pistol on a procession brought out by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) on the day, Chandpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Obaidur Rahman and court sources said.

Kachua BCL president Kamal Hossain Tito sustained bullet injuries in his leg.

Kochua AL leader Sadeq Munshi filed another case against 64 leaders and activists of BNP and front organisations for allegedly ransacking his business establishments the same day.

Masudur Rahman, manager of a petrol pump belonging to AL leader and former state minister for planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir filed another case against 12 BNP men for ransacking the pump on January 11. Milon could not be contacted for comments.

HSTU classes now to begin on Jan 21

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

First year Honours classes at Haji Danesh Science and Technology University (HSTU), scheduled to begin yesterday, will now begin on January 21.

However, the orientation programme scheduled for January 18 will remain unchanged, a press release said.

Hide traders in Rangpur, Dinajpur hostage to Dhaka tanners

Tanners' 'low prices' may encourage smuggling, traders say

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The quality of hides and skin collected in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur districts during Eid-ul-Azha this year may fall as local traders were compelled to preserve those in traditional unscientific process to avert loss because tanners in Dhaka are reluctant to buy those at 'reasonable prices', traders said.

The rigid stance by the tanners may open the door for smuggling across the border, they said.

The tanners just before the Eid asked them to purchase hides and skin at Tk 60 and Tk 40 per square

feet respectively. But due to high price of sacrificial animals this year, their prices were also higher. They had to buy hides at around Tk 70 per square feet and skin at Tk 47, traders said.

Harun-ur-Rashid, general secretary of Greater Rangpur Hides and Skin Traders Association, said availability of hides and skin during this year's Eid was also less than last year. Political instability and high price of sacrificial animals were the main reasons, he said.

He estimated that around two lakh cows and one lakh goats were sacrificed during the last Eid.

Traders collected over half of it and the rest is still with different madrasas and mosque committees, who also preserved those in the traditional process.

Hides can be preserved for about 15 days by using iodine-less salt. After 15 days, salt is used again to preserve it for another 15 days. Hides can be preserved for about three months in this process but its colour starts fading and quality falls.

Harun said small traders will lose if they supply hides and skin at prices offered by tanners.

Moreover, an amount of about Tk 15 crore of 40 traders in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur from last year's supplies is still unpaid by 10 tanneries in Dhaka, he claimed.

Kased Ali, a trader in Nilphamari town, said he has preserved the collected hides in traditional way as tanners in Dhaka refused to give the enhanced price.

Mokdum Mia, a member of Rangpur Hides Traders Association, said he will not supply hides to Dhaka tanneries on deferred payment as last year's bill is still unpaid. He and many others have preserved hides and skin in the traditional way, he said.

The traders said quality of hides and skin will fall if preserved for more than --- months. They urged the government to intervene to that tanners procure the stored hides and skin as reasonable prices this year to save the major export item.



PHOTO: STAR

A trader in Nilphamari town applying non-iodised salt again to preserve hides.

Rais Uddin's Tk 60,000 fish

Traditional fish fair in Moulvibazar attracts thousands from different districts

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

Rais Uddin came to the traditional fish fair again this year. From his boyhood, he never missed the annual fair on the bank of Kushiara at Sherpur, about 22 kilometers from Moulvibazar district town.

Fisherman Rais Uddin is 60 now. The fair is being held for about 100 years, drawing attractive fishes and thousands of buyers from greater Sylhet and other districts as well.

Every year he comes to Serpur fish fair with fishes. This year, Rais Uddin's stall was an attraction as he brought some fishes of exceptionally huge size from haor areas. One of his fishes was a local 'Bagha Ayir' weighing about 70 kg. He demanded a price of Tk 85,000 for this.

An expatriate in UK first offered Tk 45,000. Another expatriate offered Tk 50,000. But Rais Uddin would not sell the fish at a price below Tk 60,000.

Finally it was handed over to one of the expatriates at the price he demanded. There were many fishermen like Rais Uddin. Shamsul Islam, Hira Miah, Lal Miah, Md Sharif, Arbesh Miah and

Md Nurul Hoque and many others came to the fair from different districts with local varieties of sweet water fishes of huge size. Big size fishes like Boal, Ayir, Chital, Ruhi, Katla, Koi, Magur etc were great attractions for the crowd, particularly children and youngsters, who never saw and could imagine the rich fish resources Bangladesh could have.

Shamsul Islam brought a Chital fish weighting about 30 kg. He sold it at Tk 15,000.

Hira Miah brought a pair of Katla fish and Lal Miah had brought a pair of huge- seized Boal fish caught from Hakaluki Haor.

Hira Miah demanded Tk 16,000 for his Katla fishes and Lal Miah demanded Tk 18,000 for his pair of Boal fish.

This year, the fish fair started Friday (January 12) evening and continued till Saturday noon.

About 500 fishermen came to the fair. There were about 5,000 makeshift shops of other goods at the fair, held on the bank of Kushiara River. The fair is a tradition in Moulvibazar district.

The fair begins on the last day of Bangla month of Poush as per a Hindu tradition when they

observe Poush Sankranti. As per a religious tradition, they take good dishes prepared with fish on the last day of Poush and the first day of the following month of Magh.

This year, the district administration auctioned the fair spot at Tk 5,13,000. One Abu Taher Minto of Hamorkuna village auctioned the fair place this year. Fishermen came to the fair with fishes caught from Monu, Kushiara, Surma rivers and different haors and water-bodies in Sylhet and Kishoreganj regions. Thousands of people from all walks of life attended the fish fair every year to purchase fishes of their choice.

Though it started as a fish fair one hundred years ago, household goods, handicrafts, toys, sweetmeat, fruits and many other items are available at the fair now.

The district administration took special measures to maintain law and order and not to allow anti-social activities like gambling at the fair. A police contingent led by two magistrates and Assistant Police Superintendent were on duty. Fair goers expressed satisfaction at the administration's steps this year.

Another injured in BSF firing dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Another Bangladeshi, injured in BSF firing on Mazipara border in Tetulia upazila in Panchagarh district Friday morning, died at Rangpur Medical College Hospital in the early hours of Saturday, BDR sources said here yesterday.

The dead was identified as Yakub Ali. He was fatally injured as Indian BSF (Border Security Force) from Narabari camp across the border fired at least 10 bullets, the sources said.

Meanwhile, BSF on Saturday returned the body of Mobarak Ali, 24, who was killed on the same spot in BSF firing on Friday. BSF had taken away the body. It was returned after a flag meeting held at Mazipara on Saturday, the sources said.

Six Bangladeshis were injured in BSF firing in Mazipara border on that day. The rest are being treated at Rangpur Medical College Hospital and Panchagarh Sadar Hospital.

Officials of 25 BDR Battalion in Panchagarh said, BSF from Nalabari outpost opened fired Friday morning without any provocation as some Bangladeshis were working in their fields near border pillar no. 432.



PHOTO: STAR

A view of the fish fair at Sherpur in Moulvibazar that concluded on Saturday.