



A scene of the earth dumping that directly affects the crops grown at Kashimpur village in Birganj upazila of Dinajpur. Inset, local people form a human chain on the dried up bed of the Atrai river yesterday demanding postponement of leaving the dredged mud there till harvest of the crops.



PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

Spare dried riverbed from earth dumping till harvest of crops

Villagers in Birganj UZ of Dinajpur urge authorities not to dump dredged earth on their growing crops

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Farmers of Kashimpur village in Birganj upazila of Dinajpur formed a human chain on the dried up bed of the Atrai river yesterday demanding that the authorities postpone leaving the dredged mud there till harvest of the crops cultivated there.

Around 40 days will be enough to complete harvesting most of the crops in the riverbed area while one or two items like maize will require two months.

Some 70 people of the village, mostly landless ones, grow crops like onion, garlic, different types of celery, pumpkin, potato and maize on the riverbed of the Atrai River for

their livelihood.

"The mud dredged from the river is being dumped on the cultivated lands, leaving the crops damaged," said Alam Sheikh of Kashimpur, who has been growing crops on the sandy river land for last 10 years.

The affected people on Saturday filed a prayer to Birganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Yasin Hossain, seeking his intervention in this regard.

The UNO said he would take steps after discussing with the officials of Water Development Board (WDB) in Panchagarh.

"We landless people grow crops here for livelihood. But, they are dumping the earth gathered by dredging the river here, already

damaging crops in a 20-acre area," said Fazar Ali, a farmer of Kashimnagar village.

"I cultivated maize on 4.5 acres of sandy land in the Atrai riverbed this year and spent Tk 2 lakh for the purpose. I will be able to harvest the crop if the land is spared for two months," he said.

Several locals said the dredged earth is being left in a wrong spot from where it would go back to the river if there is heavy rain.

Contacted, Touhid Sarwar, an engineer of WDB in Panchagarh, said they advised the villagers not to cultivate crop on riverbed this year as the dredging was to be done.

Steps will be taken after visiting the spot within a day or two, he added.

Boro cultivation in 5 villages uncertain

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Water scarcity may affect Boro cultivation this season on 700 acres of land in Sadar union of Kamalganj upazila.

Farmers in the affected area, spread out across five villages in Kamalganj Sadar union, said they were facing severe water shortage in Baliachhara canal, their only source of water for irrigation, as its water flow reduced drastically this season due to an ill-conceived sluice gate upstream.

Many of them finished preparation for Boro seedbeds, but they could not sow seeds there due to the water crisis, they also said.

The location of the sluice gate was not set with careful planning as it sits amid barren land in the foothills, beyond the arable area in Baliachhara, claimed Mujahid Mia, a farmer from Kandigaon village.

Mohan Singha, a farmer from Rastila village, said after making a seedbed for five acres of land that he had leased in the area for Boro cultivation, all his investment was at stake due to the water crisis.

Another farmer, Jogesh Biswas, from Bangaon village, said he was gripped by uncertainty after preparing a Boro seedbed for four acres of land.

About a month ago, in an attempt to retain water, the farmers built a makeshift dam with bamboo in the Baliachhara canal near Kamalganj upazila headquarters, said

farmer Saju Mia from Baliachhara.

But the dam was a failure as the canal dried up within a week, he added.

Farmer Sushanta Das, from Pashchim Kumrakapan village, said long time ago, the Water Development Board (WDB) had promised that they would do away with the existing sluice gate and construct a new one downstream so it can retain water for farmlands in the area.

But, unfortunately, the WDB did not live up to their promise, he also alleged.

Speaking with this correspondent, Kamalganj Union Parishad Member Solaiman Hossain Bhutto said hundreds of Boro farmers in Uttar Baligaon, Pashchim Kumrakapan, Rastila, Kandigaon and Bangaon villages along the banks of Baliachhara canal in the union have been hit hard with the poor irrigation system.

Although the situation persisted for several years, the authorities did not pay heed to their repeated requests of providing an effective irrigation system in the area, he alleged.

Contacted, Kamalganj Union Parishad Chairman Abdul Hannan said the new sluice gate that the farmers had been demanding would facilitate irrigation for Boro cultivation on 700 acres of land in the union.

WDB Executive Engineer Ranendra Sankar Chakraborty said they would need to carry out a feasibility study before constructing a new sluice gate in the area.



In their attempt to retain water for irrigation, locals building a makeshift dam with bamboo in Baliachhara canal near Kamalganj upazila headquarters in Moulvibazar. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

Farmer Ohidul Sikdar of Sadipur village in Faridpur Sadar upazila looks after his arum field on the dried-up Mandartola canal. The photo was taken recently.

Arum farming on dried-up canal

Cultivation of the vegetable sees gradual rise in Faridpur as it costs less, brings good profits

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Farmers in Faridpur Sadar upazila are opting for arum cultivation as it is more profitable than the other vegetable items.

This year, a number of farmers in Sadipur area of the upazila are cultivating arum, locally called pani kochu, on the dried-up Mandartola canal, which is originated from the Padma river in Sadipur area and falls in the Kumar river in Bakhunda area.

Cultivation of the nutritious vegetable sees gradual rise as it brings good profit for little production cost.

During a recent visit to Sadipur area this correspondent saw farmer Ohidul Sikdar, 46, along with a hired labourer was taking care of his arum field on one side of the dried-up.

Ohidul said, "Like me, at least 10 farmers of the area have been cultivating arum on the dried-up canal land."

"I have planted 4,000 arum plants on 33 decimals of the canal land in front of my house this year, spending Tk 20,000 and expecting to earn Tk 1 lakh from it," Ohidul said.

He has been cultivating arum of the drier-up canal land for the last couple of years after he noticed that the land

remains abandoned for most of the time of the year, he added.

Jamal Khan, 48, another farmer of the area, said usually arum is cultivated in early January and its harvest starts in mid-April.

Arum farming is much profitable as it requires low production cost, he said, adding that, they do not need to use any insecticides, but only some organic fertilisers.

Besides, very little labour is required to look after the arum plants and it remains safe as cattle do not eat it.

Another grower Farhad Hasan, 42, said last year he cultivated arum on 10 decimals of the canal land, spending Tk 5,000 and sold his produces for Tk 50,000.

"I have cultivated the same amount of land this year as well," Farhad said.

Deputy Director (DD) of Faridpur Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Kartik Chandra Chakraborty said 260 hectares of land in nine upazilas of the district have been brought under arum cultivation this year.

They are expecting around 5,980 tonnes of arum production this year, the DD said.

Ensure Tk 400 daily wage for tea workers

Speakers tell Moulvibazar roundtable

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Tea workers under the banner of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Federation have reiterated the demand for setting Tk 400 as their minimum daily wage and proper implementation of labour laws in the industry.

To press for the demand, the federation organised a roundtable at the hall room of Moulvibazar Press Club in the district town on Sunday.

"We, the representatives of tea workers in different tea estates of Moulvibazar, have gathered here to protest the deprivation that we have been suffering for long," said Gian Urang, president of Moulvibazar tea garden panchayet committee.

Although the tea sector brings high profit, the workers live an awfully poor life with the daily wage of Tk 102, Rajezuzzaman Ratan, president of Socialist Workers Front, said in his speech as the chief guest at the programme.

"We demand implementation of minimum wage of Tk 400 and entitlement to legal framework to change the working conditions of tea workers," said Advocate Abul Hasan, central committee member of Socialist Workers Front.

Speakers at the roundtable recommended publishing a white paper on the financial condition of the tea industry and the owners' spending on the maintenance of the gardens.

Manikganj potato growers in happy mood

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Bumper yield and fair prices have brought smile to potato growers in Manikganj.

According to Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in the district, 1, 706 hectares of land have been brought under potato cultivation this year.

But the farmers have cultivated the vegetable on 1, 883 hectares of land for good profit, which is more than 105 hectares compared to last year, said District Training Officer and in-charge of the Deputy Director of DAE Md Anayet Ullah.

Potato has been cultivated on 594 hectares of land in Singair upazila, 525 hectares in Sadar upazila, 362 hectares in Ghior upazila and 234 hectares in Satura upazila of the district. Farmers of other three upazilas also cultivated some potatoes.

During a visit to Baliakhora in Ghior upazila on Monday, this

correspondent found that the farmers were harvesting potato from their land. Some were seen packing it in sacks. Some loaded a pickup van of wholesalers with the vegetable beside the road.

Abdul Karim of the village said he has cultivated potato on 55 bighas of land this season. He harvested 320 maunds of potato from five bighas of land till Monday. It has been sold for Tk 15 per kg.

He will harvest potatoes from rest 50 bighas of land next month and then keep it in a specialised cold storage of Dhaka's Dhamrai upazila, said Karim, adding that he took the decision to harvest it later, hoping to earn more profits.

Last year, he earned a profit of Tk 46 lakh from the sale of 9000 maunds of potato on 70 bighas of land, said Karim.

Abdus Samad of Char Bailajuri village in the upazila said he has cultivated potato on five bighas of

land this year. The production is good this time.

They will increase the scale of potato farming in near future as it earns good profit, he said.

Wholesaler Mir Mulyem Hossain of Kusta village in Ghior upazila said he buys potato directly from fields in different areas of the upazila and then takes it to different markets in Dhaka for sale.

He purchased 225 maunds of potato till Monday, said Mulyem Hossain, adding that the farmers have begun to harvest their crop in advance and it will continue till the end of March.

Talking to farmers of other areas in the upazila, it is found that the production cost of potato is Tk 8 to Tk 9 a kilogram, whereas the growers are selling it at Tk 20 per kg.

The DAE official said this year, the potato production is good because of the favorable weather condition.



Farmers harvest potato at Baliakhora village in Manikganj's Ghior upazila. Inset, packed potato sacks beside a road. The photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: STAR

