

Food crisis hits Sajek valley

SAIKAT DEWAN, Khagrachhari

Acute food crisis prevails in different villages of the remote Sajek union under Baghaichhari upazila of Rangamati for the last two to three months where one kilogramme of coarse rice is being sold at Tk 85-90, locals and their representatives say.

The local representatives have already written to their higher authorities in the administration, but the government is yet to send any aid to the affected villages. The representatives of Baghaichhari Upazila Parishad at their own initiative distributed some rice among the villagers on April 22, but it was very inadequate, they added.

"We need more food assistance. If the government does not act quickly and sincerely, people will die," Barha Hrisi Chakma, chairman of Baghaichhari Upazila Parishad, told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

Sajek is the largest union located in the north of Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is situated 67km northeast of

Khagrachhari town and 95km northwest of Rangamati town. The border of Bangladesh and Mizoram in India is 8km east from Sajek, according to Wikipedia.

Kala Chan Tripura, Karbai (chief) of Kajatoli village, said most of the people of Sajek are poor and depend on mostly Jhum cultivation and resources collected from forests.

Every year people of some areas face food crisis during this period as the total yield from farming decreases. Many people buy rice as they run out of stocks, he added.

But the crisis this year is relatively more acute thanks to high price of rice and fall of the price of bamboo, a major income source for many inhabitants, said Kala Chan Tripura.

Locals say a single bamboo is usually sold at Tk 20-22, but the price now plummeted to Tk 7-8. The existing poor road communication has worsened further due to recent heavy rain, causing a sharp rise in the price of rice.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4



Indigenous women carrying food home. Sajek area in Rangamati has been hit by an acute food crisis. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

DINAJPUR BOILER BLAST 2 more deaths take toll to 15

OUR CORRESPONDENT, from Rangpur

Two more persons succumbed to their injuries in the last 24 hours or so following a boiler explosion at a rice mill in Dinajpur sadar upazila on the night of April 19, bringing the death toll to 15.

Both from Kalikapur village, Mazedur Rahman, 45, passed away around 11:50pm on Tuesday and Enamul Haq around noon yesterday.

Five persons remain in critical condition in Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) and

SEE PAGE 12 COL 4

Don't torture

FROM PAGE 1

allowances come from people's pockets."

Stressing the need for maintaining discipline in the force, the PM said all its members would have to discharge their duties with patriotism, honesty, skill and professionalism.

The Rab members must maintain discipline and carry out their superior authority's orders, she added.

Hasina reiterated that her government would never tolerate any terrorist and militant activities on Bangladeshi soil.

Militancy is not a new problem for the world and also for Bangladesh, she said. "We'll do whatever is necessary to ensure peace and

security of the people."

Issuing a strong warning against attracting innocent youths to militancy through wrong interpretation of Islam, she said attention should be given to creating mass awareness to root out the menace from the society.

She lauded the publication of a booklet with proper interpretation of relevant verses of the holy Quran and Hadith by the Rab, and asked the force to take steps for its widespread publicity.

Hasina said she was frequently talking to imams, schoolteachers, freedom fighters and public representatives through videoconferences urging them to create awareness

against militancy and terrorism.

"To combat militancy, we all have to work together... If we can't do that, all our achievements would go in vain."

The government would do everything possible for the rehabilitation of militants and terrorists willing to return to normal life, she added.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed also spoke at the function.

The PM later inaugurated the newly constructed office of Rab-9 and unveiled the plaques of a number of Rab projects.

Earlier, some documentaries on Rab activities were screened.

'JMB's bomb expert' arrested in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion claimed to have arrested an improvised explosive device (IED) expert of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in the capital's Uttara early yesterday.

Mushfiqur Rahman Jeni, 28, belonged to JMB's "Sarwar-Tamim Group" and was working on producing remote-controlled IEDs, said Jahangir Hossain Matubbar, commanding officer of Rab-10, at a press briefing at Rab media centre in Karwan Bazar.

Son of a late civil engineer of

Comilla's Burichang, Mushfiqur got admitted to computer science and engineering department at Buet in 2005, but did not complete his studies.

It could not be known when and how Mushfiqur got involved in militancy, Rab said.

Rab said they learnt about Mushfiqur from 15 members of the banned militant outfit who were arrested in the city and elsewhere since March 21.

Rab official Jahangir said Mushfiqur admitted that they could remotely

SEE PAGE 12 COL 4

Issues can be resolved thru' talks

FROM PAGE 1

comments while replying to a reporter's query during a press conference at the law ministry yesterday, a day after Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha said successive governments treated the judiciary unfairly.

At a function in Habiganj on Tuesday, the CJ also said the administration never wanted the judiciary to run independently. He added that the judiciary provided protection to the administration too and the bureaucracy always considered judiciary as its contender.

"With due respect to the chief justice, I will say that you [journalists] have seen many developing and developed countries. You have also seen the neigh-

boring countries. In no country do the honourable chief justices speak so much in public or express so much anger unless it involves judicial activities," Anisul said.

He said he wanted that every issue was resolved through discussions.

The minister also said he did not see any discriminatory nature in their behaviour. "We can resolve any issue through discussions if he [the CJ] points it out."

The government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina never interfered in the judiciary and would never do that in future, he said.

Apart from increasing their other facilities, he said, the government

almost doubled the monthly salaries of the chief justice and the judges of the Appellate and High Court divisions of the Supreme Court.

The government also hiked the salaries of the lower court judges, he said, adding, it did that because it believed the judges should discharge their duties independently.

Replying to a question, Anisul said there was no gap between the government and the judiciary.

Yesterday's press conference was organised by the law ministry at its conference room on the occasion of the National Legal Aid Day to be observed on Friday.

Earlier in the programme, the minister said the government provided legal assistance to 2,31,626 people and given financial assistance to 1,66,339 people through 64 legal aid offices between March 2009 and this year.

A total of 40,715 people in prisons were given legal assistance, he said, adding that 64,546 cases involving legal aid have been disposed of since 2012.

Law and Justice Division Secretary ASSM Zahirul Haque and National Legal Aid Services Organisation's acting director Mostafizur Rahman, among others, were present at the press conference.

Mayor Khokon

FROM PAGE 16

said. "What is the plan behind laying the pipelines?"

Out of around 2,300km drainage network in Dhaka city, Wasa maintains the main 360km storm water drainage lines, including canals. The rest, mostly surface drains, is looked after by the two city corporations.

Taqsem said drainage capacity of storm water drainage lines and canals had significantly reduced as they were clogged with solid garbage, and that the two city corporations were supposed to clean those up. Moreover, designated flood plains around the capital were filled up for real estate companies.

As a result, rainwater recedes slowly in the city, he said. Regarding filling up of flood plains, the Wasa MD said Wasa had not been included in any technical committee that altered Dhaka's Detailed Area Plan over the last four years.

When asked about Tawsem's points, Khokon said when he goes to different wards to hear about the problems of residents, most people complain about water supply and waterlogging problems.

This was why he termed Wasa a

"failed organisation", as it did not give attention to the problems of locals, the mayor said. "I think the remark I made was the view of the people."

Wasa takes huge projects like fetching water from the Padma and Meghna rivers, instead of giving attention to local problems, he added.

About Wasa's complaints about not cleaning surface drains, Khokon admitted that in some cases garbage management workers do not clean properly.

Wastewater flows into the Buriganga through sewers, but there is no initiative to treat it, he said. Wasa would not have to go for water from the Padma and the Meghna if the Buriganga remained clean.

He expressed dissatisfaction with Wasa's role in addressing waterlogging.

The mayor said they completed 85 percent work of drainage system in Shantinagar, an area which would go under knee-deep water after rain, and that the situation there improved.

However, there was waterlogging in Malibagh and Rajarbagh areas, he noted.

About bringing the storm water drainage system under one authority, the mayor said they were ready to take up the responsibility.

China, Europe to build a base on the moon

FROM PAGE 16

of the '60s. We recognize that to explore space for peaceful purposes, we do international cooperation."

The director general of the 22-member ESA, Johann-Dietrich Woerner, has described its proposed "Moon Village" as a potential international launching pad for future missions to Mars and a chance to develop

space tourism or even lunar mining.

China arrived relatively late to space travel but has ramped up its program since its first manned spaceflight in 2003, more than 42 years after a Soviet cosmonaut became the first to reach orbit.

Last week the China National Space Administration launched an unmanned spacecraft on a mission to

dock with its currently unoccupied space station. It plans to launch a mission to collect samples from the moon by the end of this year and next year conduct the first mission to the moon's far side and bring back mineral samples.

The ESA hopes to conduct a mission analysis on samples brought back by this year's Chinese mission, known as

Chang'e 5, and also have a European flying on the Chinese space station at some future date, Hvistendahl said. Neither prospect has been finalized.

China was excluded from the International Space Station mainly due to US legislation barring such cooperation and concerns over the Chinese space program's strong military connections.

Metro rail project slows down

FROM PAGE 1

Despite the delays, officials were upbeat about a 2019 trial run on a part of the metro rail lines.

"We are trying with our heart and soul to launch the trial run of the metro rail from north Uttara to Agargaon by the end of 2019," said Mofazzel Hossain, metro rail project director.

Full commercial operation of the service is expected to take two more years.

Without being specific, Mofazzel said, "Tender process was delayed due to various reasons."

Utility line relocation along Agargaon to Mirpur-10 started last November and was almost done, said Mofazzel, adding that utility line relocation work for Agargaon-Motijheel section would begin by this November.

Similar work around three stations -- Kazipara, Sheorapara and Pallabi -- had been done while utility line relocation around stations at Mirpur-10 and -11 and Agargaon was ongoing, he said.

The widening and utility line relocation work on a one-kilometre stretch of road, from Mirpur-10 to Pallabi, was also underway. The stretch from Pallabi to north Uttara has no underground utility lines.

Soil tests, along the metro route, including the tests for the 16 stations, had been done, said Mofazzel.

Metro rail is aimed at easing the perennial traffic congestion in the capital and provide an improved, faster,

comfortable and environmentally-friendly means of public transportation, say transport experts.

According to Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), 14 trains would operate every three minutes and carry 60,000 passengers every hour in both directions.

The estimated time to travel the 20km distance, from north end of Uttara to Motijheel, is 35 minutes. The trains would have six cars each, all air conditioned.

Prequalification of all bidders of the eight components of the project, officially called Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project, had been done before the Gulshan attack. The Dhaka Mass Transit Company, the metro rail owning and operating firm, only signed the first contract with Tokyo Construction Company Ltd in March last year.

The deal was for the development of 19 acres designated for the metro rail depot in north Uttara. A third of the work has been done, said project officials, adding that the work has a two-year deadline.

The depot would be home to the trains. They would be maintained there and there would be a workshop, an operation control centre, a washing plant, and a training centre.

With the bid evaluation of component-2, for civil works and building construction at the depot, almost done, the authorities were eagerly eyeing the final contract with joint venture of

winner bidders Ital-Thai and Sinohydro by end of this month.

But contracts for other components, which were supposed to be signed last year, could not be inked as the Japanese government was cautious in giving consent to its nationals to travel to Bangladesh after the militant attack.

The project authorities had to postpone the bidding process time and again in the face of the foreign bidders' requests, citing security concerns, said a project official, wishing anonymity.

Project authorities are now trying to complete the bidding processes so that the remaining financial allocations could be availed prior to the end of this fiscal year in June.

"It is a tough challenge for us to be able to meet the financial deadline," said Project Director Mofazzel.

Tender process of some components, for the construction of elevated stations, viaducts and electro-mechanical installations, was on, he said.

Negotiations on the bid proposal of component-8, for procurement of 24 locomotives, 144 rail cars and depot equipment, were ongoing, he said.

Md Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said, "We maintain a detailed list of members of the foreign development partners working in the country and a precise watch on their security."

Following the Gulshan attack, police provide them with protection during their travels in the city or across the country, if need be, he said.

Flood grips Chalan Beel

FROM PAGE 1

organisations for cultivating crops. But now all his crops were damaged by floodwater.

Kader Ali, a farmer at Beeldahar village, said paddy on his 32 bighas of land went under water. "I couldn't cut the paddy due to the shortage of labourers."

Expressing frustration at the shortage of labourers, Abu Sayed, a farmer of Krishnanagar village, said, "We are facing difficulties in finding labourers to cut paddy... Normally, they charge Tk 300 to Tk 400 for a day's work. But now they are asking for Tk 700 to Tk 800."

TEMPORARY MIGRATION
Losing the only crop of the year -- Boro -- many people from Sunamganj's flood-hit haor areas are temporarily migrating to towns and cities in search of livelihood.

Fifty-five-year-old Badshah Mia from Bhati Tahirpur village used to work at paddy fields in the Boro season and fish for the rest of the time of the year.

But he had to leave home after flashflood hit Sunamganj hard. He is now staying in the capital to earn a living.

Like him, Jahirul Haque and his brother Shahidul Haque left their village home in Bishwambarpur upazila in search of work.

"We used to work at rice mills during this season. Since crops in the area are damaged, we don't have any

hope of getting jobs at the mills", Jahirul said.

"We have a big family to look after... Now we have no option but to pull rickshaws in the capital to earn a livelihood," he added.

Migration of people from haor areas to big towns and cities in search of work is not unusual, but such migration in the harvest season is abnormal and alarming, say locals and rights activists.

Nantu Lal Das, former vice-chairman of Sunamganj's Shalla upazila, said at least a thousand people from the upazila already left their homes in search of work.

It's alarming and a sign of severe crisis in the area, he said.

"They don't have any food at home, and Boro crops are gone. They have not yet got any support from the authorities. They can't find any work here. Now, they are leaving their homes to find work", he told this newspaper.

Rafiqul Islam Talukdar, chairman of Dhanpur union in Bishwambarpur upazila, said many people in his union had already left their homes to find work.

Moreover, many farmers are burdened with loans from NGOs, banks or local lenders, and it's impossible for them to repay those this year.

"I took a loan from a local lender to cultivate Boro on 10 acres of land. But I have lost all the crops and I cannot repay my loan," said

Intiaj Mia of Shaktiarkhala village while leaving his home for the capital yesterday.

"The lender is putting pressure on me to repay the loan. I need to earn for clearing my debt and also for my family," he added.

Visiting the launch terminal in Sunamganj town yesterday, The Daily Star correspondent found that hundreds of people were arriving there from many remote villages. Most of them were travelling to either Sylhet or the capital.

LOSS OF CATTLE
For Lulu Mia, it was nothing short of a disaster.

First, the farmer at Sunamganj's Batakandi village lost crops on eight acres of land to flashflood in Nandail haor. And then, six of his seven buffaloes died in a span of two days.

The buffaloes suddenly fell sick and died, said Lulu's cousin Golam Mostafa.

Two cows also died at Bhukhali village in Jagannathpur upazila yesterday.

Meanwhile, blood samples of the six dead buffaloes were sent to the divisional livestock laboratory to ascertain the cause of their death, Md Gias Uddin, deputy director of Sylhet Livestock Department, told this newspaper.

[Our Natore, Sylhet and Moulvibazar correspondents contributed to this report]