

Solar power-run irrigation gives barren land eye soothing greenery

Poor farmers of Shikarpur village in Panchagarh cultivated paddy, maize, groundnut and chilli with low-cost irrigation

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, back to Thakurgaon from Panchagarh

Once barren lands on the Karotoa River at Shikarpur village in Boda upazila under Panchagarh district are now full of greenery, thanks to the introduction of a solar power-run irrigation project there.

Under the project, farmers, mostly small and marginal ones and sharecroppers, have cultivated Irri-boro on about 50 bighas (a bigha = .3306 acre) of land, maize on 20 bighas and groundnut on 2.5 bighas and chilli on 3 bighas of land.

They are eyeing change of lot by cultivating robi crops with low cost irrigation by solar power-run pumps while farmers of adjacent villages, troubled with frequent power outages and high production cost due to price hike of diesel, are showing interest to use the system.

During this correspondent's recent visit to the project area, Nazrul Islam, 48, of Shikarpur village, said, "I have cultivated boro on seven bigha of land taking irrigation facilities from the project. The plants are growing well with smooth

irrigation that also costs lower than that by diesel-run pump.

Mofizul Islam, 40, said he cultivated boro on one bigha of land in this season and hope to get 20 maunds of paddy there.

"Tk 4200-4500 is needed for irrigation by using diesel-run shallow pump for each bigha of land while I will pay only Tk 2,500 for solar irrigation," he said.

Nur Nobi, 35, who cultivated Irri-boro on 10-bigha of land along the river first ever in his life, said, "I hope good yield as the plants are growing well. Now we do not have to worry about frequent power-cuts or increasing diesel price as we have been getting irrigation with the help of the solar project as per requirement of our land."

President of Shikarpur and Jagannathpara Adarsha Krishak Samity (farmers' association) Abdur Rahman said the association and Mutual Trust Bank are jointly conducting the project. Tk 2,500 is to be paid for each bigha of land as irrigation charge for a crop season and Tk 5,000 for three crop seasons (Tk 2500 for Irri-



Shikarpur village in Boda upazila of Panchagarh, which was almost barren only a year ago, is now full of greenery due to introduction of a solar power-run irrigation project there. Inset, a pump drawing water for irrigation under the project.

PHOTO: STAR

boro, Tk 1,500 for aman and Tk 1,000 for vegetables) over the year.

"Mutual Trust Bank Ltd arranged setting up three solar power plants at different points of the village for irrigating farmlands under the project involving Tk 90 lakh. After 10 years it will be adjusted and then the farmers' association alone will control the project," Senior Vice President of the bank Muhammad Iqbal, also

head of its SME, told this correspondent over cell phone.

"The bank has also provided Tk 1 crore as crop loan to 60 farmers of the association. Very shortly we will help farmers to make dairy farms, set up bio-gas plants and produce electricity from it," he said.

Ariful Islam, senior officer (Sales and Marketing) of Renewable Energy Ltd, sister concern of

Rahimafrooz Group, told this correspondent over cell phone that they set up the three solar power plants under the project -- two plants comprise 32 solar panels and the other comprise 48 solar panels. Each panel contains 270 Watt Peak (WP).

The 32-solar panel plant can produce 8,640 WP of electricity in a day which is able to run one single 9-horse power submersible

pump. With capacity to lift out eight lakh litres of water from dawn to dusk, it is enough to irrigate 80-100 bighas of land, he said.

Farmers can also set up small solar plants individually, he added.

"I hope good yield of crop from those fields," Boda Upazila Agriculture Officer Enamul Haque said after visiting the Irri-boro fields under the solar project at Shikarpur village.

2 killed, 25 hurt as nor'wester lashes 3 dists

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Nor'wester lashed Rangpur, Lalmonirhat and Jamalpur districts on Sunday evening, killing two people and injuring at least 25 others.

Followed by heavy rain, it also damaged over 4,000 thatched and tin-roofed houses, Irri-Boro crops and uprooted trees and electric poles in the districts.

Our Rangpur correspondent reported that two people were killed and at least 1,000 thatched houses damaged as a storm hit Rangpur Sadar, Taraganj and Kaunia upazilas at around 6:00pm on Sunday.

The deceased were identified as Rezia Akhter, 8, daughter of Lal Mia of Dangapara village in Taraganj upazila, and Limon, 25, son of Gulzar Hossain of Boro Bari area of Lalmonirhat.

Rezia took shelter under a tree which fell on her during the storm. She died on the spot. Limon was coming to Rangpur from Lalmonirhat, riding a motorbike. When he reached near a bailey bridge on Rangpur-Kurigram road in Kaunia upazila, a roadside tree collapsed on him, resulting in his instant death.

In Lalmonirhat, nor'wester lashed 30 villages under four upazilas of the district at around 6:30pm on Sunday, injuring at least 25 people and damaging over 3,000 thatched and tin-roofed houses, according to our correspondent.

The storm-hit villages are Itapota, Mogholhat, Kulaghat, Kalmati, Barobari, Khedabag, Mondolehat and Gokunda villages in Lalmonirhat Sadar

upaila; Sarpukur, Velabari, Hajiganj, Mohishkhocha, Gorbodhan, Arazi Chhalapak, Vadai and Polashi villages in Aditmari upazila; Rudreshwar, Jamir Bari, Totmari, Dolgram, Kakina and Shoilmari villages in Kaliganj upazila; and Goddimari, Sindurna, Barokhata, Dowani, Saniyazan, Doikhowa, Nowdabash and Patikapara villages in Hatibandha upazila.

Hundreds of the trees were uprooted and crops, especially maize, were damaged during the storm that continued for an hour.

Power supply in Lalmonirhat Sadar and Hatindaha upazilas remained snapped for four hours until 10:30pm as three electric poles in the upazilas were uprooted during the storm.

Our Jamalpur correspondent adds: Storm lashed a few villages in Jamalpur Sadar, Madarganj and Sarishabari upazilas of the district at around 6:00pm, damaging about 200 thatched houses and some educational institutions.

According to local people and local administration, the storm with hails damaged crops and uprooted trees and electric poles in the affected areas.

Power Development Board (PDB) sources said power supply in the seven upazilas of the district remained snapped for seven hours from 6:00pm as a tree collapsed on an electric tower in Mymensingh during the storm.

Electricity supply in the upazilas was restored after PDB men removed the tree, sources added.



PHOTO: STAR

Crows pecking at watermelons damaged by stagnant water at a village in Kotalipara upazila of Gopalganj, inset, farmers trying to pump out water from a field.

Flood water puts watermelon farmers on brink of ruin

A CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

Unripe watermelons on over 200 hectares of land in Kotalipara upazila have been totally damaged in the last few days, due to flood water triggered by heavy rain, coupled with tidal surges from the adjoining river.

According to sources at Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), the juicy summer fruit on another 80 hectares, out of a total of 436, have been partially damaged.

While visiting the affected areas on Wednesday, this

correspondent saw most of the farmlands still under water at Chakpukuria, Nulua, Burua, Machpara and Rothiarpur villages in the upazila.

A number of watermelon cultivators were seen trying to remove the flood water by making path or by using irrigation pumps.

Victims Bimal Madhu, Niren Roy, Ujjal Majumdar, Binoy Majumdar, Dipok Majumdar, Praful Boiragee and Nirmal Majumdar said over 200 farmers in the areas will incur huge losses as they will not be able to

sell the unripe all damaged watermelons.

Tapan Ballav of Burua said they had bumper production this year, but the heavy downpour damaged about 80 percent of watermelons at his village.

Pulin Chandra Barui of Noluta village said he borrowed a huge amount of money for the cultivation. "Now how will I repay the loan?" he posed.

Michael Ojha, chairman of Kalabari union parishad, said farmers in the area will incur a loss of around Tk 25 crore.

Bhashkor Chakrabarty, deputy director of DAE in the district, said they identified around 300 hectares of affected land till now, where the fruit on 220 hectares got totally rotten, shattering the dreams of at least 1500 farmers.

Deputy commissioner Sheikh Yousuf Harun said he would write to Bangladesh Samabaya Bank and Bangladesh Krishi Bank to get the interest of the loans of the victims exempted and to extend their loan repayment period.

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