

River erosion turns village affluents to beggars



Mala Rani Barmoni, the 88 year old widow of Dharla river basin, has lost all her assets to river erosion.

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Mala Rani Barmoni, an 88 year old widow of Dharla river basin at Bumka village of Mogholhat union in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila is now a beggar. Once, she was the wife of one of the richest men in the village. Like Mala, many others elderly men and women live at Teesta and Dharla rivers basin villages who are mostly all beggars now. River erosion has looted them of their homesteads, croplands, orchards and other assets in the last 20 yrs. "My husband had 30 bighas of croplands, two fruit orchards with eight bighas of land, a banana orchard with three bighas of land and a bamboo cluster spanning two bighas of land but all of these were eroded by the Dharla erosion. My assets are now in the womb of the river," said Mala, adding that her husband died about 12 yrs ago. "After losing everything, I took shelter on government road five year back, and now I'm dependent on

begging." She wears tatters now, and can only recall the days where she could but new clothing every year. Another old aged widow, Lakhmi Rani, 78, at same village has also lost her assets and is now dependent on begging. Abeda Bewa, 84, widow of late Nuhur Miah at Teesta River basin Kalmati village in Lalmonirhat sadar said that she has been begging for the last four years after losing everything by the erosion at Teesta. "The Teesta river snatched 25 bigha of crop lands and two orchards from me and my family," said Abeda, "Now I beg in order to provide for myself." "Beggars used to come to my house to ask for help, and that was only 8 years back," said Adabur Rahman, 76, of Goddimari village at Hatibandha upazila. "Teesta looted 35 bigha of crop land and four fruit orchards from me in the last 20 years, and I have no option left to beg for food and money," he said. Like him, Amzad Hossain, who was

once a rich man, is now living in miserable conditions in a makeshift hut on the roadside after losing everything to river erosion at Gobordhan village of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat. Like him, many people in the village have lost their wealth and have no means to provide for themselves at this age. "I had 20 bighas of crop lands and three orchards after the liberation but all the assets are now gone," said 68 year old Amzad Hossain. "My two sons also have no wealth, since I have nothing to pass on to," he said, adding Teesta has snatched everything." "Once, I was a rich man, as I had 26 bighas of crop lands 25 years back," said another affected Naya Miah, 62, at same village. "Teesta flooded us during the rainy season and eroded our crop lands when flood water came down every year. We got back some of our land but these were turned to sandy char, and the land was no longer cultivable." He said, adding several hundred of fami-

lies in the village were affected seriously by the River Teesta. Mohini Kanta Das, 55, an affected farmer at Rajpur village in Lalmonirhat sadar said, "Now I'm a rickshaw puller, maintaining my five members family in miserable condition but once I was well off with 18 bighas of crop lands, about 15 years ago." Rickshaw pullers Mahsin Ali, Shamsul Islam, day-labourers Narayn Barmon, Rajani Mohanto, hawkers Taher Ali, Nur Islam and many others at Kalmati and Khuniyagachh villages all repeated the same tale, they lost everything to the river. They get back their lands but these are sandy chars. They might be able to use these lands if the River Teesta gets water from its upstream in India. Sabuj Khandaker, convener of Teesta Putro, a local platform to save Teesta River in Lalmonirhat said that, in the last 20 years, at least 40 thousand families lost everything and at least two thousand affected people now beg for a living as a result.

PHOTO: STAR

Weavers enjoy high turnover on Eid

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Weavers of Pabna and Sirajganj districts, one of the biggest cloth producing zones across the country experienced healthy sales this Eid due to high demand for handloom cloths. Stable yarn prices made the weavers hopeful, and they are hopeful about high profits this year. About 4.5 lakh looms including handlooms and power looms are engaged in production in 10 upazilas of Pabna and Sirajganj districts. Power outages hampered the production but the weavers are still happy given that the demand for their products are high. "Power supply was unavailable for 8 to 10 hours everyday," said Md. Al Amin Hossain, owner of Al-Amin Weaving factory of Jalalpur village in Pabna Sadar upazila. He operates 24 power looms in his factory targeting to produce 150 to 160 pieces of 'lungees' everyday, but thanks to the power outage, his output falls to 100 to 110 pieces. Despite the production fall, the good market price of the handloom cloths allowed his business to stay profitable. Weavers of Shahzadpur, Ullahpara, Chowhali (Enayetpur), Kazipur, Belkuchi and Sirajganje Sadar upazila of Sirajganje district and Bera, Santhia, Sujaganar and Pabna Sadar upazila of Pabna seemed very busy producing cloths ahead of the festival but they all suffer from similar infrastructural problems. "On top of power shortages, the incen-

sant rain for the last three weeks of Ramadan also hampered production, but this affected mostly the marginal weavers," said Md. Farid Hossain, a marginal weaver of Dogasi village in Pabna. He could not operate his three looms randomly due to lack of workers. "Weavers working in my factory could not come to work regularly due to continuous rain so the production was hampered," he added. Farid also said that he had to produce 12 to 15 pieces of cloths every day due to increasing demand. I am fortunate that I could recover the losses of previous years as the yarn price is stable this year. "Each bundle of yarn is being sold at Tk 2,700 to 3,000, which is comparatively better than previous years. Now we can easily earn Tk. 30 to 40 profit for each piece Lungee." Farid also added that the price of colour dyes have doubled in the last three months. "About 5.5 to 6 crore pieces of handloom cloths including 'Shares' and 'Lungees' have been produced in the month of Ramadan," said Md. Haider Ali, Vice President of Bangladesh Handloom and Power Loom Owners Association, also the President of Sirajganj District Unit. He also added that at least 70 to 75 percent of the total demand of handloom cloths of the country is met from Pabna and Sirajganj. Weavers of the two districts sell their products at the two largest handloom cloths haats, one in Shahzadpur of Sirajganj and another in Ataikula of Pabna. Handloom cloths are disseminated across the country from these two haats.



PHOTO: STAR

Loom workers busy at work filling their orders ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr this year.

Scanty rain worries aman farmers

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Scanty rainfall during the ongoing rainy season badly hampers cultivation of transplanted aman (T-aman) paddy in different districts. Around 40% of targeted land in Nilphamari district still remains uncultivated although the usual harvesting season for the paddy expires mid-August, reports our correspondent. The season consists of two Bangla months of Ashar and Shraban (mid June-mid August) and the yield declines if paddy seedlings are transplanted after this period. Aman, cultivated in the rainy season with the help of rainwater, is considered more profitable than other varieties of paddy. This year DAE targeted aman cultivation on 91 thousand hectares of land in the district to produce three lakh tonnes of paddy but only 60% of the targeted land has been cultivated so far, official sources said. Visiting different villages in the district it was found that seedlings in many seedbeds have attained 50-60 days although seedlings of 18-28 days of age are ideal for transplantation.



PHOTO: STAR

ANTI-CLOCKWISE: Tired of waiting for rain water for T-aman cultivation, a farmer at Kanaikata village in Niphamari Sadar upazila finally arranges costly irrigation with power pumps. Goats graze at a field of Panthapara village in Rajarhat upazila under Kurigram district as the land meant for aman cultivation lies barren amid scanty rain. Cracks develop at a dried up aman field at Roghunathpur village in Kaliganj upazila under Jhenidah district.

farmers said. SM Sirajul Islam, deputy director of district DAE, however, said farmers can cope with adverse situation through alternative ways like digging earthen well and using machines for irrigation or changing crop pattern. Our Lalmonirhat Correspondent reports: T-aman paddy cultivation is seriously hampered as farmers could not transplant the seedlings for want of

required water. The land perched and developed cracks due to lack of water at many places. Especially the poor and marginal farmers are in trouble as they cannot afford costly irrigation with the diesel-run shallow machines. "We are cultivating T-aman paddy through irrigation using diesel run shallow machines, and it adds to the production cost," said Nurul Miah, president of

Ekota Krishak Samity at Sarpukur village of Aditmari upazila. The DAE in Lalmonirhat set a target to bring 80,563 hectares of land under T-aman cultivation this year with the production target of 2,08,270 tonnes of rice. The aman farmers will face heavy losses if there is not sufficient rainfall soon, said Safayet Hossain, deputy director in Lalmonirhat DAE.

Our Kurigram Correspondent adds: A large number of farmers cannot transplant matured T-man seedlings from their seedbeds as the lands cannot be prepared due to lack of rainwater during the ongoing rainy season. While visiting different areas of the district, this correspondent found vast cultivable fields were unused in want of water while some farmers were ploughing through irriga-

tion. "I have planted T-aman seedlings on one acre of land through irrigation while more than one acre of cultivable land have been uncultivated due to crisis of water," said Abdul Baten, 58, of Panthapara village of Omar Majid union under Rajarhat upazila. Now over 2,067 shallow and deep tube-wells are being used for irrigation in croplands in the district, sources said. According to DAE sources, about 43,000 hectares of land have been brought under the T-aman cultivation still now against the target of 1,18,650 hectares in the district this year. Our Jhenidah correspondent reports: The area of transplanted aman cultivation in the district exceeded the target this season but the farmers are worried due to lack of sufficient rain during the ongoing monsoon. Framers in the district cultivated aman on 89295 hectares of land against the target of 83465 hectares in the current season, said sources of agriculture office. During visit to some aman fields in different upazilas of the district this correspondent saw that cracks developed at most of the lands. Farmers said they have spent Tk 2000 in planting the seedlings, 1500 in ploughing and 1000 in fertilizer and insecticide per bigha (33 decimal) of land. "I have cultivated aman on 12 bighas of land this year spending Tk 54 thousand. But cracks have developed on all the land due to lack of rain water," said Sattar Mollik of Gobordanga village under Kaliganj upazila. If it does not rain yet the farmers will face severe want this year, said Hazrat Ali, deputy director of DAE in Jhenidah.

People suffer for suspension of sea truck service

A CORRESPONDENT, Bhola

A large number of people, who were returning to their workplaces after celebrating Eid, faced serious difficulties as there was no sea truck service on Bhola-Laxmipur route yesterday. As the weather turned worse from last Sunday, people of the district preferred sea truck for going to Laxmipur to go to Dhaka by road. As it is the only route for Chittagong based workers, a large number of people thronged there. A seven-month long restriction was imposed on plying of passenger carrying water transports from March 15. It compelled people to go by sea truck to Laxmipur. However, the absence of the vessel on the route added to the woes of the passengers yesterday morning. According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), sea truck services on every route were suspended due to rough weather. Meanwhile, drowning of launch Pinak-6 in Munsiganj district on Monday discouraged the people of the area from boarding small water vessels. With the suspension of the sea truck services, they crowded ferry points to cross the mighty Meghna and suffered a lot. As a result of it, no vehicles were allowed in two ferries from Bhola, said Abu Alam Hawlader, manager (commerce) of Bhola-Laxmipur ferry service. A passenger, Joy Dey, who works in Dhaka, said he had to travel on the rooftop of ferry Kishani with life risk due to a packed crowd.

Warsi quits

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was "not consistent with the rule of law and our long support for international justice", adding: "The British government can only play a constructive role in solving the Middle East crisis if it is an honest broker and at the moment I do not think it is." The chancellor, George Osborne, hit back immediately, saying her decision was unnecessary and insisting that ministers were committed to working to secure peace in the region. "This is a disappointing and frankly unnecessary decision," he said. "The British government is working with others in the world to bring peace to Gaza and we do now have a tentative ceasefire which we all hope will hold." But Labour leader Ed Miliband said Warsi had acted with "principle and integrity" and urged Mr Cameron to re-think his position. "I hope that David Cameron will reflect on what she says in her resignation letter and change his approach," he told BBC News. "He needs to break his silence and say that Israel's actions have been unjustified and indefensible. He needs to show that he can be even-handed and, without fear or favour, argue for the long-term solution that we need to this tragic conflict." In an interview with the Huffington Post, Warsi said: "Our position not to recognise Palestinian statehood at the UN in November 2012 placed us on the wrong side of history and is something I deeply regret not speaking out against at the time."