



Suchitra Sen Smriti Sangrahashala (memorial museum) in Pabna town.

PHOTO: STAR

Suchitra Sen's 89th birth anniversary passes in silence

No programmes held for the legendary actress as gathering banned to check spread of Covid-19

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

The 89th birth anniversary of legendary film actress Suchitra Sen passed in silence yesterday as there is strict restriction on public gatherings to check the spread of global pandemic Covid-19.

Ironically, people in general are having an experience, at least for the time being, somewhat similar to that of the Pabna-origin great actress had during the later part of her life, spending in mysterious quiet seclusion at home for decades.

Programmes marking the birth anniversary of Suchitra Sen have been cancelled this year due to the spread of Covid-19. Marufa Monjary Khan Soumee, district cultural officer of Pabna, told The Daily Star.

"People love Suchitra Sen and her film. Now is the time to follow, at least for the time being, her living pattern in later part of life, as people need to remain at home for evading the spread of the highly contagious viral disease," she said.

Born on April 6 in 1931 at her maternal grandfather's residence at Bhangabari village in Belkuchi upazila under greater Pabna region, Suchitra Sen grew up in her ancestral house at Gopalpur Hem Sagor Lane in Pabna town, where a memorial museum named 'Suchitra Sen Smriti Sangrahashala' has been set up.

She along with her family members migrated to Kolkata a few months before the partition of India in 1947.

There she was married with Dibanath Sen, son of a wealthy industrialist.

Inspired by her husband and father-in-law, Suchitra Sen joined the film world and made her debut as an actress in Bengali film 'Shesh Kothai' in 1952. Later she performed in at least 63 films including 7 Hindi films till 1978.

With her elegant beauty with enchanting smile and vibrant performance, Suchitra won the hearts of hundreds of thousands of film viewers.

She lost her husband in a road accident in 1969.

From 1978, Suchitra Sen kept herself detached from all the public appearances and contacts. Consequently, the film fraternity and media started comparing her with Greta Garbo, the mysterious Hollywood star.

In 2005, Suchitra Sen was offered India's prestigious cinematic prize Dadasaheb Phalke Award but she refused it, apparently to avoid public appearance.

On January 17 in 2014, Suchitra Sen died of old age complications at a hospital in Kolkata.

After her death, the Pabna district administration set up a memorial museum at her ancestral house in the town.

"Every year we organize programmes here in memory of the evergreen actress, a pride of the people of Pabna," said Jakir Hossain, president of Suchitra Sen Chalachitra Sangsad.

But the historic house remains closed to public now as no programme has been arranged on the occasion of her birth anniversary this year due to the global spread of Covid-19, he said.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Fall in fruit prices worries Rangamati farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Despite bumper production of fruits, growers in Rangamati are incurring losses as the price has fallen drastically in the local markets of the district due to coronavirus outbreak.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Rangamati, this time the farmers are very happy as they are getting bumper production of fruits due to advanced planting. As a result, they are earning good profit by selling the produce this year compared to last year.

But prices of fruits have witnessed a drastic fall in the local markets here in the last 11 days amid adequate supply as the fear over coronavirus outbreak has kept customers and fruit traders in Rangamati and the adjoining districts.

Traders from different areas in the country usually come to Rangamati to buy fruits from farmers at the field, said local growers, adding that but for the last few days, no traders were visiting the area due to coronavirus fear and that's why fruit farmers from different hill areas are now coming to local markets in the district to sell their produce.

During a visit to a market at Banarupa Samataghat in Rangamati town on Saturday, this correspondent saw that the number of buyers dropped drastically. So, the growers were passing lazy time.

Nitimoy Chakma, owner of a pineapple orchard in Sadar upazila, said he came to the market with 2000-piece pineapple for sale but he did not get fair prices as

most of the traders could not come from outside of Rangamati due to coronavirus outbreak.

"The pineapple would be rotten at garden if I couldn't sell it timely. I sold a pair of pineapple at Tk 10 to Tk 15 today, which was sold at Tk 30 to Tk 40 last week," he added.

Another owner Suman Chakma of Naniarchar upazila said "This year, I cultivated pineapple on two acres of land spending Tk 50,000. For the first time, I came to the market to sell the produce. But I am disappointed as price of the fruit has fallen drastically."

Muhammad Fazlu Mia, a watermelon grower in Rangamati Lemuchari area, said he cultivated watermelon on four bighas of land. He sold the summer fruit at Tk 30,000 till now. But a number of watermelons still lie in his field.

"I contacted with many traders from Chattogram to sell the watermelon but they told me they would not visit Rangamati this time due to the fear of the disease. Now I have to count huge losses as the price has fallen drastically in the local markets," he added.

Md Belal Hossain, a local trader, said "I collect fruits from different hilly areas, but I'm not buying those due to coronavirus outbreak."

Paban Kumar Chakma, deputy director of Rangamati DAE, said it is true that many fruit farmers are now incurring losses as prices of the fruits have drastically fallen due to coronavirus outbreak.



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer tends his watermelon field in Lemuchari area of Rangamati Sadar upazila. Despite bumper production of fruits, growers in the district are incurring losses as the price has fallen drastically in the local markets due to coronavirus outbreak.



A section of unscrupulous traders use the ground of PC Nail Memorial High School in Netrakona's Durgapur upazila for carrying sand on trucks, causing damage to the ground especially during rains.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Kids cannot play in school ground for 10 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Students of PC Nail Memorial High School in Netrakona are deprived of playing as hundreds of sand-laden vehicles have been plying through a portion of the school playground for years.

The school is situated on the bank of the Sumeswary river in Durgapur upazila headquarters.

A group of local traders have been using the school playground for sand trade for a decade, said locals, adding that the traders lift sand from the river and stack the extracted sand nearby and trucks take it to different districts of the country.

Established in 1896, the school is run by Garo Baptist Convention (GBC) in Durgapur. It has some 500 students.

Around 400 sand-laden trucks and lorries ply through the school playground every day and a group of vested quarter realises Tk 200 to Tk 250 as toll from each vehicle, said local people.

Headmaster Md Fazlul Haque said Prof Samarendra Sangma, president of the school managing committee, lodged a case with a Netrakona court in 2016 and the court then imposed a ban on plying of sand-laden vehicles on the school ground for six months.

No sand-laden trucks ply through the playground during the time.

Despite repeated pleas, the authorities

are yet to take any steps to stop plying of the sand-laden vehicles, said the headmaster.

Turya Turon Mree, a ninth grader of the school, said they cannot play at the ground due to indiscriminate plying of sand-laden trucks and lorries.

To reach school, they have to cross the road amid risk of accident every day, said Turya.

Above all, sound pollution is a very serious menace when they attend classes, said Omar Faruq, a tenth grader of the school.

Pankaj Marak, president of a majority faction of GBC in Durgapur, said many guardians are sending their kids to another school to avoid risk of accident.

Once the school was famous for its football team in Netrakona but now the children are deprived of playing, lamented Pankaj.

Md Alal Uddin, a sand trader and also the president of Durgapur upazila Awami League, said "Whether it's blessing or curse, sand trading is now going on in the area in full swing."

Mayor of Durgapur municipality Abdus Salam said he is not aware of it. But he will look into the matter.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Farzana Khanam said necessary steps will be taken in this regard after investigation.

LEVEES IN SUNAMGANJ

Rehabilitation works tainted with corruption allegations

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Allegations of irregularities and corruption are surfacing over the recently completed rehabilitation and maintenance work on more than 600 kilometres of different levees in Sunamganj.

Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) finished the work on the levees surrounding 36 haors of the district after the deadline to finish the works was extended from February 28 to March 20.

BWDB undertakes the routine maintenance work before the rainy season every year to protect cultivated crops, especially Boro, from flash floods in thousands of hectares of land in Sunamganj.

Around Tk 132 crore was spent this year to conduct 633.36 kilometres of rehabilitation work under 746 projects in the district. The projects were implemented by same number of Project Implementation Committees (PIC).

Last year, BWDB spent Tk 80 crore to complete 450 kilometres of rehabilitation work on the dykes under 572 projects.

Asked about the status of this year's work, BWDB Executive Engineer in Sunamganj Sabibur Rahman said, "All PICs completed their work. Only a few grass carpeting works are still being finished. We are now monitoring the weather and put the [newly restored] dykes under close observation."

However, officials of green organisation Haor Bachao Sunamganj Bachao said after visiting around 250 levees in the district, they found ample reasons to believe that the rehabilitation projects were rife with irregularities and corruption this year too.

The organisation's Joint Secretary Salehin Chowdhury said, "The irregularities and corruption took place in three forms. Firstly, there were around 100 projects that were not necessary [to be undertaken] for the protection of crops. Those [projects] were still implemented to serve the interests of some people."

"Secondly, around two hundred of the dykes were [already] in good condition as there was no flash flood in the district last year. But, full amount of money was allotted [for rehabilitation of the dykes] and the PICs only had to spend a small amount [of the allotted funds] to show that the works had been completed."

And finally, all the dykes are now vulnerable as none of the PICs stabilised the soil of the dykes, he said, adding that slopes of most of the dykes are also not up to the mark as grass was not planted there properly.

For decades, the government has been spending heavily on the rehabilitation work of the levees in haor regions to ensure protection of Boro harvest, which is a significant contributor to the country's agricultural economy.

The urgency of routinely maintaining the levees around the haors came to the fore in 2017 when flash floods destroyed Boro plants in vast areas in the region, resulting in a shortfall in rice production.

After finding negligence of contractors and PICs that year, the government initiated 'Kabita (Kajer Binimoye Taka) Rules 2017', a reformation in policy that put PICs under control of government officials. Under the policy, no contractor is awarded any work relating to construction or rehabilitation of levees in haor areas.

According to the policy, all PICs must be formed by November 30 of a year, the works to be started by December 15 and those to be completed by February 28.

This year, Boro paddy has been cultivated on 2,19,450 hectares of land in Sunamganj while last year's cultivation area was 2,28,440 hectares, said Mohammad Sofor Uddin, deputy director of Department of Agricultural Extension in Sunamganj.

Abdul Ahad, deputy commissioner of Sunamganj, said whenever he was informed of negligence in the dyke rehabilitation works, he directed the upazila nirbahi officer concerned to take action.

"For accountability, we provide payments to the PICs in instalments. They will get their final instalment payment after the harvest -- only if the dyke protects it [the crop]," he also said.



Ignoring the risk during the ongoing spread of highly contagious disease Covid-19 across the globe, a section of people continue inter-district travels on different modes of transport including food-carrying trucks. The photo, taken from Banani bus stand area of Rangpur-Dhaka Highway in Bogura yesterday, reflects a hard reality -- working class people's urge to join their workplace for managing the bare necessities for the family during the crisis period.

PHOTO: MOSTOFASHABUJ