

LACK OF TEESTA WATER

# Farmers switch over to tobacco

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Farmers are switching over to tobacco cultivation in the command area of Teesta Irrigation Project, the largest of its kind in the country, as Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) has failed to provide adequate irrigational water in the dry season.

This problem has arisen due to scanty flow in the Teesta river as the Indian authorities closed all gates of Gajaldoba barrage in the upstream to store river water for their own use, said agriculture officials.

Massive tobacco farming poses threat to human health and the environment, in addition to affecting food production in the country, said agronomists, physicians and environmentalists.

This correspondent recently found farmers cultivating tobacco on several thousand hectares of land in villages like Kukha Para, Singdoi, Ramnagar, Bahali Para of Sadar upazila and Kalkeut and Harish Chandra Pat, Deshibai, Uttar Deshibai, Araj Kathali, Dundibari and Satjan of Jaldhaka upazila.

Herombo Roy, a farmer of Dakkhin Deshibai village, said they are not getting smooth supply of water from the Teesta Irrigation Project this boro season.

"We have to irrigate our land by using diesel or power-run pumps on a contract with the pump owners. We have to pay the pump owners Tk 3,000-3,500 for per bigha of land," he added.

"My land is a way off the T1D2 tertiary canal (side canal) at Sindoi village. Farmers in the upstream blocked the canal to divert water to their fields. To avoid hassle, I cultivate tobacco on my land," said farmer Zahidul Islam.

"Tobacco farming has almost doubled in the last couple of years in the command area as boro farmers are not getting sufficient water for irrigation," said Shafiqul Islam Tuhin, chairman of Ramnagar union parishad of Sadar upazila.

Amalesh Chandra, agricultural extension officer at the BWDB in Teesta Irrigation Project, said farmers are inclined to tobacco cultivation.

Mahbubur Rahman, executive engineer of the BWDB's Dalia division, said 300-400 cusecs of water flowed in the Teesta river in a day during March to third week of April this year.

But at least 3,500-4,000 cusecs of water a day was needed for smooth irrigation of around 60 hectares of land, he added.



Fields of tobacco on both sides of a dried-up side canal under Teesta Irrigation Project in Sindoi, Nilphamari. Failing to get water for irrigation, many farmers have resorted to cultivating tobacco in the area as it requires less water. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

## Convenient amnesia

FROM PAGE 1

House in Chittagong.

Asked by the Criminal Investigation Department, the former army chief could not remember whether he had any scheduled programme at Bangladesh Military Academy in Chittagong.

But the then commandant of the military academy had not forgotten Ershad's official programme at the academy.

Brigadier General Hannan Shah, who was commandant of the military academy in 1981, told the CID that Ershad was scheduled to visit the academy on May 26 to inspect training.

On directives from Ershad, Hannan said the army authorities had taken necessary preparations to this effect. The commandant had also waited for Ershad at the military academy.

Ershad visited Chittagong, but he did not visit the academy. Hannan was not notified about the cancellation of the army chief's scheduled programme at the academy.

According to Ershad's testimony before the CID, he had come to know from Brigadier General Mohsin, who was commander of 69 infantry brigade, that he had visited Chittagong cantonment and had taken food at the Hilltop mess.

Ershad first had a conversation there with Major General Manzur, GOC of 24th Infantry Division, and Area Commander of Chittagong. He later had a one-to-one conversation with Lt Col Moti, said Hannan Shah, a former minister and now a member of the BNP national standing committee.

Asked by the CID, Ershad, however, could not remember whether he had any programme at the military academy and had meals at the Hilltop mess.

He, however, strongly denied having any talks with Lt Col Moti, an accused in the assassination of Zia.

Ershad, who is the prime accused in the Manzur murder case, said he could not remember whether then air force

chief Sadar Uddin had come to his office on the morning of May 30, a few hours after the assassination of President Zia.

Sadar Uddin, a witness in the Manzur murder case, in his testimony to the CID, said he was in Jessore and had flown to Dhaka and met army chief Ershad at his office at the army headquarters on May 30 morning.

Ershad also could not remember whether he had seen Brigadier General Abdul Latif at the army headquarters on May 30. He, however, said he later had come to know that Latif was on leave at that time and was in Dhaka.

In his testimony, Latif, a co-accused in the Manzur murder case, said he had met army chief Ershad at the army headquarters on the morning of May 30. Ershad was a little annoyed with him for staying in Dhaka and ordered him to immediately go to his work place Chittagong.

The testimony of CGS Nur Uddin, a witness in the Manzur murder case, has provided corroboration for Latif. According to Nur Uddin, Brig Latif had come to the office of the CGS on the morning of May 30 and army chief Ershad had also come there. Ershad had ordered Latif to go to Chittagong.

Latif also said Ershad had ordered him and Brigadier General Abdul Aziz to carry out the plan to kill Manzur.

Ershad, according to Latif's testimony, talked to him and Aziz when they were in Chittagong and instructed them to execute the plan.

Ershad denied having any talks with Aziz and Latif.

He claimed that he had received the news on the arrest of Manzur from CGS Nur Uddin. But he could not remember whether he was at the4 Bangabhaban or the army headquarters when he got the news.

"Then I had informed the [acting] president of the news [on arrest of Manzur by police.] The [acting] president ordered taking Manzur under army custody. On receiving the order, I

talked to the CGS and asked him to take necessary steps to bring Manzur and his aides under army custody," claimed Ershad.

Ershad could not remember whether then IGP ABMG Kibria was present before the acting president. He denied having any argument with Kibria over the reward money announced by the acting president for the arrest of Manzur after he had left Chittagong cantonment.

The testimonies of former air chief Sadar Uddin and IGP Kibria, however, provide a narrative different from Ershad's one. According to the air chief and the IGP, Ershad was at a meeting with the acting president at the Bangabhaban on June 1, 1981.

During the meeting, the acting president received a phone call from IGP Kibria who had informed Sattar about the arrest of Manzur by police. Hearing the news of Manzur's arrest, Ershad had got excited and made a phone call to someone, informing him of the arrest and directing him to take Manzur under army custody and execute the plan, according to the testimonies of Sadar Uddin and Kibria.

Kibria has described how he had reacted sharply to Ershad's remarks over the reward money, though Ershad could not remember whether Kibria was present at the Bangabhaban on the evening of June 1, 1981.

"Approximately, at 7:30 evening, I went to the office of the acting president and found CAS [chief of army staff] and other armed service officers sitting and talking to him. As I entered, Chief of Army Staff welcomed me with a broad smile and told me that I had secured the reward money declared for apprehending Manzur," said Kibria.

"He [Ershad] also expressed his surprise that Manzur could be arrested without resistance, and unarmed. I was annoyed at his remark and told him the reward money had a bad odour and he could keep it for himself. Police and public had done their

duties in accordance with the law. Seeing my reaction, the acting president tried to pacify me by eulogising the police efforts in capturing the alleged offenders," Kibria told the CID.

According to Ershad, there was no story behind the way the acting president had ordered taking Gen Manzur under army custody from Hathazari police station.

But the testimonies of then air chief, IGP and home minister Mostafizur Rahman have described how Ershad was desperate to force the acting president to order the police to hand over Manzur to army custody.

There was even an altercation between Ershad and IGP Kibria on the issue as the police boss had repeatedly declined to hand Manzur over to army custody.

In their testimonies a number of senior police officials have said the acting president under pressure from army chief Ershad ordered police to hand over Manzur to army custody.

Acting President Sattar had told Mostafizur Rahman that the army had taken control of Gen Manzur by putting pressure on him, Mostafiz told the CID.

Ershad also claimed that he was not earlier aware of Zia's visit to Chittagong on May 29, 1981. Prior to the president's departure for Chittagong, Major General Sadikur Rahman, military secretary to the president, had informed him over the phone about the visit.

Again, it was Gen Sadikur Rahman who, as Ershad has claimed, informed him around 5:00 o'clock on the morning of May 30 that the president had been assassinated at the Circuit House in Chittagong.

"I first informed Cabinet Secretary Keramat Ali of the assassination. Then I went to Vice President Abdus Sattar, who was at ICU in CMH, and I informed him of the president's death. I also told him that from then on he was the president," claimed Ershad before the CID.

## Law enforcers in detention trade

*Alleges human rights chief*

A CORRESPONDENT, Barguna

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Prof Mizanur Rahman yesterday once again pointed finger at the law enforcers for "detention trade" after two cops were arrested for their alleged involvement in an abduction incident.

"Earlier I had cautioned against a virus in the antidote and said a detention trade has been going on. I had asked for stopping it, but at least two ministers criticised me saying that I have turned into a Jamaat-Shibir man," he told a rally of human rights workers in Barguna town.

"What will they [two ministers] say now after the arrest of two policemen with other abductors?" he questioned.

In Kurigram, two police constables and an informant were arrested on Wednesday night on the charge of abducting Mahidul Islam, director of Gram Unnayan Sangathan, an NGO in Rowmari upazila.

The country, said Prof Mizanur, has been gripped by panic and it is the responsibility of the government to ensure security of people's lives and properties.

In an oblique reference to the stance of the major political parties on the recent spate of abduction and secret killings, the NHRC chief said political blame game [on the issue] is unacceptable. "Don't force people's lives into more anxiety blaming each other."

Though the authorities concerned

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## Without water

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Apart from the crises in Shyampur and Nayatola, people at Bhatara near Baridhara are also facing a similar ordeal for the last two months as the Wasa failed to set up a new pump there for want of land.

According to Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), it can produce 242 crore litre of water daily against its demand of around 230 crore litre per day. But as the summer has set in, the capacity has dropped to below 230 crore litre per day due to depleting groundwater level and technical glitches in a few pumps.

Seeking anonymity, a top Wasa

official said as the company produces 78 percent water from 670 deep tube wells across the capital, a particular area faces supply dearth if any pump becomes inoperative.

The pump at Nayatola has been out of order for about a month, while the pump at Shyampur for about five days, he mentioned.

"We have already started installing a new pump at Shyampur which would take at least a month. The crisis at Nayatola will be over within the next five to six days," added the official.

About the problem in Bhatara, he said the Wasa was yet to find a piece of land to set up a new pump there which has delayed any solution to the crisis.



A woman wails over her loved ones missing or dead in the capsizing of ML Shathil in the Golachipa river in Patuakhali yesterday.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKHI

## 8 dead as launch capsizes

FROM PAGE 1

"Shareng (launch operator) tried hard to control the launch when the nor'wester began, but he failed due to strong winds," he added.

Earlier, the same vessel sank on January 31.

Salvage vessel MV Rustom left Barisal for Golachipa around 6:00pm. It is expected to reach the spot this noon, Badrul said.

A fire service team has been carrying out a rescue operation with the help of locals. Coastguards were expected to join in around midnight.

Parimol Chandra Kundu, deputy director of fire service and civil defence in Barisal, told The Daily Star at 1:00am, "Rescue operation was suspended at 11:15pm due to inclement weather and tide."

He said three teams took part in rescue operation from 8:00pm. "The work will resume once the weather situation improves," he added.

Quoting locals, Parimol said 12-13 passengers managed to swim ashore.

Some locals and relatives of missing people were crowding the river bank till midnight.

## Mamata dares Modi

FROM PAGE 16

with a party which wanted to divide the state and Bengalis and non-Bengalis and wanted to send them packing from other states.

Mamata, the chief minister (CM) of West Bengal, dubbed Modi as a "paper tiger" and apparently equated herself with the Royal Bengal tiger.

"Touch a single person, we will see. The paper tiger should know there is a Royal Bengal tiger in the Sunderbans. First you face that," Mamata told a national election campaign meeting in Nandigram yesterday, reported our New Delhi correspondent.

"He does not know that speaking Bangla does not make one a Bangladeshi. Anyone who speaks

Bangla across India is branded a Bangladeshi. This is discrimination," she said.

Attacking Modi without naming him, she said "I am in politics for long and I never indulged in politics on Bengalis and non-Bengalis. It is not in our culture."

At a rally in Serampore in West Bengal on April 27, Modi had said Bangladeshis should be ready with their bags packed after May 16, the date of vote counting for the Lok Sabha elections.

Preamble of the Indian constitution says that the constitution is secular and so someone, who did not follow secularism, could not become the prime minister of India. The Hindu quoted Mamata as saying.