

TEESTA IRRIGATION PROJECT

Illegal sand lifting
threatens dykes

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Mindless earth and sand lifting along the embankments built on both sides of the main canal under the Teesta Irrigation Project continue unabated, making the dykes vulnerable to collapse at anytime.

If any of the embankments collapses, several thousand hectares of agricultural land in Dimla and Jaldhaka upazilas of Nilphamari would be inundated, locals said.

While visiting the canal recently, this correspondent found several ditches were dug at various points along the embankments, especially beside the one known as left embankment.

The left dyke is important because the Bangladesh Water Development Board officials use the road constructed on it to monitor the irrigation project.

Ditches around 5-10 feet deep and 100 feet long were spotted at no fewer than 20 points along the dyke in Paschim Balagram, Chaoradangi and Dandibari villages of Jaldhaka, and Kakra, Satjan, Khalisha Chapani and Dalia villages of Dimla.

During the visit, the correspondent found that a sand lifter named Lebu along with some day labourers was

lifting sand and earth at Kakra village. Asked, he claimed they would use the sand to repair a local road.

Villagers said some local people also extract sand and earth from the dyke to earth-fill their homesteads.

Originating from Teesta barrage point at Dalia of Dimla, the 18-km long and 278-foot wide canal stretches up to Dundidari of Jaldhaka, with 1400-1600 cubic feet water per second flowing through it.

At least 20 different points on the embankments collapsed in the past since the inception of the irrigation project in 1998, hampering irrigation and inundating the adjoining villages, locals and the sources in the BWDB said.

Mainuddin Mondol, BWDB sub-divisional engineer of Dalia division, said, "Local influential quarters assaulted the BWDB officials on several occasions in the past while they were conducting drives to stop the lifting."

"I myself became the subject of such attacks, and escaped with the help of police."

BWDB Executive Engineer Mahbubur Rahman of the same division said he was facing difficulties to look after the vast irrigation project

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Workers employed by an influential local take sand away from the embankment of the main canal of Teesta Irrigation Project at Kakra village in Nilphamari. The water in the canal can be seen below the X mark. Inset, at Dandibari village, part of the embankment has turned into a ditch close to the canal, marked X. PHOTO: STAR

Migrants' death

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At least 1,738 died of strokes, heart attacks, cancer and other illnesses. The cause of death of 20 overseas workers could not be known.

At least 30.44 percent of the deaths were in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 16.83 percent in Malaysia and 14.46 percent in the United Arab Emirates.

Tasneem Siddiqui, who chairs Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, said the minister's recent statements in parliament that the deaths were natural and "the death rate of migrants is not more than the national average" were unacceptable.

"The minister's remark hardly takes into consideration the ages of the migrants ... the average age of the deceased workers was 38 years whereas average life expectancy of Bangladeshis is 70.36 years," she said. Besides, the migrants go through

all kinds of health tests before leaving the country, she said, adding that why they die so early in their lives was something to be investigated seriously.

Replies to queries, Minister Mosharraf said the government had taken the issue of unnatural deaths of migrant workers seriously and started investigations.

He said excessive migration costs compelled overseas job seekers to work for long hours and to have poor diets and accommodation. These were the main reasons behind migrants' deaths, he claimed.

He also mentioned that they had been trying to reduce migration costs and had also been lobbying labour receiving countries to ensure the workers' safety.

Mosharraf blamed recruiting agencies for charging excessive migration fees and sending more workers than the actual demand.

JESSORE BUS PLUNGE
Driver, helper
surrender

OUR CORRESPONDENT, JESSORE

The driver and helper of the bus that plunged into a roadside ditch killing seven schoolchildren in Jessore on Saturday surrendered to the police yesterday.

They surrendered to Joydev Vadra, superintendent of police in Jessore, around 10:00am. Later, the two were sent to Chaugacha Police Station.

"We have taken the two accused under our custody and will produce them before the court," said Motiar Rahman, officer-in-charge of the station.

On Sunday, a case was filed in connection with the bus plunge, accusing four people, including driver Israfil Morol of Jhencorgachha upazila and helper Moharram of Jessore

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AL says polls fair, BNP differs

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and their supporters in another 17 upazilas during the polling.

Giving the AL's reaction to the first phase of upazila polls, HT Imam,

co-chairman of the party's election steering committee, said it was the government's responsibility to assist the Election Commission in holding the elections in a free and fair manner.

Elections created a festive atmosphere and witnessed a huge turnout of voters, he told a press conference at the party chief's Dhanmondi office in the capital.

On some incidents of violence during the polls, the adviser to the prime minister said some minor incidents occur during every election. "What has happened in several places is nothing but isolated incidents," he added.

In a post-polls reaction to the media, Rizvi Ahmed, BNP joint secretary general, said: "The automatic

prime minister [Sheikh Hasina] has once again held a peculiar election today [yesterday] where polling centres in about seven to eight upazilas were captured forcibly."

"The upazila election has proved that the BNP's decision to boycott the January 5 polls was correct as it was not held peacefully," he told newsmen at the BNP's Nayapaltan headquarters in the capital around 5:00pm.

The first phase of upazila polls has proved that the BNP could have been in a dreadful situation and faced dire consequences if it had contested the parliamentary elections, he added.

He claimed that the upazila polls were not held in a peaceful manner as the agents of BNP-backed candidates in different upazilas could not enter the polling centres.

The armed cadres of the AL-backed candidates captured all the polling centres in Meherpur Sadar upazila and Bakerganj upazila of Barisal district,

complained the BNP leader.

"Besides, some ruling party men caused troubles in many upazilas so that voters could not cast their votes in favour of BNP-backed candidates," mentioned Rizvi.

Local administrations, he mentioned, did not take steps to this end even after filing of complaints by the candidates. "Rather, they [administrations] helped the ruling party-backed candidates in different ways."

After yesterday's upazila polls, the opposition's demand for holding the national election under a non-party administration was more justified now, he noted.

In the first phase, 97 upazilas went to polls yesterday. In the second phase polls will be held in 117 upazilas on February 27, while 83 upazilas will go to polls in the third phase on March 15 and 92 upazilas in the fourth phase on March 23.

China's real

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Erecting a dam, the historical metropolis was slowly filled with water until it was completely submerged by the turquoise-blue mass now referred to as Qiandao Lake.

Depending on where on the lake bottom it is, the city is between 85 and 131 feet underwater. And it lay forgotten for 53 years.

Greek philosopher Plato wrote about Atlantis some 2,600 years ago, describing it as 'an island situated in front of the straits called the Pillars of Hercules.'

He said the island he called Atlantis 'in a single day and night... disappeared into the depths of the sea.'

Searches continue across the Mediterranean, particularly around Gibraltar, to find the original Atlantis.

But China's manmade version will soon be a renowned attraction. Qiu Feng, a local tourism official, has now suggested using Shi Cheng as a destination for diving clubs.

Qui said: "We were lucky. As soon as we dived into the lake, we found the outside wall of the town and even picked up a brick to prove it."

Criminal killed

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on January 13, demanding Tk 1.5 lakh.

Bahalul, an immigrant in Canada, came to Bangladesh in January this year.

On Tuesday, the law enforcers managed to arrest Kiron and his two associates -- Shibli Sheikh and Jamal Sheikh -- with 11 bullets, several mobile phone sets and SIM cards, the OC added.

Based on information gleaned from the arrestees, police went to Nilokhi along with Kiron to recover hidden firearms early yesterday, the police official said.

As the law enforcers reached there around 1:15am, Kiron's cohorts opened fire on police, forcing them to fire back.

During the gunfight, Kiron was hit by a bullet when he tried to flee the scene, the OC said, adding that his associates however managed to escape.

Kiron was rushed to Shibchar Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Police recovered a pistol, two bullets and several cartridges from the spot.

'ZAWAHIRI MESSAGE'
Rasel placed
on 10-day
remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A Tangail court yesterday placed Rasel Bin Sattar Khan, arrested on Tuesday for spreading online the audiovisual message allegedly from al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, on a 10-day remand.

The remand was granted in a case filed under the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act.

Deputy Assistant Director of Rab-12 Kamal Hossain filed the case, accusing Rasel of publishing "false and defamatory information and pictures" against the government and its head.

A sedition case was also filed against Rasel. But the court did not hear the case and asked the investigating officer to first obtain the home

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26 killed in Kiev

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He declared today a day of mourning for the dead. The state security service said it had opened an investigation into illegal attempts by "individual politicians" to seize power.

A senior opposition leader, world champion boxer-turned-politician Vitaly Klitschko, walked out of a meeting with Yanukovich during the night, saying he could not negotiate while blood was being spilt.

When fighting subsided at dawn, the square resembled a battle-zone, the ground charred by Molotov cocktails. Helmeted young activists used pickaxes, and elderly women used their bare hands, to prise up paving to stock as ammunition.

The Health Ministry said 26 people were killed in the fighting in the capital, of which 10 were police officers. A ministry official, quoted by Interfax, said 263 protesters were being treated for injuries and 342 police officers, mainly with gunshot wounds.

The interior ministry said that five

of the dead policemen had died of identical wounds from sniper fire to the head and neck. Journalists said they saw some hardline protesters carrying guns at the barricades.

European Union leaders condemned what they called "the unjustified use of excessive force by the Ukrainian authorities" and said they were urgently preparing targeted sanctions against those responsible for the crackdown.

Protesters have been occupying central Kiev for almost three months since Yanukovich spurned a far-reaching trade deal with the EU and accepted a \$15-billion Russian bailout.

The sprawling nation of 46 million people with an ailing economy and endemic corruption is the object of a geopolitical tug-of-war between Moscow and the West. That struggle was played out in hand-to-hand fighting through the night, lit by blazing barricades on Kiev's Independence Square, or Maidan.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman insisted the Kremlin was

sticking to a policy of not intervening in Ukraine, although his point man has called for decisive action to crush the protests. The Kremlin said Putin and Yanukovich spoke by telephone overnight, calling the events an attempted coup.

Moscow announced on Monday a resumption of stalled aid to Kiev, pledging a \$2-billion cash injection hours before the crackdown began, although the money has not yet arrived and the Kremlin spokesman would not say when it would be paid.

Ukraine's hryvnia currency, flirting with its lowest levels since the global credit crunch five years ago, weakened to beyond 9 to the dollar for the second time in February after the violence.

In Brussels, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy said the 28-nation EU, at an emergency meeting today, would impose sanctions on those blamed for the bloodshed.

"Our ministers in the Foreign Affairs Council will at their meeting tomorrow examine targeted measures,

such as financial sanctions and visa restrictions against those responsible for violence and use of excessive force," he said in a statement.

The European Investment Bank, the EU's soft-loan arm, said it had frozen its activities in Ukraine due to the violence.

The leaders of the EU's main powers, Germany and France, meeting in Paris, were to issue a joint statement on the crisis later in the day.

French President Francois Hollande backed Poland's call for "quick and targeted sanctions against those responsible". A German government spokeswoman said Chancellor Angela Merkel was "deeply saddened" by the escalation but when asked whether the time for EU sanctions, she said: "We are not yet there."

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said on Twitter that Yanukovich now had "blood on his hands".

Diplomats cautioned that any sanctions would be largely symbolic, noting that similar Western measures had long failed to sway or unseat the

Section 144 based on falsehood

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Prior to the tragic happenings of February 1952, certain elements unwilling to compromise on the matter of the ideology of Pakistan, as they saw it, went all the way toward professing their determination to keep the ideology intact. The consequences were sometimes hilarious. Note may be made of the Aga Khan, who jumped into the fray with the bizarre suggestion that as a way of putting an end to the language controversy, Pakistan should adopt Arabic as its state language. In the process, he went for some defence of Urdu but was not inclined to appreciate the cause of Bangla.

We reproduce here excerpts from some editorial comments by newspapers at the time, meaning February 1951, as they have appeared in Chakrabarty's work.

The Pakistan Observer, in its editorial on February 13, 1951, commented:

"We are glad that the Aga Khan has done some plain speaking, at the risk of being misunderstood, regarding the language controversy. Though we do not think that making Arabic the state

language of Pakistan is a feasible proposition, still he has done a service by boldly attacking some false notions about Urdu. . . The only wise course under the circumstances is to adopt both Bengali and Urdu as the state language(s) of Pakistan."

The Morning News, on February 14, 1951, injected a note of sarcasm in its response to the Aga Khan's suggestion:

"All the three reasons that the Aga Khan has advanced for Arabic and against Urdu appear to be on the face of them fallacious. . . We mean no disrespect to the Aga Khan when we respectfully differ from (sic) him. Arabic has not been able to unite the Arabs themselves. How can it unite Pakistan with the Arab world?"

For its part, the Azad appeared to be pretty enthusiastic about the Aga Khan's views. On February 13, 1951, it had this to say:

"His proposal is not new. It has got many supporters both in eastern and western Pakistan . . . It therefore appears that the movement in support of Arabic is gaining ground. The leaders of the country should therefore

go deeply into this matter." On April 18, 1951, the Pakistan Observer, reacting to suggestions in favour of Urdu as the state language of Pakistan, noted thus:

"Maulana Akram Khan is reported to have said at the Urdu Conference that those who oppose Urdu in East Bengal are the enemies of Islam. Presumably he includes among those 'enemies' those who like Dr Mohd Shahidullah have been advocating Arabic as our state language in preference to Urdu. Those who want to see Urdu and Urdu alone as our national language are bad psychologists."

It may be noted that Dr Shahidullah's views on Arabic had come in mock-serious manner. He had actually argued for Bangla but had ventured to suggest that if it was a matter of an Islamic language for Pakistan, then why not go for Arabic rather than Urdu?

Preparations for the general strike called for February 21, 1952 went on in full swing throughout the day on February 20. A meeting of the All Party State Language Committee of Action

took place in the evening at the Nawabpur office of the Awami Muslim League. Virtually, the entire discussion at the meeting was given over to the question of whether to go ahead with the strike the next day by violating Section 144 imposed by the government of East Bengal.

As Badruddin Umar notes, a majority of those present at the meeting were opposed to a violation of Section 144. Only a handful, including Oli Ahad, convenor of the Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action, advocated a violation of the government orders.

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