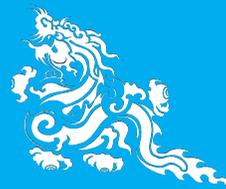


KUENSEL



THAT THE PEOPLE SHALL BE INFORMED

MONDAY, JULY 10, 2017 • Nu 15



The Tingtibi-Pangbang road along the Gelephu-Trongsa highway which was blocked since yesterday morning was opened to traffic by evening Story on Pg.5 (Photo: DoR)

Briefly

Travel Advisory

» All Assam Gorkha Student Union have called a 12-hour Ulderguri district strike from 0500 hours today. All Bhutanese commuters are advised to refrain from travelling towards Jomotshangkha .

Inside

HOME

» Teach children values of farming : PM | PG.5

DZONGKHAG

» Dumseygang to get drinking water supply | PG.8

Drying water thwarts rice self-sufficiency dream

Tenzin Namgyel

If Bhutan cultivated all the land left fallow, the country would produce additional 10,323.315 metric tonnes (MT) of paddy every year.

According to the 2015 agriculture statistics, 6,345 acres of paddy fields were left fallow until 2015. Average paddy yield per acreage is around 1,627kg. This means, 6,193.989 MT rice is being lost annually. Compared with traditional mill, which produced 40 percent of rice, improved mill gives out 20 percent more.

Given the pressure on paddy fields due to the rapid drying up of irrigation water and urbanisation, the size of fallow land in the last two years could have increased. The report says that the paddy fields left fallow could be much higher than estimated, **Pg.2**

Delayed DNA reports prolong judgement for 14 cases

The lack of a DNA testing facility in the country compounds the problem

Tashi Dema

Almost two years after a 45-year-old man from Getana, Chukha was arrested for the alleged murder of a 60-year-old woman and her 16-year-old grandson in Kuen-garabten, Trongsa, his family members continue to come to Thimphu.

This is because the investigating agency, the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) is yet to receive the DNA test results from Kolkata, India.

The suspect's brother, Nima, who was in Thimphu last week said it was his fourth visit to see RBP's forensic officials. "I have called them several times."

Nima said that every time he approached the police officers, he was told that they have sent the DNA to India and that they are awaiting the report.

He believes the forensic report could either convict or acquit his brother. "His trial has been too long and people say that if we don't follow up, he will be convicted."

Nima said that the delayed judgment is affecting the suspect's health. Claiming that his brother is suffering from a disease, he said his condition worsens in bad weather. "If my brother is innocent, he is also losing precious years of his life in detention."

Nima appealed to the High Court, requesting court officials to expedite the judgment but he was told that until the lower court passes judgment, the High Court could not intervene.

He alleged that police are deliberately delaying the DNA report to prolong the judgment. **Pg.3**

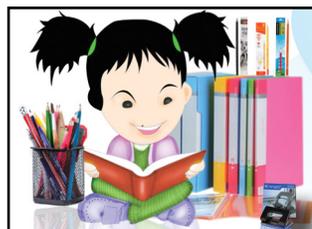


Weather

Thimphu	
Max	Min
27	17
Kanglung	
Max	Min
25	17



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Drying water thwarts rice self-sufficiency dream

From Pg.1

as the biannual survey excludes Gungtongs or empty households that do not engage in any form of agriculture activities.

In 2015, an average of 18 percent of farming households faced food shortage due to decreased rice production.

Why fallow?

It is reported that paddy fields remain fallow mainly because of drying up of irrigation water and poor agriculture practices. In many parts of the country, rice farmers said that availability of irrigation water is decreasing by the year.

In the last three years, Tashi, a rice farmer from Bayminang in Punakha, lost around 9,762 kgs of paddy after two acres of paddy fields had to be left fallow. The sixty-nine-year-old, who works as a sharecropper for his neighbour, has lost all hopes of recultivating the fallow land because of inadequate irrigation water.

Tashi said: "It's worrying to see our water drying up every year. It's not the water that is drying, but our food." The water sources for both irrigation and drinking are fast disappearing due to global warming.

Punakha has 335 acres of paddy fields that are now left fallow. If fully utilised, the dzongkhag could produce additional 545,045 MT paddy every year. Today, the dzongkhag produces 10,622.683 MT paddy from 6,529 acres.

Like Tashi, one of the farmers in Kanglung, Trashigang said that spring water that he used to irrigate his field has dried almost completely.

"Part of it has been piped for drinking by the people," he said

Although no studies have been undertaken to ensure the disappearance of irrigation water due to global warming, rice farmers said that the rising temperature



Rice farmer Tashi shows his fallow land

contribute to the drying of water sources.

Around 700 acres of paddy fields have been lost to infrastructure development, especially roads, building and townships. Around 323 acres more have been lost to illegal conversion of wetland for socioeconomic development purposes and natural disasters.

For instance, Bajo town in Wangdue was been established on paddy field. Infrastructure development ate up vast acres of the once lush paddy fields. The fields were left fallow also because of the wild animals' attack on the crop and rural-urban migration.

Rice self-sufficiency

From the total area of 38,394 square km, 71 percent of the country is under forest cover; 51.4 percent under protected area. Only 7.8 percent of the total land is arable. Of that, only 49,325 acres

of land is under cultivation.

According to the agriculture minister Yeshey Dorji, 160,000 acres of paddy fields is required if the country is to become rice self-sufficient, which would produce 260,320 MT of paddy annually.

However, the country has only 80,000 acres of registered paddy fields, of which only 49,325 acres have been utilised until 2015, producing 80,251.1775 MT paddy. Today, the country faces shortage of rice by almost 180,068.225 MT.

The minister said that given the limited scope of paddy fields, Bhutan would never achieve rice self-sufficiency.

"But we are trying to increase production by improving rice variety, developing climate change resilient variety, improving agriculture sector through encouraging mechanised farming, and reviving irrigation channels.

"We also encourage dou-

ble cropping of rice, which are in practice in the west and south," I hope with this mechanism we can at least reduce rice import."

Rice import

According to trade statistics, the country in 2015 imported 83,646.083 MT rice and spent Nu 1.6 B. In 2016, the country imported rice worth Nu 1.9 B.

The report shows a sharp rise in rice import in the last five years. In 2010, rice import stood at 52,008.038 MT, which increased to 54,042.481 MT in 2011. Expenses also increased from Nu 847.059 million (M) in 2010 to Nu 851.923 M in 2011.

Rice import figure stood at 72,290.806 MT in 2012, which increased to 72,585.987 MT in 2013. Expenses recorded at Nu 1.2 B in 2012 increased to Nu 1.5 B in 2013.

In 2014, the country spent Nu 1.7 B for 79,375.476 MT rice import.

Dzongkhag-wise record of fallow land

Dzongkhag	(Acres)
Bumthang	Nil
Chukha	214
Dagana	527
Gasa	2
Haa	39
Lhuentse	343
Mongar	313
Paro	41
Pemagatshel	194
Punakha	335
S/jongkhar	104
Samtse	829
Sarpang	686
Thimphu	43
Trashigang	493
T/yangtse	343
Trongsa	489
Tsirang	774
Wangdue	482
Zhemgang	196
Total	6,345

Source: Agriculture Statistics 2015