

Boro plants dying for dry spell, acute power crisis

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Boro plants on vast areas of land in several districts are getting damaged as a drought-like situation coupled with serious power crisis is hampering irrigation.

Cracks have developed in many lands and plants are gradually turning yellowish, much to the frustration of farmers, reports our Pabna correspondent.

Farmers have cultivated boro paddy on 69,450 hectares in nine upazilas of the district but most of the lands have already dried up as farmers could not irrigate those due to acute power crisis, said officials of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) in Pabna.

According to AED, 869 deep tube wells including 741 electricity-run ones, and 21,462 shallow tube wells including 3,342 electricity-run ones and 1,470 other local pumps provide irrigation facility in the district.

"At least 35 MW power is needed daily for irrigation in nine upazilas of the district. But we are getting only 18 to 20 MW power supply in the peak period of the season," said an official of Pabna AED.

Our Sirajganj correspondent reports: Farmers in the district apprehend missing the production target of boro paddy this season due to irrigation problem.

AED sources said 127,850 hectares of land in the district have been brought under boro cultivation this year. A total of 14,058 pumps run by electricity and 57,946 pumps run by diesel were set up in the district to supply water. But most

of the power-run pumps have become inoperative due to unusual load shedding and low voltage.

"Cracks have developed in my boro field due to lack of water as my pump went out of order about two weeks ago due to erratic power supply," said Zamat Ali, a farmer of Ullapara.

During recent visits to different areas of Raiganj, Tarash, Chalan Beel and Kazipur upazilas, this correspondent saw many farmers

feeding their damaged boro plants to cattle.

Zahir Uddin, owner of a diesel-run pump at Raiganj, said he could not operate his pump properly as the water level has gone down due to lack of rain.

If it does not rain soon, it will be disastrous for boro cultivation, said Sirajganj AED Deputy Director Abu Bakar Siddique.

Our Dinajpur correspondent adds: Boro production in Dinajpur and adjacent dis-

tricts is likely to face a setback as the farmers cannot smoothly operate their power pumps due to electricity crisis while lack of rainfall coupled with fluctuating temperature has worsened the situation.

AED officials said they had a target of boro cultivation on 171,592 hectares of land in Dinajpur district this season with a production target of 646,860 tonnes while the farmers cultivated 178,450 hectares of land, raising the production target to 675,985

tonnes. But acute power crisis seems to dash the hope of farmers as the electricity-run water pumps can hardly operate more than one or two hours a day in the peak irrigation season.

At least 98,323 hectares of land in the district depend on power-run irrigation, AED sources said.

Dinajpur Palli Biddyat officials said they are getting only 18/22 MW of electricity supply a day against the daily requirement of 81MW during the peak IRRI-boro season.

The agricultural officials said the dry spell has already damaged over 10 per cent of boro crop in the district while farmers have put the amount to over 30 per cent.

The amount of damage is likely to be much more as there is no sign for end of dry spell yet.

Thousands of farmers of Narail district are facing uncertainty as irrigation problem due to power disruption is causing damage to boro crops, reports a correspondent from Narail.

Amid severe heat and lack of rain, cracks have developed on the fields.

Most of the canals and ponds have dried up and underground water level has depleted, making it hard to get water from normal hand tube wells, especially in Narail Sadar and Lohagara upazilas.

Crisis of drinking water has also turned serious in many areas.

In Narail district, 38,270 hectares of land has been brought under boro cultivation against a target of 37,271 hectares in the current season.



Boro plants are getting damaged in a dried up and cracked field in Raiganj upazila of Sirajganj district as lack of irrigation coupled with hot spell seems to upset the production target this season.

TRAILS OF DESTRUCTION



Green mangoes lie scattered at an orchard in Duari village of Tanore upazila under Rajshahi district yesterday as a nor-wester lashes the area on Thursday. Below: Books, office papers and furniture are kept for drying on the ground of Alhaj Masud-ul-Haq High School in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila yesterday as Thursday night's nor-wester destroyed the school house and damaged goods.

First term exams start but many students yet to get textbooks

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Three and a half months after start of the academic year, a large number of students in secondary and junior secondary level schools and madrasas in different northern districts are yet to get all their textbooks.

According to schedule, the educational institutions yesterday started the first term examinations, amid students' fear of 'bad result' as many of them could not prepare well due to lack of textbooks.

About one lakh required textbooks on different subjects are yet to reach students in secondary and junior secondary schools in Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh and Nilphamari districts, reports our Nilphamari correspondent.

Following the government's decision to reach free textbooks to secondary level students from this year, dropouts have become interested to resume studies and it is the major cause behind the situation, said the district education officers (DEO).

The government supplied about 37 lakh textbooks for all the high schools, junior high schools and madrasas in Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh and

Nilphamari districts on the basis of number of students in 2009 but additional one lakh books are needed now, said sources at district education offices.

"We received about 11.5 lakh textbooks in the beginning of 2010 according to the number of students in schools and madrasas last year. We are in need of 50 thousand more textbooks on different subjects as many dropouts are returning to schools after distribution of textbooks free of cost," said Lalmonirhat DEO Khondar Alauddin AlAzad.

Panchagarh DEO SM Moslemuddin said, "Now we are in need of additional 25 thousand textbooks. Girl students are now interested in reading agriculture subject instead of home economics. So, books on home economics are to be returned and additional number of books on agriculture and other subjects are needed."

Nilphamari DEO Rokhsana Begum said they freshly need 20 thousand books, mostly on agriculture.

Akhter Hossain, headmaster of Namuri Girls' High School in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat district, said 281 students of his school from classes VI to IX are yet to get agriculture book and 170 students to get Bangla essay book.

Almost all educational institutions of the region are facing similar situation, said teachers.

"We expect early solution of the problem as demand note has been sent to National Curriculum and Textbook Board for providing the required books immediately," said the Nilphamari DEO.

Our Chapainawabganj correspondent adds: Textbook shortage is hampering study at secondary and junior secondary level schools in the district.

Educational institutions, however, started the first term examination yesterday, said teachers and students. Several books, printed without approval on low quality paper, are available in the local market for additional prices, said a number of students and guardians.

Shoaib Ali, headmaster of Rohonpur Rabeya Girls' High School in Gomastapur upazila, said he did not get 25 sets of textbooks of class-VI, 17 sets of class-VII and 28 sets of class-VIII. Every high school is facing problem due to shortage of books, he added.

Headmasters of Harimohan Government High School and Hasina Girls' High School and assistant headmaster of Pilot High School in Nachole upazila also told similar stories.



Sylhet experiences a five-hour-long downpour yesterday. The photo shows an inundated road in the city.

Rain paralyses life in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Heavy rain paralysed normal life in Sylhet city yesterday and the low-lying areas remained submerged for hours, causing immense sufferings to the dwellers.

Sylhet Met Office recorded 124mm rainfall in five hours from 6:00am.

The city roads at Bilopar, Kuarpur, Laladighirpar, Kanishail, Hawapara, Dargah mohalla, Kajolshah, Bagbari, Shahjalal Upashahar, Tero Ratan, Jatarpur, Hosnabad, Jhalopara and Mendibag remained under water for six to seven hours.

Traders at different markets had to keep their shops closed as rainwater

entered the shops and caused water-logging in the areas. "We had to keep our shops shut for hours," Abdus Shahid Miah, a trader at Kushighat Market said, adding that they experience such suffering during the rainy season.

Busy city roads go under water even after light to moderate rainfall due to lack of proper drainage system as almost all the natural drains and canals in the city have been narrowed by the grabbers. Many of them have already built pucca building and commercial establishments, encroaching upon the streams and canals.

Acting Chief Engineer of the Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) Noor Azizur Rahman said rainwater cannot pass

through the drains and canals as those have been narrowed by the grabbers.

He, however, said the SCC has started a project involving Tk 11 crore to construct drains and free the natural canals--Malni Chhera, Goali chhera, Monglichhera, Kalibari-Akhalia Chhera, Bhubichhera, Boloram khal, Ratnar Khal, Haldichhera and Bashu khal--from the encroachers.

Local people alleged the SCC's sanitation department does not clean the drains regularly. Besides, the authorities are not sincere to evict the grabbers. But an official claimed the department lacks manpower to run its clean-up operations smoothly.

11 injured as robbers open fire, explode bombs

UNB, Pirojpur

Armed robbers looted nine jewellery shops and two dwelling houses after injuring 11 people, eight of them with bullet, at Srirankati Bandar Bazaar in Nazirpur upazila early yesterday.

Police said a gang numbering 40-50 entered the shops at the bazaar after tying up five night guards at about 2:30am.

They then looted 50 tolas of gold ornaments, Tk 10 lakh in cash, several tolas of silver and other valuables worth Tk 50 lakh from the jewellery shops and nearby houses.

The gang opened fire and exploded 50-60 bombs as locals tried to resist them, leaving 11 people injured. Later, they made off with the booty being chased by a police patrol team.

The bullet injured victims are Badsha Sheikh, 35, Saiful Bepari, 43, Gouranga Maker, 42, Sumon Dhali, 24, Arif Mollah, 20, Masum Hawlader, 24, Samir Sheel, 25, and Ujjal Dhali, 18.

They were rushed to Khulna 250-bed Hospital where condition of Badsha and Samir was stated to be critical.

In Satkhira, muggers took away Tk 3 lakh from a mobile phone trader in Polashpole Bou area of the district town on Thursday night.

Victim Saiful Islam said a gang of three intercepted him at about 10:00pm while he was returning home after closing his shop. The muggers took away the money at gunpoint and fled away by a motorbike.

BARAPUKURIA COALMINE

Land subsidence victims to start fresh agitation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Villagers affected by land subsidence around Barapukuria coalmine will again go for fresh agitation from tomorrow (April 19) to realise their demands including compensation and rehabilitation.

They alleged that the authorities of Barapukuria Coalmine Company Limited (BCMCL) are yet to start implementing the pledges they made before the affected people during their fast unto death programme on March 12.

The affected villagers withdrew their fast unto death programme on the day following the assurance given by the BCMCL authorities of meeting the demands in phases from April 1.

Protesting delay in implementing the pledges, Jibon O Shampad Raksha Committee, an association of the affected people of 15 villages, informed the director of BCMCL of their fresh agitation programme through a memorandum on Monday last.

Md Ibrahim Khalil and Md Belal Uddin, convenor and general secretary of the commit-

tee, handed over a copy of the memorandum to Engineer Md Quamruzzaman, managing director of the BCMCL.

The also sat with the BCMCL officials on their demands on April 8, but the meeting yielded no positive results, sources in the committee said.

However, BCMCL sources said a meeting will be held at Petrobangla office in the capital today to discuss the issues.

BCMCL officials said a land survey is needed to start giving compensation to the affected villagers, but they (villagers) last week stopped land survey launched by deputy commissioner office.

The people of 15 villages affected by land subsidence around Barapukuria coalmine have been agitating since January this year demanding compensation and their rehabilitation.

BCMCL authorities officially confirmed that about 201.07 acres of arable land around the coalmine area subsided by two to three feet due to underground geological fault since May 2006, causing water logging in the area.



Rakhaine girls wait for their male counterparts during their traditional Sangrang festival (marked by merry making through sprinkling of sacred water) at Tekpara in Cox's Bazar town as the three-day celebrations welcoming Rakhain New Year 1372 started yesterday.