

SUPPLY THREATENED DUE TO POOR NAVIGABILITY

40 vessels, barges stuck at Jamuna shoals

GOLAM MOSTAFA JIBON, from Nakalia, Pabna

Around 40 vessels and barges loaded with fertiliser, fuel and rice have remained stuck at shoals in different places of Jamuna River for the last seven days, much to the disturbance of supply of the essential items through Baghabari port.

As large vessels and barges cannot reach the port due to poor navigability of the river in the dry season, farmers of the northern region are worried about supply of fertiliser and fuel in the beginning of Boro season.

The port authorities have started unloading goods from the stranded vessels and barges with the help of small boats but it takes additional time and cost to transport the goods to different destinations.

The vessels and barges got stuck at different points including Nakalia, Berakhola, Kazirhat, Notakhola, Latifpur, Char Saifullah and Pechakola in Pabna district as hundreds of shoals have emerged with receding of water level in Jamuna, said sources at Baghabari river

port. They said at least 9 to 13 feet deep water level is needed for smooth movement of vessels and barges while the channel has now only six to seven feet deep water.

Talking to this correspondent at different points of the channel, masters (driver) of several vessels and barges including MV Sabuj, MV Kohinoor, MV Mohammad Ali, MV Asad and MV New Sun-2 said failure to dredge the channel in time has led to the navigability problem.

The present situation could have been averted if the dredging work had started in time, they said.

Hundreds of trucks and labourers are passing idle time in the port area as goods cannot reach the port in time, said Abdul Aziz, labour handling and carrying agent of Baghabari river port.

They have to count huge losses due to the situation, he said.

Abdur Razzaque, assistant director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) at Baghabari river port, said they have already sent letters informing the higher authorities about

the present situation of the channel.

"Two dredger machines are now in operation at two points of the channel. But these are not enough for the long channel. More dredgers are needed to keep the channel navigable. Dredging activities are now being hampered due to strong current of the Jamuna," he added.

Fertiliser supply to 16 northern districts has now become uncertain due to poor navigability of the Jamuna, said several traders involved in fertiliser transportation.

If the present situation continues for a few more days, farmers of the region would face serious fertiliser crisis, they said.

When contacted, authorities of Padma, Meghna and Jamuna fuel depots said there is sufficient stock of fuel in their depots but they will have to face difficulties if the present situation continues for more than a week.

They urged the authorities to take immediate steps for dredging the route to keep it fit for smooth movement of all kinds of river transport.



Several vessels laden with fertiliser lie anchored on the bank of Jamuna River near Nakalia in Pabna district yesterday as they cannot move further due to drastic fall in water level in the river.

Dense fog disrupts flights, vessel movement in Ctg

UNB, Chittagong

Movement of vessels at the sea port channel and flight operations at Shah Amanat International Airport here were disrupted yesterday due to dense fog.

Vessel movement at port channels remained suspended for eight hours till 12:00 noon.

Besides, three Bangladesh Biman flights and one of GMG Airlines from Shah Amanat International Airport were suspended due to dense fog.

On Saturday afternoon, a vessel loaded with edible oil got stranded near Karnaphuli estuary on its way to Chittagong Port due to dense fog.

Mauritius flag-carrier vessel SYD Polen got stuck at a shoal near the outer anchorage of the port.

BSS adds: The weather again marked fluctuation in the last two days with rise in temperatures, disappearance of fogs

and sunny sky at most places in the northern region.

The situation suddenly deteriorated sharply on Saturday causing bone-chilling cold while the gaps between the maximum and minimum temperatures came down to only four degrees Celsius on an average.

On Saturday, the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded were 18 and 12.6 degrees respectively at Rangpur, 15 and 12 degrees at Dinajpur, 16.1 and 11 at Saidpur, 14.4 and 10 at Rajshahi, 16 and 10.5 at Ishwardi and 17 and 13 degrees at Bogra.

However, the Met Office yesterday recorded minimum temperatures of 13 degrees Celsius at Rangpur, 11.7 at Dinajpur, 12 at Saidpur, 12.2 at Rajshahi, 12.6 degrees at Ishwardi and 13 degrees at Bogra.

Similarly, the maximum temperatures also marked sharp rises yesterday by four

to seven degrees Celsius at different places in the sub-Himalayan region.

Our staff correspondent in Rajshahi adds: Bone-chilling cold coupled with mists and winds paralysed the normal life in the district yesterday.

Meteorologist Bazlar Rashid observed that the chill increased due to sharp fall in the maximum temperature and reduction in difference between highest and lowest temperatures.

The gap between highest and lowest temperatures were 4.2 degree Celsius on Saturday while it went down to 3.4 degree yesterday, said Rashid.

The severity of cold forced most people to stay indoors affecting businesses, education, office and normal activities.

Paddy growers expressed anxiety as their boro seedbeds were being affected greatly while the potato growers were happy expecting a good harvest due to the chill.



Residents of villages around Barapukuria coalmine in Fulbari upazila of Dinajpur district form a three-kilometre-long human chain at nearby Kaluapara village yesterday demanding compensation to and rehabilitation of the people affected by land subsidence around the mine.

BL COLLEGE CLASH BCL, Shibir file cases accusing each other

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Islami Chhatra Shibir lodged separate FIRs (first information reports) with Daulatpur police station on Saturday night blaming each other for Friday's violent clashes on Daulatpur Government BL College campus.

BCL college unit President Saifuzzaman Mukul lodged an FIR with the police station at 8:30pm, accusing 18 leaders and activists of Chhatra Shibir of resorting to violence on the campus Friday noon.

The FIR named accused include General Secretary of Shibir Khulna city unit Ataur Rahman Bachchu, Organising Secretary Abu Saeed, Sadar upazila unit President Azizul Farazi, President of Shibir BL College unit Gazi Morshed Mamun, Secretary Abdullah AL Mamun and Organising Secretary Mahiul Islam.

The FIR was recorded as a regular case at 10:30pm, said SI Ruhul Quddus of Daulatpur police station. No one was arrested in connection with the case as of filing of this report at 5:00pm yesterday.

Shibir BL College unit President Gazi Morshed Mamun lodged an FIR with the same police station at 7:15 pm, accusing 12 leaders and activists of BCL college unit of creating anarchic situation on the campus on Friday. This FIR was recorded as a regular case at 11:30 pm.

BL College unit of BCL at a press conference at local pressclub yesterday accused Shibir of resorting to violence on the campus on Friday without any provocation.

It also demanded immediate withdrawal of 'false' case recorded against 12 BCL leaders and activists of the college unit.

Meanwhile, seven people were injured in a clash between BCL and Shibir at Rupsha Degree College under Rupsha upazila of Khulna district Saturday afternoon.

The incident took place at around 3:30pm while Shibir men were holding a rally on the campus protesting BL College incident.

The injured are undergoing treatment at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH).

BARAPUKURIA LAND SUBSIDENCE Affected villagers demand compensation by Jan 31

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Villagers affected due to frequent land subsidence caused by underground geological faults around Barapukuria coalmine yesterday formed a human chain and held a press conference demanding compensation and their rehabilitation.

They also demanded that Barapukuria Coal Mine Company Ltd (BCMCL) give compensation to the affected people as per the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in May last year between the villagers and the BCMCL authorities within January 31.

Otherwise, they threatened to stop coal production until their demand is met.

On May 15 last year, the representatives of the affected villagers signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the BCMCL for compensation and cooperation.

Villagers at a press conference yesterday claimed that it was stated in the MoU that the BCMCL would pay compensa-

tion to around 2,400 people of seven villages around the coalmine for damage of their arable lands caused by land subsidence by December 31, 2009, but to no effect.

Ibrahim Khalil, convener of Jibon O Shampad Rakkha Committee, read out a statement at the press conference press conference at Barapukuria High School complex. He demanded compensation and rehabilitation of at least 2,600 families of 15 villages including Bolorampur, Jhigagari, Mougaram, Kalupara Kashidanga, Bashpukur, Kazipara and Barapukuria Bazar.

"If the authorities concerned fail to implement the MoU within January 31, we will go for tougher movement to realise our demands," he said.

Contacted, BCMCL official said they signed the MoU with the villagers but did not give any timeframe to implement it.

Meanwhile, the BCMCL has taken a Tk.324cr master plan to compensate and reha-

bilitate the affected villagers.

The master plan includes preparing resettlement framework (RF), land acquisition plan (LAP) and resettlement action plan (RAP), and distributing compensation money and rehabilitate the affected villagers after developing a 'mining city'.

The BCMCL authorities prepared a Development Project Proposal (DPP) and placed it to the government to allocate Tk 260crore in the Annual Development Project (ADP) of 2010-11 fiscal year, official sources said.

Considering the scale of damage including infrastructure, land and natural resources, BCMCL authorities prepared the resettlement framework (RF) with the help of independent consultant Dr Khurshed Alam and placed it to Petrobangla on October 4 last year, sources added.

The BCMCL authorities also identified at least 646 acres of land as 'possible land subsidence area' according to the international standard of mining project.



Students of Mymensingh Nursing College observe a token hunger strike on the campus yesterday demanding realisation of their 6-point demand including modification of their curriculum in conformity with the development of medical science.



Four skins of deer seized from Dakkhin Charduani village in Pathorghata upazila in Patuakhali district, left, and seven deer rescued alive from poachers who had caught them from the Sundarbans last year.



Deer poaching on in Pathorghata

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Several gangs are engaged in poaching deer in Pathorghata upazila under Barguna district to make quick bucks from selling venison and deer skin.

Law enforcers and forest department staff rescued seven deer alive and seized skins of 17 deer and 31 kg venison from the upazila last year. Seventeen hunters were also arrested during the period.

The poachers make traps with plastic rope in forest areas. When deer come to the bank of a river or canal to drink water, gang members forcibly direct the deer to be caught up in the trap.

Usually hunters catch deer alive and bring it to their houses at night to keep it inside 'safe holes'.

Following buyers' order, the deer are slaughtered and venison is supplied. Usually a kg of venison is sold for Tk 200

to 300, locals said.

Sobahan Bahini and Motaleb Bahini are still very active although their ringleaders went into hiding after several cases were filed against them for deer poaching, said Pathorghata Forest Range Officer Abdul Latif.

"Conducting several drives against deer poaching, we rescued seven deer and seized 17 deer skins and 31 kg venison from January to December last year. We also arrested 17 hunters and handed them over to law enforcers," he said.

The existing law, which has provision for fining a poacher Tk 500 and awarding him six months jail, is too inadequate to prevent the poachers, he said, adding that they often fail to conduct successful drives due to lack of logistics, especially speedy vehicles.

South-west sees bumper potato harvest, outlook for north poor

A CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Despite scarcity of potato seeds during the current cultivation season, growers in the southwestern (SW) region are expecting a bumper potato production due to favourable weather condition.

Crisis of potato seeds forced the farmers of the region to cultivate less than the targeted area this season. Still the region is most likely to achieve the production target, said local agriculture officials.

This year's potato production target has been fixed at 2,36,197 tonnes in 10 southwestern districts. The farmers in the region produced 2,33,028 tonnes potato last year.

The officials said farmers will start harvesting potato from first week of March.

Potato has been cultivated on 13,414 hectares of land in 10 districts of Khulna division this year against the target of 14,316 hectares. Last year, potato was cultivated on 16,027 hectares of land, which is 2,613 hectares higher than that of this year, said the sources at regional office of the agriculture extension department.

"We expect a bumper potato yield this year as the early blight disease which

usually affects the plant shortly after sowing the seeds has not been spotted in the region," said GM Hakim, deputy director of department of agriculture extension (DAE) in Jessore.

He said farmers also got sufficient fertiliser this season. "We are hopeful of achieving the production target," Hakim said.

Talib Hossain, a farmer of Fotehpur area in Jessore, said he had a target to cultivate potato on five bighas of land but he cultivated it only on three bighas due to scarcity of seeds.

"Still I expect a good output if fog did not play foul at the last moments," Talib said.

Hafizur Rahman, owner of Golden Seeds Farm said they incurred a huge loss last year as they had to sell potato seeds at only Tk 6 per kg.

"That's why the traders did not keep enough stock which is the main reason behind potato seeds scarcity this year," he pointed out.

Around 80 to 100 maunds of potato can be harvested per bigha if the weather remains favourable till February, Hafizur said.

In contrast, target of potato production in the northern region may not be

achieved as vast fields of potato crop were attacked by blight.

According to UNB, field reports received from eight districts of the region said the disease has damaged the potato crops causing massive losses to the farmers.

Agriculturists blamed outbreak of the potato blight due to dense fog and cloudy weather on and off in January and sowing of low quality seeds in some areas.

If there are fungi in potato seeds or soil, they attack plants when there is thick fog and cloudy weather, they said.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) sources said a target was set to bring 150,344 hectares of land under potato cultivation in the eight districts of the region, including Rangpur and Dinajpur with an output target of 24,80,676 metric tons.

After visiting many areas it was found that the disease has badly affected potato crops in most areas of the region raising fears that the production target in the current season might not be achieved.

Farmers said the new varieties of potato 'fancila' and 'proventu' were attacked mostly by the fungal disease than the BADC's 'diamond' variety.