

Teesta irrigation canal embankment at risk as illegal sand lifting on

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The 18-kilometre main canal of the country's largest Teesta irrigation Project is increasingly becoming vulnerable due to lifting of earth and sand from the embankments by some unscrupulous people.

The left embankment of the canal, from Dalia of Dimla upazila at the Teesta Barrage point to Dundidari of Jaldhaka upazila, has been damaged at 21 points, claimed locals.

The damaged parts include a 300-metre stretch which has been completely destroyed by the sand lifters, they said, adding that if the embankments collapse, irrigation to Boro fields will be greatly hampered this season.

The canal, which was commissioned in 1998 and has been bracketed as a key point installation (KPI-1) since, is connected with other secondary and tertiary canal networks stretching around 300 kilometres, said a Water Development Board (WDB) official.

"Around 44,000 hectares of Boro field have been brought under irrigation through this canal this year. The canal with a bed width of 278 feet carries 1400-1600 cubic metres of water per second if there is normal water flow in river and it puts pressure on embankments," informed the WDB official posted at Dalia.

The 18-kilometre main irrigation canal was supposed to have embankments as wide as 111 feet, with an average height of five feet, said the official.

But during a recent visit, this reporter found that a 300-metre portion of the left embankment has been levelled with farmlands at Dundibari village in Jaldhaka upazila. In other 20 points, the extent of damage ranged from 10 to 100 metres.

It made the embankment so



Roots of trees meant for strengthening the embankment on Teesta main irrigation canal lie exposed due to massive removal of earth from there, which leaves the embankment vulnerable to erosion and collapse.

PHOTO: EAM ASADUZZAMAN

vulnerable that at pressure of flowing water, it collapsed at several places at different times in recent past.

As vast crop fields were inundated following the incidents of embankment collapse, the WDB had to repair the damaged parts spending huge sums of money.

A resident of Dundibari village, also a beneficiary of Teesta irrigation project, Moshir Rahman said forest department planted several thousand woody trees in 2004 to protect the embankment.

"But callous earth lifters often remove soil from near the roots of grown up trees, even cut the roots, ultimately leading to death and

falling down of the trees," he added.

"Earth lifters from nearby Jaldhaka upazila town bring tractors to carry the earth and if we try to prevent the illegal act, their men assault us," said farmer Hukum Ali of Balagram village.

Azizul Islam, president of Teesta project irrigational water management association, a body of beneficiary group, said they were interested in playing a role to protect the embankment if the authorities give them responsibility.

"In last meeting with WDB officials in the first week of this month, we asked them to give us the responsibility to look after the canal embankments and trees on

them along with water of the canal," he said, adding that they also wanted permission for fish farming in the canal.

However, Sub-divisional engineer of WDB's Dalia Division Abdul Hafiz outright rejected the idea, saying that the canal and other facilities are very 'important infrastructures'.

Asked why the WDB has failed to protect the important infrastructures from the illegal lifting of soil from the embankment, Abdullah Al Mamun, executive engineer of WDB's Dalia division, said he had taken steps to handle the situation with heavy hands and requested chairmen of the

union parishads concerned to cooperate in protecting embankments.

He also said that his department has lodged a number of cases against the illegal earth and sand lifters and persons who harmed the project's property.

Responding to another query, Al Mamun said they have nine armed Ansar members to ensure the security of three regulators along the 18-km canal.

"But we are facing problem to monitor round the clock the canal and other key structures due to shortage of manpower," he said without getting into the details of 'manpower shortage'.

Jubo League leader's 'assault' sends UP member to hospital

He faced the wrath as he had protested irregularities in govt's rice sale scheme

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A Jubo League leader allegedly beat up and injured a member of a union parishad (UP) as the latter protested irregularities in government's rice sale programme for the poor in his union under Baniachong upazila of Habiganj on Sunday.

The injured, Habibur Rahman Mujahid, UP member of ward 5 in Dakkhin-Purbo (No 3) Union Parishad, was admitted to Baniachong Upazila Health Complex.

Later that night, Habibur filed a written complaint with Baniachong Police Station against Subed Ali, from Jatukornopara village in the upazila. Subed is the president of Jubo League's Baniachong upazila unit.

Contacted, Rashed Mobarak, officer-in-charge (OC) of the police station, confirmed of receiving the complaint from Habibur.

According to the complaint, Subed and his goons physically assaulted Habibur in the afternoon when he confronted rice dealer Shahjahan Mia in the union's Ganingganj Bazar area after getting complaints that Shahjahan was limiting sale of rice to 20 to 25 kilograms for each cardholder.

As per government rule, each cardholder is eligible to buy a maximum of 30 kg rice for Tk 300.

Locals, who rescued Habibur and took him to the health complex, alleged that Subed used his influence to award Shahjahan the contract of selling rice under the government programme in the union.

Jasim Mia, a cardholder in the area, said although it had been announced by the government that each cardholder would be able to buy 30 kg of rice, he was allowed only 24 kg.

A number of residents in the union also complained of nepotism during the enlistment process that excluded a large number of impoverished families from the government-funded programme.

Shahjahan Mia, against whom people raised complaints of curbing sales, claimed that he was not in his store when the assault on Habibur took place.

Denying his involvement in the attack on Habibur, Jubo League leader Subed Ali claimed that Habibur filed the complained against him only to tarnish his image.

OC Rashed Mobarak said they would take necessary action once Subed's involvement is found following completion of their investigation.



A cross-section of people join a human chain organised by Gaibandha chapter of Jalabayu Parishad on BD Road in the district town yesterday marking Climate Week 2019. Speakers at the programme urged empowerment of local bodies and allocation of sufficient budget for tackling the adverse effects of climate change. PHOTO: KM REZAUL HOQUE

Girl dies from 'wrong treatment'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A nine-year-old girl died allegedly due to 'wrong treatment' at a private hospital in the town on Saturday.

The right leg of Atika, daughter of Atiqur Rahman of Gokhari village in

Baliadangi upazila, fractured as a battery-operated three-wheeler hit her when she was returning home from school over two weeks ago, Atiqur said.

"After treatment for 13 days at Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital, she was shifted to Eliza Nursing Home and Diagnostic Centre where a junior orthopaedic consultant at Panchagarh Sadar Hospital conducted a surgery on her right leg on Saturday night, after anaesthesia by an anaesthesia consultant.

"Excessive dose of anaesthesia caused death of my daughter the same night. The two doctors left the private hospital without informing us of the death," Atiqur alleged.

Thakurgaon Civil Surgeon said a 3-member probe body has been formed to investigate the incident.

No complaint

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of people, including local indigenous community leaders and rights activists, against Kalam.

They termed Kalam's behaviour harassment and unacceptable. They also demanded his punishment.

Condemning the photos, Rani Yan Yan, adviser to the Chakma circle chief, on a Facebook post, said "[This is an] Example of a public representative accepting greetings.

"...No one dared to protest indecency, public sexual harassment of an indigenous woman by an upazila chairman."

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said Kalam's conduct was "unacceptable and unpleasant."

"Through such an incident...her society and culture were dishonoured. Respect should have been shown towards her," Sanjeeb told this correspondent over phone.

The chairman should be summoned and warned by the higher authorities, he added.

The photos -- which showed Kalam apparently trying to forcefully hug the woman -- were taken during a public reception for him in the remote Miringchara area under the upazila.

Following criticism, Kalam later removed some of the photos.

Afterwards, he said, "I am sorry for my behaviour and I have already deleted the photos from my post.

"I will never do this".

Runpau's brother Men Rung had earlier said their family considered the incident to be "normal" as Kalam was a public repre-

sentative and had been elected upazila chairman on multiple occasions.

"My sister is a simple woman. She respects the chairman a lot," Men Rung told this newspaper yesterday.

He also said his family members were embarrassed to see the way the photos were all over social media.

He denied that his sister, who is unmarried and aged about 20, or any other member of their family had any complaints against Kalam.

Kalam, who was elected as an independent candidate during the second phase of the countrywide upazila parishad elections on March 18, first posted the photos on his Facebook account.

He is a former leader of BNP's Alikadam unit.

Meanwhile, rights activist Khushi Kabir said as the man in question was an elected public representative, locals could raise questions about his behaviour.

Sexual harassment is an offense in the country and there is a court directive to this end, Khushi, coordinator of Nijera Kori, said.

She, however, said the woman who was the supposed victim should be heard out first.

Asked about Kalam's apologetic stance, she said, "Apology is not enough. Action should be taken in this regard."

Earlier in the day, Sing Young Mro, a member of the Bandarban Hill District Council and a leader of the Mro community, said "We strongly condemn the harassment of a Mro woman of remote Miringchara area under Alikadam upazila by the local representative Abul Kalam."

Hard-pressed FF Protap gets recognition, not benefits

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Protap Chandra Roy is yet to get the government allowances meant for freedom fighters (FFs) due to a 'slow process'.

After struggling to get recognition as a freedom fighter, the 65-year-old man from Kazirchawra village under Harati union in Sadar upazila have been earning his livelihood by selling spices items at people's doorsteps.

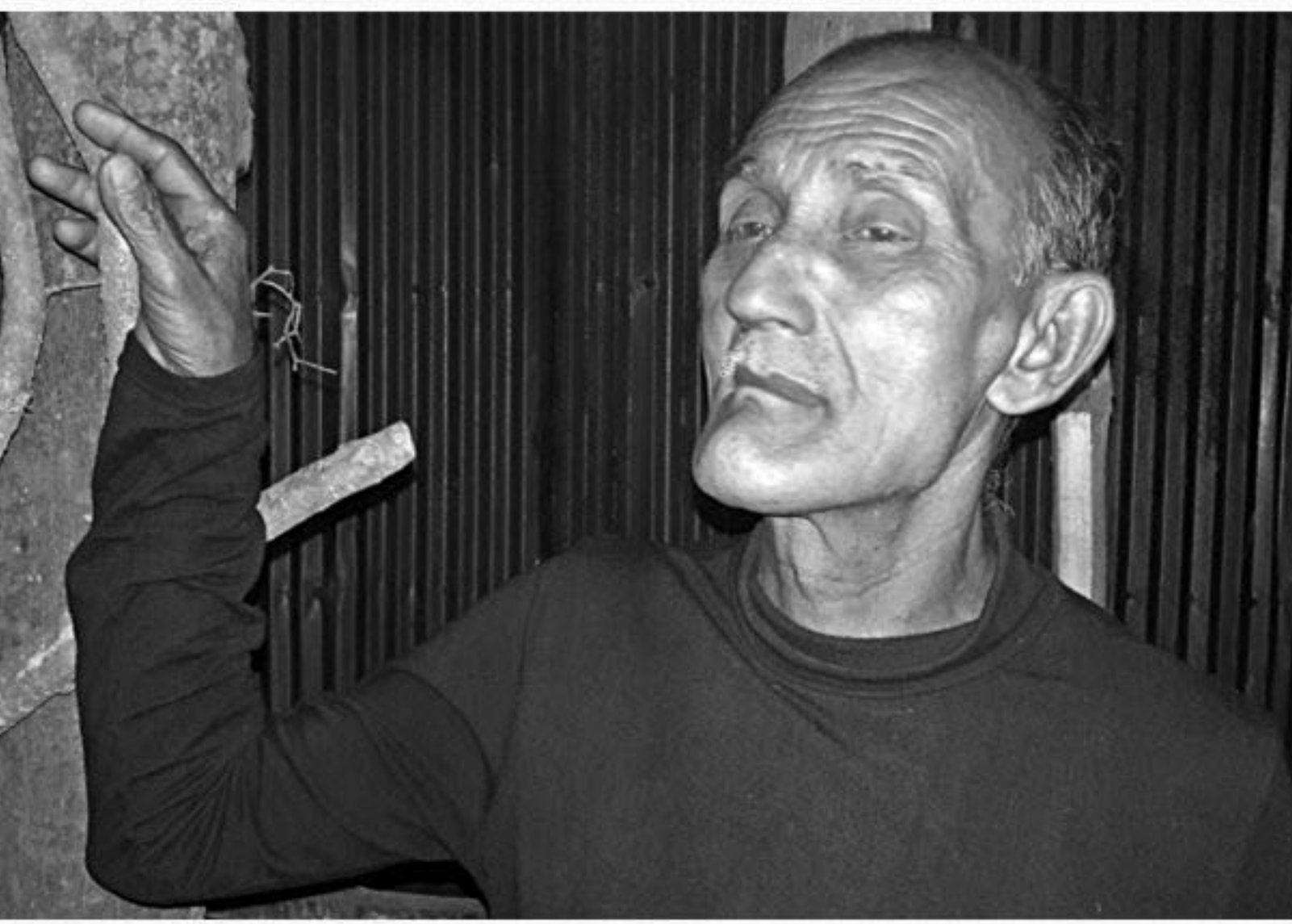
When Protap is waiting for over four decades to get his monthly allowance as a freedom fighter, another man in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur is enjoying the benefits, using the same serial number.

Nowadays, landless Protap, son of late Tarini Kanta Roy, and his ailing wife Bimala Rani, 55, are passing their days in hardship with the little income that comes from Protap's small trade.

Protap goes out of his house on a bicycle and roves at least eight villages every day for selling his products.

"I have a hut erected on my brother's land as I had to sell my homestead on two decimals of land during my daughter's marriage," Protap said.

"I have submitted all the necessary documents to the Sadar upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) a few months ago," Protap said, adding that after primary inquiry the UNO assured him of taking steps in this regard soon, but he is yet to receive any benefit.



When this correspondent tried to reach the other Protap from Uttar Dhamur village in Rangpur's Gangachara upazila for his comments, he declined to talk to the journalists.

While speaking over the phone, Gangachara UNO Taslima Begum said she joined the office recently and she wasn't aware of the matter.

During primary investigation they came to know that another Protap in Rangpur's Gangachara upazila has been enjoying the government benefits under the same serial No 205944, Sadar UNO Jayashree Rani Roy said.

After examining the documents she

primarily assumes that the one from Lalmonirhat might have been deprived of the facilities meant for freedom fighters, the UNO added.

She already sent the inquiry report to the ministry concerned and the matter is under now process, UNO Jayashree said, adding that she was waiting for a positive reply soon.

"I fought the country's Liberation War when I was only 18 years old. I joined the fellow freedom fighters under Sector 6 and my serial No is 205944," Protap said, adding that he got the recognition only on paper, but is yet to avail any benefits.

NZ orders top-level probe

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that shocked the world.

"It is important that no stone is left unturned to get to how this act of terrorism occurred and how we could have stopped it," she told reporters.

New Zealand's spy agencies have faced criticism in the wake of the attack for concentrating on the threat from Islamic extremism.

Instead, the victims were all Muslims and the massacre was allegedly carried out by a white supremacist fixated on the belief that there was an Islamist plot to "invade" Western countries.

"One question we need to answer is whether or not we could or should have known more," Ardern said.

"New Zealand is not a surveillance state ... but questions need to be answered."

Ardern ruled out New Zealand reintroducing the death penalty for accused gunman Brenton Tarrant, 28, who was arrested minutes after the attack on the mosques and has been charged with murder.

She said details of the royal commis-

sion were being finalised, but it would be comprehensive and would report in a timely manner.

It will cover the activities of intelligence services, police, customs, immigration and any other relevant government agencies in the lead-up to the attack.

The gunman livestreamed the attack online, although New Zealand has outlawed the footage as "objectionable content".

Ardern reiterated her believe it should not be aired.

"That video should not be shared. That is harmful content," she said when questioned about Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan showing excerpts of the footage at campaign rallies for local elections this month.

Erdogan had angered both Wellington and Canberra with campaign rhetoric about anti-Muslim Australians and New Zealanders being sent back in "coffins" like their grandfathers at Gallipoli, a World War I battle.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters travelled to Istanbul to

meet Erdogan and address an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Peters said OIC members were full of praise for the support New Zealand had offered its small, tight-knit Muslim community in the wake of the killings.

"A number of them were weeping and sobbing at the demonstration (of support) by non-Muslim New Zealand towards the Muslim victims," he told reporters.

"It was dramatic and I was told by countless ministers that they've never seen anything of that type."

The body of an Indian student killed in the Christchurch mosque attacks, meanwhile, was returned yesterday to her grieving family in Kochi, where relatives remembered a bright young woman dedicated to her studies.

Ansi Alibava, 25, was the first of at least five Indians shot dead on March 15 to be repatriated.

The family planned to hold a funeral ceremony for the masters student in their nearby hometown of Kodungallur.