



PHOTO: STAR

Farmers irrigate their Boro field through a diesel-run shallow tube-well at Karia Kalanda village under Baliadanga upazila of Thakurgaon as the nearby deep tube-well lies inoperative for lack of power supply, right, farmers at Kanaibari village in Biral upazila of Dinajpur replace the power-driven water pump with the diesel-run one due to uncertainty of power supply.

Irri-boro farmers in north worried at power outages

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Irri-boro cultivation in eight districts under Rangpur division is suffering as large areas of land cannot be irrigated properly due to shortage of electricity supply during the peak sowing season.

Many paddy fields are drying up due to the situation while a good number of farmers are yet to start sowing the paddy for the same reason, reports a Rangpur correspondent.

The Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) has fixed a target of producing 30,88,559 tonnes of Irri-boro rice from 7,75,284 hectares of land in eight districts under Rangpur Agriculture Zone this season, said Khondker Md Mesbahul Islam, an agriculturist of DAE Rangpur divisional office.

District-wise, the target is 1,30,184 hectares in Rangpur, 1,20,154 hectares in Gaibandha, 1,1,06,753 hectares in Kurigram, 55,282 hectares in Lalmonirhat, 78,112 hectares in Nilphamari, 1,72,449 hectares in Dinajpur, 67,554 hectares in Thakurgaon and 44,796 hectares in Panchagarh.

The number of irrigation pumps has increased to 3,01,631 this cultivation season from last season's 2,78,081 in the 'crop cultivation zone' of Rangpur division, DAE officials said.

But in absence of adequate power supply, the machines have remained mostly unutilised.

Masud Al Faruque, Power Development Board (PDB) chief engineer of Rangpur Distribution Zone comprising the eight districts, admitted shortage of power supply.

Only 140 to 150MW of electricity can be supplied against the demand of 350MW from 7:00am to 5:00pm, 240 to 260MW against the demand of 340 to

350MW from 5:00pm to 11:00pm, 200MW against the demand of 330MW to 350MW from 11:00pm 7:00am, he said.

A few PDB officials expressed apprehension that the power outage will take a serious turn when the peak period of irrigation begins within a short time.

Meanwhile, frequent load shedding accompanied by fluctuation and low-voltage of electricity is causing damage to the irrigation machines.

On the other hand, many farmers are irrigating

their boro fields with the help of the diesel run shallow machines but it adds to their cost.

Our Thakurgaon Correspondent adds: Cracks started developing in dried up Irri-boro fields on hundreds of acres of land in different areas of Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts for want of irrigation as power-run deep tube-wells and shallow machines cannot be run properly due to erratic power supply.

It has also worried farmers fearing losses as the expendi-

ture will be shooting up for use costly diesel-run pumps instead of electricity-run deep tube wells and shallows for irrigation activities.

In Thakurgaon, the DAE has fixed a target to cultivate Irri-Boro on 67,554 hectares of land and farmers have already cultivated Irri-Boro on 59,375 hectares of land against the target.

In Panchagarh, farmers have cultivated Irri-boro on 34,200 hectares of land till Thursday against the target of 44,796 hectares of land. The cultivation usually runs

till mid-March.

Irrigation on about fifty percent of land of Irri-boro cultivation depends on power-run deep tube-wells and shallow machines in these districts, according to DAE officials in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh and Barind Multipurpose Development Authority.

During a visit to different villages in the two districts on Thursday and Friday, this correspondent saw some farmers setting diesel-run shallow machines at different villages beside the electricity run deep tube-wells to meet up irrigation on boro fields for saving the plants.

However, many cannot think of using diesel-run shallow machines due to high price of diesel.

Our Dinajpur Correspondent reports: Farmers in the 'rice production zone' of the district are leaning towards diesel-run shallow machines for irrigation as the power supply is too inadequate to run the electricity-run machines.

Besides adding to the cultivation cost, it is causing the farmers a lot of troubles.

During a visit to Kanaibari area under Biral upazila of Dinajpur, this correspondent saw farmer Md Nazimuddin replacing his power-run water pump by a diesel-run shallow engine as interruption to irrigation caused by frequent load shedding started affecting his boro land badly.

"We are getting smooth supply of electricity only three to four hours a day but at least 10 hours of power supply is needed to manage irrigation in my boro land," said Nazimuddin, who cultivated boro on seven acres of land this season.

Several farmers of the area said they would require additional Tk 2,000 per acre if they continue irrigation with diesel-run shallow engines.



PHOTO: STAR

Several hundred farmers yesterday besiege the Palli Bidyut Samity office in Nilphamari town and vandalise the room of the general manager protesting power outages during the peak sowing season of Irri-Boro in the district.

Outcry against outages

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Four employees of Palli Bidyut Samity (PBS) office in the district headquarters were injured as a section of agitators vandalised the office during a demonstration demanding uninterrupted power supply for irrigation during the ongoing boro season.

Several hundred farmers of different villages under Nilphamari Sadar upazila joined the procession brought out by Jubo League and besieged the PBS office at Sutipara village in the town at noon.

At one stage, 25-30 young men forcibly entered the office and ransacked the rooms of general manager (GM) and assistant general manager (AGM), said Sekendar Ali, AGM of PBS, Nilphamari.

They broke chairs, tables, file cabinets and other things of the office.

Four employees of PBS -- Anisur Rahman, 40, Mostofa Kamal, 45, Abdur Rouf, 42, and Rezwanul Haque, 45, were injured by the unruly agitators.

"Seeing the agitators proceeding aggressively towards my office, I left the place for safety," said SM Habibur Rahman, GM of PBS, Nilphamari.

"Against the requirement of 30-MW electricity daily, we are getting only 8-MW," he added.

District unit general secretary of Jubo League Shahed Mahmud denied involvement of any of his activists in ransacking PBS office.

He, however, said, "Everyday farmers throng union and ward level offices of Jubo League and complain to local leaders about irregular supply of electricity by PBS."

NOAKHALI AND LAXMIPUR

10 'robbers' handed over to police after mob beating

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Local people in Noakhali and Laxmipur districts caught ten suspected robbers and handed them over to police after mob beatings yesterday and on Thursday.

Noakhali police rescued four suspected robbers from a mob at village Motipur under Noakhali sadar upazila early yesterday, reports our correspondent.

Two critically injured were admitted to Noakhali Medical College Hospital. The agitated people also burnt a motorbike used by them.

The arrestees are Rabbani, 28, son of Ahmed Ullah of village Motipur, Bashar, 30, of Kalitara Bazar, Bahar, 32, of village Alipur under Begumganj upazila of Noakhali district and Al-Amin, 27, of Chandpur district.

Zahedur Rahman Jony, officer in-charge (inquiry) of Sadar PS and locals said, the four were preparing to commit robbery at the house, keeping their motorbike on the road near the house around 2am.

Night guards Enayet Mia and Manu Mia found the motorbike on the road and started to look for the

owner.

One of the four youths told the night guards that DB police came to the house with the motorbike.

Suspecting their movement, Enayet and Manu informed the matter to locals over mobile phone.

Locals raided the house, caught the four and beat them up severely. They also set the motorbike on fire.

On information, police rushed to the spot and rescued them from the mob.

In Laxmipur, people rounded up six suspected robbers and handed them over to police after a good beating in Char Lawrence and Torabganj areas in Kamalnagar upazila on Thursday night, reports UNB.

The arrestees are Swapan, 25, of Bilashpur village of Shariatpur district, Raju, 22, Bachchu, 27 and Rabin, 24 of Charkajol village in Bhola district and Kalam of Charfalkon village and Rubel, 20, of Torabganj village in Kamalnagar upazila.

Police said local people caught the youths while they were roaming around in Char Lawrence and Torabganj areas suspiciously.

C'NAWABGANJ AND NETRAKONA

2 killed, 25 hurt as villagers lock in fierce clashes

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least two people were killed and 25 others injured as rival villagers locked in clashes in Chapainawabganj and Netrakona districts yesterday and the day before.

A man was killed and at least 16 others were injured while eight houses ransacked as two rival groups clashed in Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj yesterday morning.

The victim was identified as, Abul Kalam, 35, son of Entaz Ali of Kamalpur village, reports our correspondent.

The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Shibganj and police said that the clash ensued following an altercation over the seat arrangement at a cultural function at Kamalpur High School on Friday afternoon.

Two people of Shialmara and Doulatbari villages turned the matter into a battle of the two villages, leaving five people injured.

Following the incident, all of a sudden, people of Shialmara village entered Kamalpur and Doulatbari villages with bamboo sticks, iron rods and lethal weapons at around 8:00am yesterday, ransacked around eight

houses and injured at least 11 people.

Seriously injured Abul Kalam was rushed to the Chapainawabganj Adhunik Sadar Hospital where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.

In Netrakona, a young man was killed and 10 others were injured as two rival groups clashed at Kumri village in Sadar upazila on Friday night, reports our correspondent.

The dead was identified as Mohon Mia, 22, son of Raisuddin of the village.

Police and local people said that the clash followed an altercation over a local football match.

A group led by Raisuddin and another by Masud engaged in a bloody clash at around 8pm with sharp and lethal weapons.

At least 11 people, including Mohon Mia and his father Raisuddin, were injured.

Mohan and Raisuddin were rushed to Mymensingh Medical College and Hospital in critical condition where Mohon Mia died after a few minutes.

Raisuddin was referred to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital. Several others were admitted to Netrakona Sadar Hospital.

RANGAMATI

Sightseers flock to see beauty of spring

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

The hill district is buzzing with a large number of tourists as the area appears with immense natural beauty at the arrival of spring, also the last phase of the ongoing tourism season.

Especially on holidays, visitors engage in cruising in the serene water of Rangamati Lake and sightseeing at different tourist spots in Rangamati town and surrounding areas adorned with flora and fauna amid captivating landscape.

Hanging Bridge of Parjatan Holiday Complex, Kheppu Para on Asambasti-Kaptai road, Suvolong waterfall, Peda-Ting-Ting, Tuk Tuk Eco village, Chang Pung Restaurant, Rajban Bihar, the palace of Chakma chief, the DC Bungalow and Indigenous Museum are some of the most attractive locations for the tourists in Rangamati.

During the last couple of weeks, some 2000 to 3000 visitors came to Parjatan Holiday Complex daily while thousands more are staying at different hotels and guest houses.

"I along with my friends have come here to spend holiday here amid the eye-catching views of the hilly areas," said Md Nazrul Islam, a resident of Gazipur in Dhaka.

"We have come here along with our children to spend holiday. Rangamati is a very nice place. My children are very happy to come here," said Jesmin, a woman from Khulna.

The hotels, motels and guest houses have almost remained booked in advance in this time, owners said.

Some 1500 to 2000 tourists were checked at Parjatan motel every month from September last year to January this year. Three percent of them were foreigners," said Akhlaqur Rahman, manager of

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Rangamati.

"We earned Tk 1.7 crore in last five months from where we got Tk 51 lakh as operating profit.

"We cannot provide accommodation facility to the corporate clients due to lack of seats in our motel. Only 50 people can be accommodated at a time. We will be able to provide accommodation for about 100 clients a day when the works of under construction 'Parjatan Resort' complete," he said.

"All the seats in our hotel often remained booked by the tourists in advance and so, we had to say sorry to many others," said Jahangir Alam Munna, owner of Hotel Sufia, a set-up with modern

amenities in Rangamati.

Dr Md Nazer, proprietor of recently launched hotel 'Shanghai International', said it often remains fully booked by the visitors.

Besides, different government guest houses of Rangamati Hill District Council, Department of Forest, Power Development Board and Small and Cottage Industries Corporation are full to the capacity as their seats are booked by a large number of tourists, in addition to government officials.

Winter and spring are considered as the best period for excursion and sightseeing while the number of tourists drastically decline during summer and rainy season.

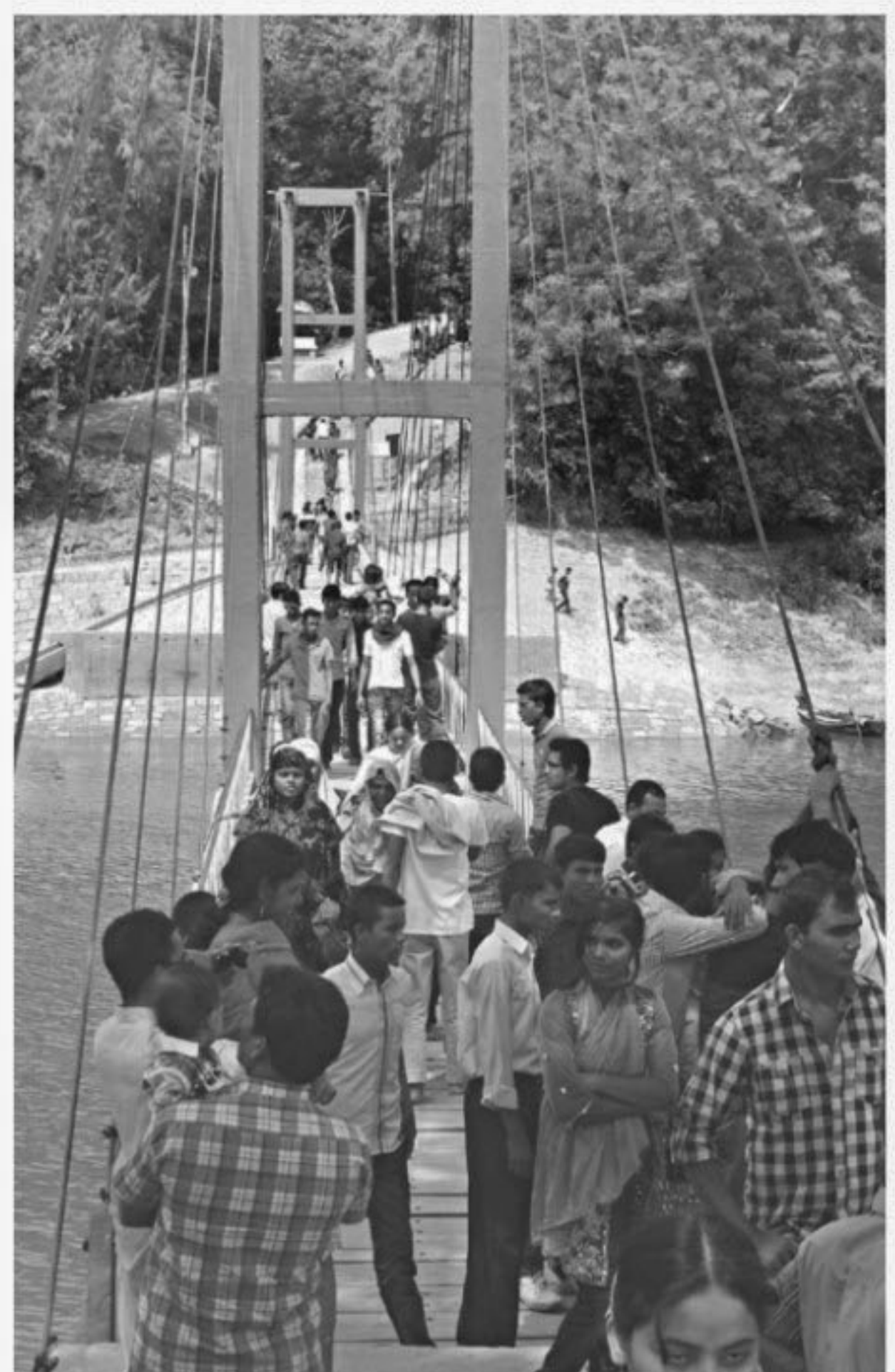


PHOTO: STAR

With the arrival of spring, a large number of tourists visit the picturesque Rangamati hill district. Photo shows people crossing the hanging bridge of Parjatan Holiday Complex at Kheppu Para near the town.

SNIPPETS

Convicted prisoner dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

A convicted prisoner of the district central jail died at Rangpur Medical College and Hospital on Friday night. The deceased was identified as Abdur Rahim, 45, of Shahapur village in Badarganj upazila. Rahim was admitted to the hospital at about 10:30pm after he complained of chest pain, said jail superintendent Rafiqul Islam. Meanwhile, family members claimed that torture by police caused the death after Rahim was sentenced to one year imprisonment by a mobile court on Thursday night. Refuting the allegation, Pittish Chandra Sarkar, officer in-charge of Badarganj police station, said police arrested Rahim at night for possessing alcohol and produced him before the court. The court sent him to jail, the OC added.

15 shops, one house gutted

UNB, Laxmipur

A devastating fire gutted 15 shops and a house at Haidarganj Bazar in Raipur upazila early yesterday. Locals said the fire originated from an electric short circuit at a shop at around 4:00am and soon engulfed the adjacent 14 other shops and the house in the market area.

Youth commits 'suicide'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A young man allegedly committed suicide following a family feud at Barali village in Kalaroa upazila yesterday. The victim was identified as Sajjad Hossain, 27, son of Abdul Khaleque of the village. Subhas Biswas, officer in-charge of Kalaroa police station, said Sajjad took his life by hanging himself from the beam in his room at about 5:30am.

Robbers loot house

UNB, Sylhet

Robbers looted cash, gold and other valuables worth Tk 10 lakh from a house in Purba Kushighat area of the city early Friday. Locals said a gang of robbers stormed into the house of Phul Mia at around 3:00am and took the family members hostage at gunpoint. At one stage, they beat up the victims indiscriminately, leaving the house owner and his mother Sajeda Begum critically wounded.



Rangpur recalls martyrdom of little Shanku

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Rangpur townspeople yesterday recalled the martyrdom of Shanku Samajdar and demanded a memorial for the schoolboy.

Shanku, a class V student, died when Urdu-speaking people (Beharis) opened fire on a possession in Rangpur town on this day during the non-cooperation movement in 1971.

Shanku's mother Deepali Samajdar said at around 9:00am, he went out of their rented house in Guptapara area and took part in the procession.

He was killed when an Urdu-speaking Behari named Sarfaraj Khan opened fire on the procession from his house in Alamnagar area in the town, she added.

Freedom fighters, leaders and activists of different socio-cultural and political organisation yesterday visited the Sangku's house and prayed for salvation of the departed soul.

They also urged the government to build a memorial for the martyr in the town.