

Plenty of food for monga-hit voters

VGF rice distribution begins early this year, TR to begin soon

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The government this year started food distribution for vulnerable groups at least one month ahead of the usual schedule in the five monga-prone northern districts.

Relief department sources said the government allocated VGF (vulnerable group feeding) cards to 8.85 lakh families in 339 unions and 15 municipalities of Rangpur,

Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha and Nilphamari districts in the first half of August.

Usually, monga (a pre-harvest lean period) starts in the area in mid-September and continues till paddy harvest begins in early November.

In previous years, VGF program usually began at the end of September, and at places, in the first week of October.

The government has to hand over

power to a caretaker administration in last week of October, when Monga will turn acute.

Local political activists observed that VGF programme has been started earlier this year to please voters before its departure.

This year, 2500 regular VGF cards are being distributed in each union and municipality against 2000 last year.

Around 8,850 tonnes of rice worth

about Tk 15.50 crore will be needed in each turn (twice a month). So far, one allotment was distributed in August, relief officials said.

Besides, the ministry of food and disaster management allocated 64,000 tonnes of rice under test relief (TR) and part of this will reach the five northern districts within one week, Nilphamari district relief officials said.

All the 22 parliament members in five northern districts will also get 100 tonnes of rice each and each female MP would get 20 tonnes for distribution under special TR allotment, the sources said.

Opposition MPs are usually sidelined in such food distribution programmes, Awami League MP from Nilphamari-2 constituency Asaduzzaman Noor said.

Under test relief, each union usually gets five tonnes of rice, which may vary depending on its population.

The open market sale (OMS) of food grains will also be started this month, they said.

Nilphamari District Relief Officer Moshir Rashid said he received a government order to disburse 1600 tonnes of rice under VGF programme in August. He is expecting more such order, he said.

Nilphamari District Food Controller Enayetur Rahman said there are 16000 tonnes of rice and 1000 tonnes of wheat in seven Local Supply Depots (LSDs) in the district.

Opposition leaders and locals apprehended a massive misappropriation of rice and wheat by ruling party leaders as they will try to please party workers ahead of election.



Pickets stop a train in Panchagarh during the opposition-called countrywide hartal yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



People queue for VGF rice in front of Nilphamari municipal office on September 7.

PHOTO: STAR

NETRAKONA-1 CONSTITUENCY

Ex-JCD leader's move to elbow out incumbent BNP MP

JAHANGIR ALAM, Netrakona

Intra-party rift in Netrakona BNP has widened over nomination from Netrakona-1 constituency (Kalmakanda and Durgapur upazilas) in the coming parliamentary election.

The party in the area is divided into two factions, one led by lawmaker MA Karim Abbasi and another by former central JCD leader Kawser Kamal. Both are seeking nomination.

MA Karim Abbasi was elected from Netrakona-1 with BNP ticket in 1991 and 2001 by defeating Awami League candidate Jalaluddin Talukder. He was whip of BNP in parliament during 1991-1996.

While talking to this correspondent a number of local BNP leaders alleged that Karim Abbasi did little development work in Kalmakanda upazila. On the other hand he did some work in Durgapur upazila during his tenure, they said.

Leaders and workers of Kalmakanda upazila BNP are now united under the leadership of Kawser Kamal as he promised there development activities if elected, they claimed.

Some party leaders in Kalmakanda also claimed that they will boycott all political programmes



Kawser Kamal



MA Karim Abbasi MP

of Karim Abbasi in the upazila.

They said that during BNP's founding anniversary programme on September 1, they held a discussion meeting where Kawser Kamal was the chief guest and Kalmakanda upazila BNP president Muslimuddin Ahamed was in the chair. Most of the workers attended the programme, extending their support to the former JCD leader, they claimed.

Kawser Kamal has also a large number of supporters in Durgapur upazila, where the party is divided into two groups led by the two leaders, they said.

As per the updated list, there are 3,04,541 voters in the constituency-1, 38,276 in Durgapur and 1,66,265 in Kalmakanda.

The two rivals, Abbasi and Kawser Kamal are holding workers meetings and public rallies to show their strength and are lobbying with party high-ups for nomination, sources said.

At rallies, Kawser Kamal bitterly criticised Abbasi saying, "The four-party alliance will lose this seat (Netrakona-1) to the opposition if Karim Abbasi is nominated because he has become unpopular for not doing development any work,

inefficiency, corruption and ill treatment with people and party men"

"I believe the party high command will not nominate Karim Abbasi in the coming election", he said while talking to the correspondent.

Muslimuddin Ahamed, president of Kalmakanda upazila BNP, said, "We believe party high-ups will nominate Kawser Kamal from the area if they want to retain the seat".

"If Karim Abbasi gets nomination, most BNP leaders and workers in Kalmakanda and a faction in Durgapur will not support him", he further said.

Former president of Durgapur upazila BNP MA Jinnah also echoed the same sentiment.

"Karim Abbasi has isolated himself from party workers and people due to his corruption, inefficiency and autocratic activities", he said.

But Karim Abbasi claimed he is still popular in Durgapur and Kalmakanda. "I have done many development works in Durgapur and Kalmakanda during my tenure" Karim Abbasi said while talking to this correspondent.

Those who are criticising me are newcomers in the party and they do not have any base among grassroots level party workers", he claimed.



The Khagrachhari-Baghaichhari road has become a death trap as it collapsed at many points due to rain. The photo was taken from Marisshah. Officials said the road can not be repaired due to lack of funds.

PHOTO: STAR

Rab called to nab a thief

AMANUR AMAN, Kusthia

Finally, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) had to come to make a thief descend from a coconut tree.

Elahi Sawdagar, 40, an alleged thief had entered into the house of one Jahangir in Lord Market area in Meherpur upazila headquarters at about noon on Friday and was caught.

He was beaten and was being taken to police. On way, he slipped from the hands of his captors, ran and climbed on a coconut tree owned by one Abdul Khaleque in the area.

Failing to make him descend, local people called police, who asked him to come down, assuring him that he will not be harmed. Elahi said he will surrender only to Rab. Police then called fire fighters, who showered water on him to force him to come down. They tried till about 9 pm but failed. Police left the area at about 10:00 pm.

On Saturday in the morning, local people were awed to see him atop the tree. They informed Rab office in Meherpur. A Rab team rushed to the spot and asked Elahi to come down.

He quickly got down and surrendered to the elite force, which handed him over to police. Police later said they freed him as no one filed any case.

JP may raise spectre of rivalry for ruling BNP in Kishoreganj-1

MOKLESUR RAHMAN LITON, Kishoreganj

Jatiya Party may become a formidable rival for BNP in Kishoreganj-4 constituency if it joins the BNP-led alliance, according to political circles.

JP chairman HM Ershad has sought two seats from greater Mymensingh as one of his conditions to join the BNP-led 4-party alliance, said Mojibul Huq Chhunu, a possible JP candidate from Kishoreganj-4 constituency in the coming election. He was deputy minister for land during Ershad government.

Ershad's wife Rawshan Ershad is eyeing the other constituency-Mymensingh Sadar, JP sources said.

In 2001 election, BNP leader and 4-party alliance candidate Dr M Osman Faruq was elected from Kishoreganj-4 comprising Karimganj and Tarail upazilas. He got 65,449 votes against Awami League candidate Dr. Mizanul Huq's 64,232. Mojibul Huq Chhunu ran third with 62,533 votes.

After the 2001 election, both Mizanul Huq and Mojibul Huq Chhunu alleged that BNP managed victory there through manipulation.

BNP 'created a situation' at a polling center and the result was postponed. Re-election was held and Dr. Osman Faruq was declared elected, they had claimed.

By now, Chhunu staged several showdowns at Karimganj and Tarail upazilas. He has launched all out campaign, holding small rallies and moving door to door, political circles said.

At rallies, he is telling people that he was the first man who took the initiative for development of Karimganj and Tarail by building infrastructures including roads and Upazila Parishad complexes during JP rule. He has at least 50,000 'reserved votes' in the two upazilas, Chhunu claimed while talking to this correspondent.

The JP leader also brought allegations of corruption against BNP lawmaker and Education Minister Osman Faruq. "He was involved in corruption and nepotism. Osman Faruq appointed his cousin Tutul as his assistant private secretary (APS). Tutul amassed money from non-government schools, colleges and madrasas in the name of arranging MPOs (government payment order)

for their teachers, he alleged.

Some local BNP leaders alleged that the education minister created 'pocket committees' in his area by dissolving earlier committees in Karimganj in an undemocratic way.

Several protest meetings were held against the present Karimganj upazila BNP committee. Local BNP leaders also protested the upazila committee at a press conference in Kishoreganj press club last year.

Presidents and secretaries of all union BNP committees are now behind Jahangir Alam Molla, former president of Karimganj upazila BNP committee, party sources claimed.

Talking to this correspondent, Molla said, he started campaign after assurance of BNP high command including Mirza Abbas, minister-in-charge for Kishoreganj district. Mollah enjoys support of Abbas, the sources said.

This correspondent visited different areas in Kishoreganj-4 constituency and talked to local people and leaders of BNP and JP. They said the education minister sacked his APS few months ago but the damage has already been done.

Killing of an Awami League (AL)

worker by police during a clash between Jatiatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and AL activists on May 7 at Gojadia Bazar in Karimganj further tarnished the image of Osman Faruq, some elderly people said.

They said Chhunu, with a good number of rejuvenated party workers, may turn into a big hurdle for Osman in the coming election.

Chhunu, at a public meeting at Jhautola Bazar in Karimganj on August 25 declared that he would contest in the coming election whether Ershad joins BNP-led alliance or not. He got 50,393 votes in 1996 election.

AL's Dr. Mizanul Huq was elected from Kishoreganj-4 in 1991 and 1996 but defeated by Osman Faruq with a margin of only 1,217 votes in 2001.

Local people this correspondent talked to claimed that AL has a good chance to regain the seat as Mizanul Huq has made local party leaders to close ranks. Intra-party feud was the main cause of his defeat in 2001 election, they said.



Osman Faruq

Dr. Mizanul Huq

Mojibul Huq Chhunu

Jahangir Alam Molla

Party rivals plan procession against AL MP

MD HOSSAIN SERAJ, Magura

Rival party men in Sreepur upazila has declared Awami League (AL) lawmaker from Magura-1 constituency Prof MS Akbar 'unwanted' in the area.

They will bring out a broom procession today protesting his alleged anti-party activities.

To make the broom procession a success, front-ranking leaders of Sreepur AL held a meeting with leaders of Magura Sadar upazila and municipal units. The meeting decided that the procession will be held in Magura town instead of Sreepur upazila headquarters scheduled earlier, party sources said.

Asked why the broom procession, Sreepur upazila AL president Akbar Hossain Main said, "We are just trying to make our leader Sheikh Hasina understand that she should nominate anybody except Prof Akbar as his activities have proved his anti-organisational character. He has lost confidence of party men here".

"He was declared unwanted in Sreepur at a party meeting held there on Tuesday (September 5). We are now exchanging opinion with district leaders on how to make the broom procession a success", Akbar Mian said.

In reply to another question, Akbar Mian said, "After declaring him unwanted in the upazila, almost all the leaders of Sreepur

AL and its front organisation are now determined to resist him (Prof Akbar)".

Tuesday's meeting was presided over by Akbar Mian, party sources said.

On contact, Prof MS Akbar MP said, "Like you, I also hard about the programme. It is nothing but a conspiracy by a few self-seeking people in the party to tarnish my image."

When contacted, Sreepur upazila Awami Jubo League president Kutubuddin Kuti refuted lawmaker Akbar's comment.

"Please wait and see. Not only leaders of Sreepur upazila AL and its front organisation, many district level leaders will also join the programme against the MP because during his 10 years' tenure he never held a meeting with local Jubo League."

He claimed that the MP was always surrounded by his followers who actually do not belong to AL.

Party sources said Sreepur upazila AL is divided into two factions, one led by Akbar Hossain Mian and the other by former local AL general secretary Molla Nabout Hossain.

Intra-party rift in Magura district AL took a new turn when a new faction in the party emerged and held separate programmes on August 27 marking the death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Disease damages guava in Magura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

An 'unidentified disease that attacked around 800 guava orchards has posed a big threat to growers in Magura Sadar upazila.

At least 25 per cent of the total plants along with guavas on about 1,000 acres in 11 villages has rotten, growers said.

Most of the guava growers as well as traders are now frustrated fearing huge loss in the peak time of the seasonal fruit.

Many farmers in Hazrapur, Hazipur and Raghobdair unions opted for raising guava orchards about 10 years back hoping more profit than paddy.

"Even in last season, a farmer earned around Tk 80,000 by growing guava on one bigha land while paddy or jute brought him only Tk 5 to 6 thousand earlier", Nurul Islam a farmer in Ichchakhada village said.

This year growers expected to sell guavas at least worth Tk 4 crore

but the disease damaged at least Tk 1.5 crore guavas, he said.

During a visit this correspondent saw most of the guava orchards in Ichchakhada, Hazrapur, Uthali and Nandlalpur villages were attacked with the disease. They applied pesticide but to no effect.

Assistant Agriculture Officer in Magura Sadar upazila Abdur Rashid however claimed that the disease was not unknown. He identified it as 'anthrax'.

Guava plants were attacked with anthrax as farmers planted seedlings without keeping a mandatory distance of 6 to 7.5 feet and applied urea close to root of plants, he said.

But Deputy Director of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) Aminur Rahman Siddique said the plants were attacked with a viral disease called 'Dieback'.

Farmers were advised to cut off infected branches and to apply pesticide 'Diphan M-45', he said.



A rotten guava on an affected plant in an orchard in Magura Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR