

SYNDICATION OF JFF FERTILISER

Small fries held but their godfathers evade action

MIRZA SHAKIL, BACK FROM TARAKANDI, Jamalpur

The joint drive by law enforcers against hoarders and black marketers of urea supplied from Jamuna Fertiliser Factory (JFF) continues but it is yet to ease the fertiliser crisis at farmers level.

Farmers have to queue at dealers shops and buy a 50 kg bag of urea at between Tk 350 and Tk 400 against the government-fixed price of Tk 290, they told this correspondent during his visit to different rural markets in Jamalpur on Friday.

In about a week, the law enforcers arrested a number of unscrupulous people involved in the illegal trade and seized some 100 tonnes of urea but their godfathers, who are mainly responsible for the artificial crisis, remained out of the dragnet. Most of them have gone

into hiding, sources said.

The fertilisers were seized from unauthorized godowns in Madarganj, Islampur, Sarishabari, and Sadar upazilas in Jamalpur district.

Powerful syndicates control distribution of urea produced in JFF at Tarakandi in Jamalpur, which creates an artificial crisis in 20 districts.

Sixteen northern districts and four in greater Mymensingh are under the command area of the factory, which produces 1,700 tonnes of urea a day.

Besides, raising prices by forming cartels, the syndicates are also involved in smuggled urea across the border. The syndicates are led by at least 12 powerful local influentials enjoying political clout, the sources claimed.

Jamuna Fertiliser Factory

produces 5, 15, 000 tonnes of urea annually, of which at least 2, 00,000 tonnes are smuggled across the border by the syndicates, they claimed.

Supply and price of urea in the 20 districts depend on the syndicates as dealers are almost helpless due to their influence. At times dealers are compelled to sell to them their quota lifted from the factory.

The syndicates operate, as government does not monitor fertiliser supply and distribution except during the peak season of Irri-Boro cultivation (February-April) when its use increases, the sources said.

This correspondent during a visit to the factory area also talked to JFF officials, dealers, and farmers.

JFF officials said they have nothing to do as they supply the

produced urea to 1, 823 government-approved dealers who lift their quota from the factory. A dealer is appointed for a certain area.

The sources said many dealers even do not lift their quota from the factory and sell the delivery order (DO) to syndicates. Some dealers sell their quotas for the whole year, widening the scope of smuggling.

The syndicates have several large godowns in the area.

The godfathers also maintain arms cadres, the sources claimed.

When government changes, 'control' of the supply also changes--from cadres of one political party to another, they said.

Some dealers seeking anonymity said the crisis will end if the godfathers sheltered by major political parties can be brought to book.

1,100 urea bags seized in Kishoreganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

About 1,100 sacks of urea were recovered from the hoarders in three joint drives conducted by army and police in Hossainpur, Karimganj and Tarail upazilas yesterday and day before.

Tarail Police Station sources said, a police team led by Tarail Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) A F M Haiatullah seized 500 sacks of urea from the store of Dulal Mia in Tarail Bazaar yesterday.

In two other joint raids conducted by army and police day before yesterday, about 500 sacks of urea were recovered from Hossainpur upazila and 100 sacks of urea from Karimganj upazila, police sources said.

Army and police sources said, all the sacks of urea were recovered from the stores of traders who are not authorised dealers to sell urea.

However, an unidentified man was arrested from Karimganj upazila, police sources said.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Poor people hit by severe cold wave scramble for warm clothes during their distribution on Gaibandha Town Protection Embankment on Friday.

Dry in need, flood in rains

Teesta Irrigation Project's no use to farmers

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Teesta Irrigation Project, largest of such projects in the country, could not supply any water to farmers to irrigate lands so far during the current IRRI-Boro season.

The once-mighty river is almost dry at certain points now as India unilaterally withdraws water by closing all the gates of Gajaldoba barrage in the upstream.

Executive Engineer at Dalia Division of Water Development Board (WDB) in Nilphamari, Atiqur Rahman, told this correspondent that the flow of water at Teesta Barrage point is now 2,500 to 3,000 Cusec. The flow was 3,500 to 4,000 Cusec last week.

At least 7,000 to 8,000 Cusec water is necessary to provide irrigation facilities to farmers in the project's command area and maintain navigability, he said.

The flow is falling drastically as India closed all the 52 gates of Gajaldoba barrage, about 100 km upstream in West Bengal, to provide irrigate facilities in the state, he said.

Visiting the Teesta Irrigation project and Teesta Barrage site on Saturday, it was seen that the river in the upstream of the barrage is almost dry. Only some narrow streams were seen in several places.

The dried up river is only 250 meters from the Teesta Bbarrage, where farmers have cultivated crops like paddy, wheat, maize and pulses.

However only in the 'restricted zone' which stretches 200 meters in front area of the barrage, the WDB authorities somehow managed navigability.

For want of irrigational water, farmers in the project area are irrigating lands with diesel-run shallow pumps or by lifting water manually from the lean river channels.



PHOTO: STAR

The Teesta has turned into a narrow stream near the Teesta Barrage, making the massive irrigation project useless to farmers during IRRI-Boro season.

Sources at WDB Zonal Office at Rangpur said, this year they have a target to bring 60,000 hectares under irrigation in the project's command area. Though it is only one-third of the original target of 1,54,250 hectares in Nilphamari and parts of Rangpur and Dinajpur, it is uncertain whether this area can be irrigated in the current season, they said.

Atiqur Rahman said, "We are getting little water from the upstream which seeps through the closed gates of Gajaldoba barrage, situated about 80 meters higher

land than the Teesta Barrage level.

He however said his office is in close contact with Indian officials about the situation.

In rainy season, India usually opens all the gates of Gajaldoba barrage to release the excess water, raising its flow up to 3,00,000 Cusec and flooding Bangladesh, sources said.

BWDB sources claimed that at Joint River Commission Meeting in 2005, India suggested Bangladesh

to abandon the second phase of Teesta Irrigation Project as a condition for a Teesta water sharing agreement. Indian authorities at

other meetings said it would discuss sharing of Teesta water only when survey of other rivers like Dudh Kumar, Monu, Khoyai, Gomti, Muhuri and Feni would be completed, the sources said.

However Bangladesh went ahead with the second phase of the project. The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) at a meeting in July last year allocated Tk 227 crore for implementation of the second phase of Teesta Irrigation Project. The work is in progress.

The second phase will cover an

additional 4,48,774 hectares of land in part of Rangpur, Gaibandha, Bogra and Joypurhat districts.

However at a ministerial level meeting between India and Bangladesh, a formula was evolved to share the Teesta water, suggesting that Bangladesh would get 35 per cent of Teesta water and India 39 per cent with the rest 26 per cent to be kept for navigability of the river. But the formula is yet to be implemented as the actual flow of water in the river is still to be ascertained, allegedly due to India's reluctance.

6 brickfields closed in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A mobile court in Matiranga upazila yesterday closed six brick fields for operating without licence and using firewood in stead of coal violating environmental laws, district administration sources said.

They said, the court led by first class magistrate Ahmed Kabir, in a surprise visit to the brick fields, found that about 96,000 maunds of firewood were stacked on the yard of the brick kilns.

The mobile court also found that the brick field authorities had been using 30 feet high chimneys violating the official rule of 120 feet chimneys.

The court realised fine amounting to Tk 50,000 from the brick field owners on the spot.

Four cases were filed against them for operating the brick fields illegally.

However, the owners evaded arrest by escaping from the spot earlier.

On contact, Khagrachhari Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shahadat Hossain told this correspondent the drive will continue to protect environment.

Earlier, two illegal brick fields were closed in Dighinala upazila and over Tk 1.6 lakh were realised as fine from the owners, the DC said. The DC said action against illegal brick fields will continue.



PHOTO: STAR

Farmers in a long queue for diesel in front of a filling station in Netrakona yesterday.

Diesel, urea crises hit Boro in Sherpur, Netrakona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Boro cultivation is being hampered greatly in Netrakona and Sherpur districts due to acute scarcity of diesel and urea in the ongoing paddy cultivation season.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), 1,26,000 hectares of land were brought under Boro cultivation in 10 upazilas of Netrakona district. As many as 72,150 hectares of land were brought under Boro cultivation

in five upazilas of Sherpur district, DAE sources said.

Abdul Hamid, a farmer at village Sunajur under Atpara upazila told this correspondent that the farmers were forced to buy each sack of urea at between Tk 340 to 350 against the government rate of Tk 290.

Farmers were seen to be waiting in long queues at the filling stations and fuel shops in different parts of Sherpur and Netrakona districts on Saturday and yesterday where each litre of diesel is being sold at

between Tk 40 to 42 against the government rate of Tk 36.40.

On contact, Netrakona DAE deputy director Md Tajuddin assured that there would be no shortage of fertiliser in the district as the government already appointed 110 dealers to distribute 81,000 metric tons of fertiliser in the district.

Sherpur DAE deputy director Jasimuddin Ahmed also echoed similar view saying the government had appointed 62 dealers to distribute 41,000 metric tons of fertiliser among the farmers in the district.

BSF returns 6 Bangladeshis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Saturday handed over six abducted Bangladeshi farmers to Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).

BSF abducted Alamgir Hossain, Rintu, Anwarul Hossain, his brother Ripan, Samsul and his brother Asadul of Munshiganj village in Daulatpur upazila from Munshiganj border point in the same upazila at about 10:00am.

ABSF patrol team of Krishan camp in Nadia district in India entered the Bangladesh territory through Border Pillar No 153 in Munshiganj border and abducted the Bangladeshis when they were cutting grass for cattle, BDR sources said.

BDR sent a protest letter to BSF asking them to hold a flag meeting. Responding the call, BSF organised a flag meeting at Totarpara border point Saturday night and handed over the six abducted Bangladeshis to BDR.

Eye camp in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A week-long eye camp began at Shalbigha village in Baralekha upazila on Friday.

Moulvibazar unit of National Society for Blind (BNSB) and Sujanager (Baralekha) Social Welfare Foundation jointly organised the camp.

Cataract patients are being operated under free of cost by the specialists of local BNSB Eye Hospital.

A sincere gesture can be enough to do a great job

AMANUR AMAN, Back from Daulatpur

It was beyond the dream of poor people on an isolated shoal on the Padma.

Only five months ago, they used to take meal and finish all evening chores under flickering kerosene lamps. And life stopped there for the rest of the night.

Now, the whole village with over 3000 people remains lively till late night. Electricity from a biogas plant has changed their life. Unlike city dwellers they are free from the curse of loadshedding.

An expat sets up bio-gas plant to illuminate his remote village

Use of biogas plant is not new in the country. But power generation from such a plant and its use by so many households is certainly something great for the downtrodden.

It has been possible due to the effort of a man of the village--Mohamad Ali--an expatriate in Saudi Arabia. The benevolent man has spent his life's savings of Tk 25 lakh to remove darkness from his village, the beneficiaries said.

The story is of a village named 'Padmar Char' in Ramkrishnapur union in Daulatpur upazila. This union is detached from the upazila headquarters by Padma river, which flows around it.

Ramkrishnapur was once part of the mainland. Thirteen years back, the mighty Padma changed its course causing erosion across the upazila, isolating 18 villages in the union from the upazila headquarters. Since then, these villages were deprived of all facilities from the upazila headquarters and people there have to walk about 6 kilometers and cross the Padma to come to Daulatpur upazila headquarters.

Mohamad Ali went to Saudi Arabia to seek fortune 16 years ago, where he works as an electrician. When he came back to his village, he often thought to 'do something' for the deprived people.

In August last year, Ali came to the village on a five-month leave.

Based on his experience, Ali thought of producing power from biogas for his people. He contacted officials of Bangladesh Biogas Diploma Engineer's Association (BBDA) and its Kushtia unit secretary Safiqul Islam.

He also visited a Biogas plant in



PHOTO: STAR

The gas chamber (above) and the generator producing electricity from biogas at Padmar Char village in Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia district.

Bogra used for domestic purpose.

Ali with Saiful's, help drew a plan for biogas plant to generate power.

He first set up a dairy farm with 150 cows to collect dung and constructed a big a big 'digester tank' with 'inlet' and 'outlet' faces.

Cow dung is poured into 'digester tank' through the 'inlet face', where gas is produced.

A biogas tank has been built at the 'outlet face' of the 'digester', which can contain 25000 cft biogas. A 1600 cc (cubic power) generator has been set up, which produces power by using the biogas through a pipeline.

At least 50 kilowatt electricity is

being generated there, which is supplied to the households. Primary schools, mosques and markets in five villages in Ramkrishnapur union now also get electricity from the plant.

The villagers pay Tk 50 for each bulb, which they use at will. But they are very conscious not to misuse the power and take care of the whole system like their own property. About Tk 25,000 is earned from the consumers per month.

Villagers are very happy. As a gratitude to Mohammad Ali they have renamed the area Saudi Ali Para.



PHOTO: STAR

The Chittagong Development Authority demolished illegal structures in Sholoshahar area in the port city yesterday.