

TEESTA IRRIGATION PROJECT

Farmers pay Tk 1,000 despite Tk 480 govt rate

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

While the government has fixed the rate for irrigation water supply from the Teesta Irrigation Project at Tk 480 per acre throughout the year, farmers are reportedly paying Tk 1,000.

This discrepancy has led to frustration among farmers in the project area.

However, authorities from the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) claimed that no additional money is being taken from farmers.

The payments for irrigation water are made through local farmers' associations, they added.

BWDB officials said approximately 1,00,000 farmers have cultivated Boro rice on 1,23,500 acres of land under the project across six districts: Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Dinajpur, Joypurhat, and Bogura.

Irrigation water is supplied through a 750 kilometre canal network from the project.

The government earns Tk 5,92,80,000 for supplying irrigation water to 1,23,500

acres at the rate of Tk 480 per acre.

Farmers, however, alleged that local associations have collected Tk 12,35,00,000 from them for irrigation water supply to 1,23,000 acres at the rate of Tk 1,000 per acre.

While the association leaders paid the government fee of Tk 5,92,80,000, the additional Tk 6,42,29,000 remains unaccounted for, the farmers alleged.

Rashidul Islam, a 65-year-old farmer from Nilphamari's Dimla upazila, said he has been growing crops using irrigation water from the project for the past 30 years.

"I had to pay Tk 1,000 to receive irrigation water for one acre of land, despite the government rate being Tk 480.

I don't know where the extra Tk 520 went. I paid the amount through the local association. However, they did not give me any receipt for it," he said.

Abdur Rahim, a 70-year-old farmer from the same area, alleged that the extra money is shared between the association leaders and BWDB officials.



Mango farmers spray pesticides on their mango trees. This year, orchards throughout the Rajshahi district saw an abundance of mango blossoms. However, in just 15 days, most of these buds fell off, causing these farmers to lose hope. As a last ditch effort, they are using insecticides, hoping to salvage this year's yields. The photo was taken from the Mormoria village in Paba upazila recently. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

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30 injured as wedding party bus overturns in Netrakona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

At least 30 passengers were injured in an accident when a passenger bus carrying wedding guests overturned and landed in a field after being hit by a cattle-laden truck on Thursday afternoon.

The accident occurred around 4:30pm in the Islampur area, near a petrol pump on the Netrakona-Mohanganj road. The passengers were en route from Netrakona to Mohanganj to attend a wedding reception.

Eyewitnesses confirmed that women, children, and elderly individuals were among the injured. Both the bus and truck drivers were also reportedly injured but fled the scene after the incident.

Locals rushed the injured to Mohanganj and Netrokona Sadar Hospitals, although their names and identities have not yet been confirmed.

According to Barhatta Police Station Sub-Inspector Md Mahmudul Hasan and eyewitnesses, about 40 passengers were travelling on the bus. When it reached the turn near the Islampur petrol pump, the truck coming from the opposite direction collided with the bus, causing it to veer off the road and overturn in a field.

SI Mahmudul added that the bus and the truck have been seized, and legal action is underway.

SAVING ICHAMATI RIVER

Legal tangle hinders revival efforts

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

The progress of a Tk 1,554.90 crore mega project aimed at reviving the Ichamati river in Pabna has hit a snag due to numerous legal battles over disputed land, casting uncertainty over its timely completion.

The three-year project — launched in June last year — targets 110 kilometres of dredging work, including 33.77km of the river itself, 44.07km along canals connecting it, 20km of the Sutikhali river, and 12.37km of the Bharara canal.

According to Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), the initiative is being implemented by the Bangladesh Army's Engineering Division.

The plan also includes extensive construction — 10km of retaining walls, 10km of drainage lines, 23 bridges, 56 quays, and a 10km walkway. A total of 42,310 trees will be planted along the walkway in Pabna municipality.

"Once completed, Ichamati will regain its former flow, river communication will be restored, and its banks will become tourist attractions," said project director Sudhangsha Kumar Sarkar, also superintendent engineer of BWDB in Pabna.

He added that the river would reconnect with the Padma and Jamuna rivers, and a pumping station will ensure water flow during the dry season.

Currently, 162 excavators are involved in dredging, with 26km of

the river and 5km of canals already completed up to the Fakirpur bridge, said warrant officer Md Saiful Islam of the Bangladesh Army, who is posted in the project area.

However, dredging a 5km stretch through Pabna municipality has become challenging due to land disputes.

Over the years, riverbanks have been encroached upon through forged documents. BWDB identified

with the work by bypassing the disputed land, as we cannot act beyond court orders."

Environmental activists blame poor planning. Md Abdul Hamid Khan, secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon in Pabna, said, "The authorities didn't demarcate the river before starting the project. According to High Court orders, CS (Cadastral Survey) records must be used for river demarcation. But



1,053 illegal structures on the Ichamati's banks — most of which were demolished before the project began. But many encroachers have since filed 87 court cases, stalling further work.

"We're engaging in legal battles, but these processes take time," said Md Mosharaf Hossain, assistant director of BWDB in Pabna.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw several signboards along the riverbank declaring legal proceedings over land claims.

Regarding the stalled dredging, Saiful Islam said, "We will continue

encroachers made fake documents with help from local officials."

He called the situation a result of official negligence.

Md Masudur Rahman Mintu, an alleged land grabber, claimed many residents have lived on the banks for decades and possess valid documents.

"We've been paying taxes and hold three to four official records. We don't oppose the project — but if our land is needed, it should be acquired lawfully," he said.

Pabna Deputy Commissioner Md Mofizul Islam said the administration is pursuing legal resolutions and will act upon the court's decisions.

Body of missing man found in forest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Police have recovered the body of a man who was missing for seven days from a remote forest area in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj early yesterday.

The deceased, Liton Mia, 38, from Goachnagar village in Madhabpur upazila, was missing since April 3.

His body was found buried under a mound in the Kapaichhara tea garden area.

According to his family, he left home to collect firewood from the Satchari forest but did not return. His family began searching for him and filed a missing person's report with Chunarughat Police Station on Thursday, seven days after the incident.

Following the complaint, police launched an investigation and arrested one suspect, Pramod Rickmon, 32, from the Kapaichhara tea garden area.

"Based on Pramod's confession, we recovered the body from under a sand mound in the tea garden area," said Nur Alam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Chunarughat Police Station.

During preliminary interrogation, Pramod confessed that Liton was beaten to death by a group of five individuals who suspected him of cattle theft.

Liton was accused of stealing ten cows and was

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Potters in Patuakhali gear up for Baishakh

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

With Pabela Baishakh just around the corner, the air in several villages of Bauful upazila in Patuakhali is thick with the scent of wet clay and fresh paint.

Pottery artisans are working tirelessly in courtyards and makeshift workshops, shaping, painting, and drying clay goods — each piece crafted in anticipation of booming sales during the Bangla New Year festivities.

Around a thousand families across four villages — Kankdia, Boga, Madanpur, and Bilbilas — are engaged in this traditional craft.

Though their products are sold throughout



the year, demand peaks ahead of the Baishakhi celebrations and fair, with traders and artisans expecting sales to exceed Tk 1 crore this season.

These villages, located about 30 kilometres northeast of Patuakhali town, have long been home to the Pal community, renowned for their pottery skills.

Under the supervision of master craftsmen, the artisans produce a wide variety of household and decorative items using a special type of locally sourced sticky clay.

The production process is a team effort — some artisans shape the clay, others paint the items, some dry them in the sun, and others take care of packaging.

Over the past five decades, the Pal community has adapted to changing consumer tastes, said Barun Pal, one of the most experienced artisans in the region.

"In the beginning, we used to make only clay pots and toys. Now, we create a wide variety of items like dinner sets, cups, and other decorative

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Artisans are busy weaving Shital Pati, a traditional mat, in Kathalia village of Barishal's Bakerganj upazila. These mats are crafted by interlacing strips of a green cane known as "Murta." Depending on size and quality, each mat sells at wholesale prices between Tk 1,500 and Tk 3,500. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: TITU DAS

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