

TWO YEARS INTO DAMAGE BY FLOODING

Farmers worried as sluice gate yet to be repaired

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Farmers of Tengrakhali village in Zianagar upazila under the district are worried about the safety of their crops, especially *khesari dal* (a kind of pulse), from flooding as a damaged sluice gate there has remained without repair for around two years.

The pulse is cultivated on around 1,000 acres of land at the village.

Traditionally farmers sow the seeds in aman fields before reaping the paddy. After harvesting aman paddy, *khesari* plants grow there without much care.

But for the last two years, water enters the fields as one of a few sluice gates, built by Water Development Board (WDB) under an embankment project beside the Baleshwar River five years ago, got badly damaged.

"Last year, we failed to save our crops from flood by filling the sluice gate with mud as water current was too strong," Mizanur Rahman, a farmer of the village.

"After reaping aman paddy, we get *khesari dal* as a second crop. If water enters our fields through the damaged sluice gate, we will have



PHOTO: STAR

This sluice gate at Tengrakhali village in Zianagar upazila under Pirojpur district has remained without repair since its collapse two years ago, affecting nearby crop fields with floodwater.

to incur loss," said Md Mozid Gharami, another farmer of the village.

The damaged sluice gate also hampers communication there.

Locals alleged that faulty construction caused damage to the sluice gate on the embankment within three

years.

"I have arranged filling the damaged sluice gate with mud but it remains vulnerable to erosion. No initiative by the WDB to rebuild the sluice gate is in sight," said Md Shah Alam, chairman of Parerhaat union parishad in the

upazila.

"We could not repair a few sluice gates including the one under question as the higher authority is yet to sanction fund for the purpose," said Md Sarwar Hossain, sub-assistant engineer of WDB in Zianagar upazila.

Pabna AL council tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The district Awami League (AL) will hold its council tomorrow after nine years.

Grassroots level activists want to elect their leaders through voting while the senior leaders are in favour of a selection committee from the party high command, said sources.

"Internal party feud may take place if we go for voting. To avoid any untoward situation, we want a selection committee from party chief Sheikh Hasina," said M Saidul Haque Chunnun, senior vice president of district unit AL.

Five candidates will vie for the president post. They are incumbent president of the unit and land minister Shamsur Rahman Sharif Dilu, vice president M Saidul Haque Chunnun, Rezaul Karim Lal, Abdul Hamid Master, former state minister Samsul Haque Tuku and former lawmaker Panjab Ali Biswas.

On the other hand, lone candidate Golam Faruk Khandaker Prince, organising secretary of the district AL, will take up secretary post.

The last council was held in 2005, said Prince, also the lawmaker from Pabna-5 constituency.

Later, we could not hold council due to political unrest, he said.

FF Kashem Fakir now fights for a morsel of bread

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A valiant freedom fighter in Sadar upazila now runs his family of five by selling medicines for rat killing.

The lone bread earner, FF Abul Kashem Fakir, 64, is facing great trouble to support his family as his earnings have drastically fell.

"Days were when I earned Tk 150 to 200 a day by selling medicines for killing rat, louse and scabies at my makeshift shop at markets in the district. But my earnings have dropped alarmingly nowadays," said Abul Kashem.

Altaz Hossain, a resident of Alorupa intersection area in the district town, said although Kashem's medicines are very effective, many now do not buy them for fear of fake medicines.

Kashem, son of late Ahmed Fakir of Adampur village under Moksdepur upazila in Gopalganj district, fought against Pakistani occupation forces under Sector 8 during the country's Liberation War in 1971.

After the country was freed, he shifted to Lalmonirhat town and married Fatema Begum of Shaheed Shahjahan Colony in Sadar upazila.

His two sons--Abu Kawsar, 24, and Abu Sayeed, 15-- work as hawkers in the town while his daughter Amana Khatun, 19, studied BA at a local college.

"Although I get freedom fighters' monthly allowance, it is too small amount for me to maintain the family. I face acute trouble when I can't bear the education cost of my daughter," said the valiant freedom fighter.



PHOTO: STAR

Utterly hard-pressed, freedom fighter Abul Kashem Fakir sells medicines for treatment of scabies and killing rats and lice beside a road in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

Two killed in dredger capsized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Two workers were killed as a sand-laden dredger sank in the Shitalakkha River at Shaorait point of Kaligonj upazila on Wednesday night.

The victims were identified as Mohammed Shawkat Ali, 34, son of Ahammed Ali of Jhakuapara village under Chikmari upazila in Kurigram district and Mohammed Noab Ali, 40, son of Alim Uddin of Muradpur village of same district.

Quoting locals, OC of Kaligonj PS Mohammed Nazmul Haque Bhuyan said, three workers of a dredger owned by one Billal Hossain alias Biplob of Narayanganj district fell asleep in the dredger after taking meal. At mid night, the dredger sunk in the river after it suffered a leak at the

20 injured as rival AL men clash in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

At least 20 people, four with bullets, were injured in a clash between two rival groups of the ruling Awami League in Sadar upazila of the district yesterday.

Of the injured, four hit by bullets are Mithun Ali, 22, Bokul Hossain, 35, Sabdar Ali, 40, and Mottleb Ali, 50. They are now undergoing treatments at Kushtia Medical College Hospital.

Abdul Khaleq, officer in-charge of Kushtia Model Police Station, said there had been a long standing rivalry between the supporters of two locals AL leaders, Shawkat Ali and Sikandar Ali, over establishment supremacy in the area.

Abdul Jalil, one of the supporters of Shawkat, locked in an altercation with a supporter of Sikandar over a trifling matter at Baliapara village around 9:30am, said the OC, quoting witnesses.

Following the altercation, both the groups equipped with locally made weapons swooped on each other triggering a clash among them that left at least 16 people from both sides injured, the OC added.

Being informed, a team of the law enforcers rushed to the spot and fired several gun shots to disperse the clashing groups and bring the situation under control.

At least four others received bullet injuries during the police firing, locals alleged.

Housewife murdered for dowry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A housewife was hacked to death allegedly by her husband at Kodupur village in Baniarchang upazila of Habiganj district on Wednesday night.

She was identified as Jesmin Akter, 28, daughter of Mugol Miah of the village.

Jesmin was married to Enayet Miah of the same village ten years ago. Enayet came to the house at night and hacked her over dowry around 8:00pm, relatives of the deceased said.

Md Liakat Ali, officer in-charge of Baniarchang Police Station, said Enayet went into hiding after the incident.

College boy abducted in Meherpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Armed criminals abducted a college student in Gangni upazila of Meherpur district early yesterday.

The victim, Rabbi Hossain, 18, son of Jahangir Hossain of Solotaka village of the upazila, is a HSC first-year student at Kushtia Government College.

Reazul Islam, officer in-charge of Gangni Police Station, quoting victim's family members said Rabbi along with his paternal uncle Daud Hossain went to guard their fish enclosure at Solotaka Beel (water body) on Wednesday evening.

A gang of 8/10 stormed into their makeshift hut, built to guard the fish farm, while they were asleep around 2:30am and abducted the two at gun-point, added the OC.

While the abductors were about to leave the spot, Daud escaped from their clutch and ran for his life. He managed to flee the scene taking advantage of the darkness and thick fog. Later, the gang picked up Rabbi and left the scene.

Raj Punnah fest begins today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Raj Punnah, a traditional festival of the Bohmang district, will begin today in the district amid festivity.

Seventeenth Bohmang king Bohmongree U Chaw Prue will inaugurate the three-day festival at the Bohmang Rajbari ground in the morning.

Hundreds of tourists from home and abroad have already arrived to attend the festival.

Besides, people from various communities including Chakma, Marma, Tangchangya, Tripura, Pankhua, Lusai, Khyang, Bawm, Khumi, Mro, and Chak from three hill districts thronged the Royal House compound to enjoy the traditional festival.

Raj Punnah is an annual revenue collection programme where the Bohmang Circle Chief collects taxes from headmen and karbaris.

On the opening day of the festival, the headmen of 109 mouzas and over 1,000 karbaris will express their loyalty to the Bohmongree, who receives annual *jhum* tax and traditional gifts from them.



PHOTO: STAR

A woman with her family members busy making poppadoms at Jogenbabur Math in Dinajpur town.

Poppadums make their life easier

KONGKON KARMAKER And ANDREW EAGLE, from Dinajpur

Each morning, Dinajpur town's Jogenbabur Math becomes a hive of activity. From an early hour, women from disadvantaged families arrive at the field to start rolling poppadums.

Made from lentils and spices, the snack and side dish alternatively named as *pnad* or *papar* has long been enjoyed across South Asia. Poppadums are also common in the West where they have become a well-established part of South Asian restaurant fare. Given the ease of final preparation, with the finished papars needing only to be fried in oil, the item is also increasingly enjoyed in western homes.

At the field, traders supply raw materials, which are powdered and distributed for rolling. The flattened poppadums are then dried in sunlight. Once dry, the their breads are ready for marketing.

By mid-morning much of Jogenbabur Math is covered with drying poppadums.

Trader Omesh Saha employs up to 100 women in the task with others involved in packing the product. "A woman can roll up to 6 kilograms per day," he says.

The women are currently paid 10 taka for every 100 poppadums rolled. "Each worker can make 500-800 per day," says Saha, an effort that brings an average monthly income of about 2500 taka. They work about six hours per day.

The flexible working hours and daily payment system have made the emerging cottage industry popular with women, who can earn that much needed extra bucks while managing household responsibilities. Poppadum rolling is

also possible to do from home, which suits young mothers.

Besides, food preparation experience learnt at home helps most women to complete the task quickly and effectively. "I don't think many men could compete with the skill of women's hands," says trader Biren Das.

Minoti Rani Das has been rolling poppadums for ten years. When she started, the rate was 2 taka for 100 poppadums. "It has helped me a lot," she says, "I hope to keep doing it forever."

"The best thing is that I can work from home," says Das, "as much as I like without feeling pressure. I don't have to worry about marketing or buying raw materials." Purnima Das of Barabandar has been rolling poppadums for the last six years. "My earnings have helped me send my two children to school," she says. At weekends and during school holidays her ten-year-old daughter Dolla, studying in class III, enjoys helping her mother to roll poppadums on the roadside in front of their home.

"Perhaps 400 women in this area are involved," says another worker, Jayanti Rani Das.

President of Dinajpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry told the Daily Star that poppadums have become important in supporting thousands of families by providing workplaces in or nearby homes. "Around 1500 families in the district generate income this way," he says.

Meanwhile, the popularity of the product, which is sold across Bangladesh and has export potential, has made poppadums as synonymous with Dinajpur as kataribhog rice and lychees.



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