



BARIND FARMERS At mercy of 'water lords'

ANWAR ALI

On April 9, Mukul Soren, a Santal farmer in Rajshahi, drank pesticide in a suicide attempt over not getting irrigation water from the same deep tubewell that allegedly led to the suicide of two farmers, also Santals, last year.

All three were fed up with the exploitative system of irrigation water distribution in parts of the Barind region.

The Barind region, known as the rice bowl of Bangladesh, faces a great catastrophe with its groundwater levels depleting fast. In this water-stressed region, irrigation tubewells have now become a tool for the people with political clout to exploit farmers.

A significant number of these farmers belong to ethnic minority communities and is therefore more vulnerable to exploitation.

Last year, Abhinath Mardi, 36, and his cousin Robi Mardi, 27, died by suicide in Godagari of Rajshahi allegedly after the local tubewell operator refused them the irrigation water they were entitled to,

according to family members and case documents.

After public outcries, police arrested and pressed charges against Shakhawat Hossain, the tubewell operator.

The Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA), the government agency responsible for overseeing irrigation in the region, replaced Shakhawat with a new operator, Hashem Ali Babu. But there seems to be no respite from the exploitation by the operators, appointed by the BMDA.

It was the same tubewell in Rajshahi's Issoripur village that drove Mukul, 35, to make an attempt on his own life. Unlike the Mardi cousins, Mukul survived as he was swiftly taken to a hospital.

"Water scarcity pushed me to the brink after I could not irrigate my land for eight days during peak irrigation season," Mukul told The Daily Star recently.

"The tubewell operator then called me one dawn, promising me irrigation water. I went there around 5:00am. But he kept me waiting till afternoon and

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EXPLOITATION BY TUBEWELL OPERATORS

- Capitalize on water crisis in much of Barind region
- Deprive small farmers of water regularly
- Those who pay extra money receive irrigation water on time

HOW SMALL FARMERS STRUGGLE

- Face trouble to irrigate their land
- Endure deliberate delays by tubewell operators
- Many forced to sell or lease out land
- Lax monitoring by authorities

INFLUENCE OF MONEY AND POLITICS

BMDA, responsible for overseeing the operation of thousands of deep tubewells in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions, earns substantial revenue in irrigation charges from farmers every year. Yet the way it appoints and monitors the operators raises questions.

Now Fitch has negative outlook on Bangladesh

Stops short of rating downgrade

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh's credit rating came under further threat yesterday as Fitch put the country on a "negative" outlook while giving a damning verdict on the central bank's policy response to the fast-depleting foreign currency reserves.

The American rating agency maintained Bangladesh's BB- rating but warned that the outlook was now negative rather than stable, mirroring the action taken in July by its peer Standard and Poor's.

By the end of 2023, Fitch estimates the foreign currency reserves will be sufficient to meet three months' import bill, which is lower than the 'BB' median of 4.4 months. And in the next fiscal year, the import cover will come down to about 2.6 months.

Fitch estimates that gross reserves fell by 19 percent in the first nine months of the year.

As of September 20, foreign currency reserves stand at about \$21.5 billion, enough to meet four months' import bill at best, as per the latest published data by the Bangladesh Bank.

"We forecast foreign exchange reserves to stay under pressure, driven by rising imports and foreign currency intervention by the central bank," Fitch said.

The negative outlook reflects a deterioration in external buffers, which has increased vulnerability to shocks.

"It also reflects our view that the country's incremental policy response, including exchange rate system changes, and continued support from external official creditors, has been insufficient to stem the fall in foreign reserves and resolve domestic US dollar liquidity strains," it added.

Earlier in May, Moody's downgraded Bangladesh's long-held credit rating on the same concerns over the country's external position after monitoring the situation for about six months.

The foreign exchange reserve outlook is challenging, amid a still managed exchange rate, elevated oil prices and a further relaxation of import restrictions, which will widen the current account deficit through to 2025, Fitch said.

"It remains uncertain whether the shift to a single



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BEHIND THE CRISIS

- Excessive groundwater extraction for decades
- Annual extraction of water in this region amounts to 137,100 crore litres, enough to meet Dhaka city's water demand for 548 days
- 70pc annual groundwater extraction attributed to unregulated private deep tubewells

THE TUBE-WELL TROUBLE

- BMDA introduced deep tube-wells in 1990s
- BMDA stopped setting up of fresh tubewells in 2012
- Yet unregulated private tubewells continue to thrive
- 16,000 govt-run, 56,000 private tubewells in operation in Barind region



A file photo, top, shows a lowland in Uchadanga in Rajshahi's Tanore upazila. Farmland in many areas develop such cracks in dry season. The deep tubewell, left, over which two Santal farmers died by suicide while another attempted to take his life.

PHOTO: STAR

Bhuban dies a week after being hit by stray bullet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bhuban Chandra Shil, who was hit in the head by a stray bullet during an attack on a "top criminal" a week ago, died at a city hospital around noon yesterday.

Bhuban, 55, was passing through Tejgaon Industrial Area on a motorcycle on September 18 night when criminals attacked a suspect in the film actor Sohel Chowdhury murder case.

Since then, he had been on life support at the intensive care unit of

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Who is to blame for Bhuban's death?

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

It was an unlikely death for 55-year-old Bhuban Chandra Shil, a lawyer who lived in Dhaka city for work while his family stayed in Maizdi, Noakhali.

He just happened to be passing the Tejgaon industrial area on his motorbike when a stray bullet hit his head.

He was an innocent bystander caught in what seems to be a revenge attack by a criminal gang. It was Tariq Sayeed Mamun, a suspect in film actor Sohel Chowdhury's murder case, who was the actual target.

After serving 26 years in prison, Mamun had been out on bail and was going home in his car when he was intercepted by a gang of criminals on motorbikes who started shooting at him.

Mamun tried to escape the vehicle, but the criminals chased him down and stabbed him in the neck and back.

Miraculously, Mamun, after treatment at the

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Cops, AL activists 'vandalise' rally stage

Alleges BNP, defers Savar rally to Sept 28

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP was forced to defer yesterday's Aminbazar rally in Savar as the stage set up at the venue was vandalised allegedly by police personnel and ruling Awami League activists.

However, the party's other rally in Old Dhaka's Dholaikhal was held peacefully.

The meeting at Aminbazar was scheduled to begin at 3:00pm as part of BNP's 15-day programme to press home its one-point demand - resignation of the government and general elections under a non-party interim government.

The rally has been

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BNP leaders and activists at a rally in the capital's Dholaikhal yesterday. The party's Dhaka south city unit organised the meeting as part of its one-point movement demanding resignation of the government and general election under a non-party interim government.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



বড় ক্রেতা ও বড় ইস্যুয়ার-এর মধ্যে IFIC স্থাপন করেছে এক অনন্য মেলবন্ধন

আইএফআইসি আমার বন্ড

নিরাপদ বিনিয়োগে সেরা মুনাফা

মেয়াদপূর্তিতে প্রকৃত মুনাফা বার্ষিক ১২%



মাস প্রদানের ১০০০ কোটি টাকার এবং বিনিয়োগের কোনো ঝুঁকিসহ নেই



৯ লক্ষ টাকা বিনিয়োগ করলে প্রতি মাসে পাবেন নিট ২,০০০ টাকা এবং ৫ বছর শেষে ৯ লক্ষ টাকা। এভাবে মেয়াদপূর্তিতে মূল টাকাসহ ফেরত পাবেন সর্বশেষে ৯,৩০,০০০ টাকা



মাস শেষে টাকা সরাসরি একাউন্টে জমা হবে



বিনিয়োগ ও আয়ে আঁধার অনুযায়ী আয়কর সুবিধা আছে



আইএফআইসি ব্যাংক প্যারানি নিয়ন্ত্রিত এই বিনিয়োগ সম্পূর্ণ নিরাপদ



* প্রাপ্ত টাউনশিপ নির্মিত ডেভেলপার হিসেবে বড় বিনিয়োগকৃত অর্থ ঢাকা ইপিজেড-এর পাশে মেয়াদলব্ধ ইকো সিটি'র ২ম পর্যায় নির্মাণে ব্যয় করবে

* মেয়াদলব্ধ ইকো সিটি : ঢাকা ইপিজেড-সদস্য মডেলসহ উপরে ৯৯২ একর জমির উপর নির্মিত একটি অত্যাধুনিক, সবুজ, স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ ও সস্তায় পূরণ প্রকল্প

সরকার অনুমোদিত ১০০০ কোটি টাকার দিন জিরো কুপন বন্ড

আসে এসে আসে পাবেন ভিজিত কেনার সিমিত সুযোগ

বন্ডের নাম : আইএফআইসি প্যারানি-ডি

ইস্যুকার : প্রাপ্ত টাউনশিপ গ্রিন ডিভো কুপন বন্ড

ট্রাস্ট : প্রাপ্ত টাউনশিপ নির্মিত

প্যারানি : সন্ধানী লাইফ ইনস্যুরেন্স কোম্পানি লিমিটেড

উপস্থাপনা ও বাবক্ষপক : আইএফআইসি ইনভেস্টমেন্ট লিমিটেড

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বন্ড কেনার জন্য আসুন IFIC ব্যাংক-এর যেকোনো শাখা-উপস্থাপনা অথবা বন্ড কেনার ১৬২৫৫ আইএফআইসি আমর বন্ড সম্পর্কে বিস্তারিত জানতে বিডিআর কোর্সে কল করুন