

Dead people collecting grant money!

MINTU DESHWARA, back from Habiganj

At least four dead workers have apparently collected grant money awarded to 400 hundred tea workers at Sreebari Tea Garden in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj.

Upon approval of upazila social services officer and upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), the one-time Tk 5,000-grant is being given at the directive of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to impoverished tea workers at different tea gardens in the country every year.

According to tea worker leader Rupu Karmakar, out of total 1,200 workers at Sreebari Tea Garden, 400 were supposed to receive the grant this year.

The garden's worker Kalicharan Rikiason died on November 13 in 2019. But his name was in the list of grant recipients for this year under serial number 205 and the money was collected on his behalf in July the same year.

His wife Mousumi Rikiason said, "The list was made after my husband died. Although my husband's name is still in the list, I've never received the money."

The money was also collected for Hirannanda Das, who died on December 12 in 2019, but the name was included in the grant list made for this year.

Shantush Tanti, a member of the local union parishad, said that names of two others -- Bindu Kharia and Thakurmoni Kal, who died in the last two to three years -- also made it to this year's list.

"Neither the tea garden Panchayat president nor the social services department in the upazila informed me that they were preparing a list for the grant," he alleged.

Claiming that the committee members collected bribe include names of workers in the list, he said such irregularity is a violation of the "Cha Sramikder Jibanman Unnayan Karmasuchi Bastobayan Nitimala-2013".

A number of unscrupulous worker leaders including the Panchayat president have been cheating innocent workers by embezzling their money in the name of dead, widow or mentally unbalanced people, alleged a local named Mishu Acharjee.

Unless the criminals are brought to book, a clash might erupt over the irregularities and the president of the



A section of impoverished tea workers at Sreebari Tea Garden in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj.

PHOTO: STAR

Panchayat will be responsible for any such untoward incident, he also said.

Jagannath Rikmon, a worker at Sreebari Tea Garden, said, "I gave them money as well as photocopy of my identity card with the assurance of including my name in the list of the grant. I saw my name the list, but I didn't get the money yet."

"I also handed them money and the photocopy of my identity card so they would enlist me. But I can't find my name in the list. When I asked the Panchayat head about it, he asked me to wait longer," said another tea worker Suman Nunia.

Tea worker leader Rupu Karmakar said

Panchayat President Ranjit Rikmun with the connivance of Sajan Karmakar, Ram Babu Tati and Vijay Gowla are involved in various irregularities such as accepting bribe in exchange for inclusion of names of workers who are not eligible to receive the grant.

Although the workers filed written complaints against the corrupt individuals with the UNO, social services officer and officer-in-charge of police station in Chunarughat, no action were taken against them, h added.

Asked about the accusations, Sajan Karmakar told this correspondent that he

collected more or less Tk 500 from the workers on behalf of the Panchayat chief after assuring that names of the workers who paid the money to him would be included in the grant list for this year.

Ranjit Rikmun, the Panchayat president, however, denied the allegations and said that he did not have the sole authority in the process of selecting grant recipients.

Chunarughat Upazila Social Services Officer Barindra Chandra Roy said they stopped disbursing the grant after receiving written complaints from workers of Sreebari Tea Garden.

Manikganj freed today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Manikganj was freed from the Pakistani occupation forces on this day in 1971.

Every year, people of the district observe the day as 'Manikganj Free Day'.

On December 13 in 1971, the valiant freedom fighters declared the district (the then sub-division) free from the Pakistan Army and hoisted the national flag atop of the Primary Training Institute (PTI) in the town.

Sing early March in 1971, the freedom-loving people of the district, under the leadership of Captain Abdul Halim Chowdhury, started preparing themselves so that they could resist the Pakistani occupation forces and fight back.

As a part of their preparation, freedom fighters looted firearms from Manikganj Treasury on March 27, a day after the declaration of the country's independence on March 26.

On October 28, freedom fighters led by Engineer Tobarak Hossain Ludu, Lokman Hossain and Zahidur Rahman killed 82 Pakistani soldiers and held 50 others wounded after a fierce battle in Singair upazila.

Besides, another group led by Bir Protik Ibrahim launched a successful operation and blew up Siddhirganj Power House.

On November 11, Pakistani forces attacked Teroshree village in Ghior upazila and killed 43 innocent villagers.

On December 13, freedom fighters finally declared the then sub-division free from the occupation forces.

Idols vandalised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Unidentified criminals vandalised three idols of Hindu Goddess Kali at a temple in Sujanagar upazila of the district early Friday.

Temple committee members found the three idols damaged at Ahmedpur Baroar Kali Mondir on Friday morning and informed the police, Officer in Charge (OC) of Aminpur Police Station Mozammel Haque said.

The criminals also looted all the ornaments from the idols, the police official said.

Dilip Chandra Sutrodhar, president of the temple managing committee, filed a case on Friday night, the OC said.

Woman killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A woman was killed by one of her neighbours allegedly over a trivial matter in Baufal upazila yesterday.

The deceased, Rani Begum, 55, was wife of Abul Kashem of Keshabpur village in the upazila.

Meanwhile, police detained Puspa Begum, 45, wife of Abdul Halim of the village, for her alleged involvement in the murder.

Police said Rani was sowing some gourd sapling beside the road in front of her house around 8:00am when their neighbours Halim and his wife Puspa protested it, triggering an altercation between them.



Farmers in Pakhimara area of Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila face uncertainty over Boro and seasonal vegetable cultivation as no dam is built on the canal to prevent saltwater intrusion towards fields.

PHOTO: STAR

Boro, winter vegetable farming uncertain

Growers are worried as no dam is built on Pakhimara canal this year for prevention of saltwater intrusion towards fields

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Boro paddy and winter vegetable cultivation has become uncertain as no dam is built on the canal in Pakhimara area under Kalapara upazila this year for prevention of saline water intrusion towards fields, much to the worry of farmers.

The upazila parishad gives a grant of Tk 50,000 to the farmers every year to build a temporary dam, but this year they are not getting the grant due to fund crisis.

As a result, about 3,000 farmers of ten villages including Pakhimara, Kumirmara, Majidpur and Alempur are facing uncertainty over cultivation of Boro paddy and winter vegetables.

Local farmers said there is sluice gate at the mouth of Pakhimara canal. The canal is directly connected to the Andhamanik river. The sluice gate lies damaged for long due to lack of repair. As a result, saline water enters the fields through the damaged gate.

Every year the farmers of the villages take initiative to prevent intrusion of saline water by making earthen dam in front of the sluice gate. They also get a grant of Tk 50,000 from the upazila parishad for construction of the dam.

The growers are very worried now as they are not getting grant from the parishad this year due to fund crisis.

Sultan Gazi, a farmer from Alempur

village, said they receive financial assistance from the upazila parishad every year to build the dam on the canal. But this year they are not getting the assistance.

As a result, 3,000 farmers are facing uncertainty over boro and seasonal vegetable cultivation, he said.

This year, heavy rains have damaged early winter vegetable plants, he added.

Zakir Gazi, a farmer from Kumirmara village, said if the dam is built, 3,000 famers of the ten villages will be able to produce agricultural products worth about Tk 5 crore.

Once the saline water enters the canal from the river, all the farmers will have to count huge losses, said Zakir.

Abul Hossain, a farmer from Islampur village, said due to saltwater intrusion, farmers of Kumirmara, Majidpur, Sonatala, Pakhimara, Naobhanga, Gamiratala, Alempur, Neyamatpur, Islampur and Gutabachha villages will also be affected.

He added that this year most of the farmers are taking preparation to cultivate Boro as the price of the paddy is good. Many are preparing seedbeds. But if the dam is not built, everything will be ruined.

Chairman of Kalapara Upazila Parishad Rakibul Ahsan said this year the upazila parishad cannot help the farmers financially to build the dam due to fund crisis.

Bagerhat betel nut farmers all smiles

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Fair prices have brought smile to Bagerhat betel nut growers although the yield of the nut is not good this year due to cyclone Amphan. Bagerhat district is famous for producing quality betel nuts, said agriculture officials.

On a visit to the betel nut market in Kachua upazila on Thursday, this correspondent found that per kuri (231 pieces) betel nut was being sold at Tk 500 to Tk 700 depending on the size.

The market was abuzz with farmers and traders. Hundreds of workers remained busy filling the sacks with different sizes of betel nuts.

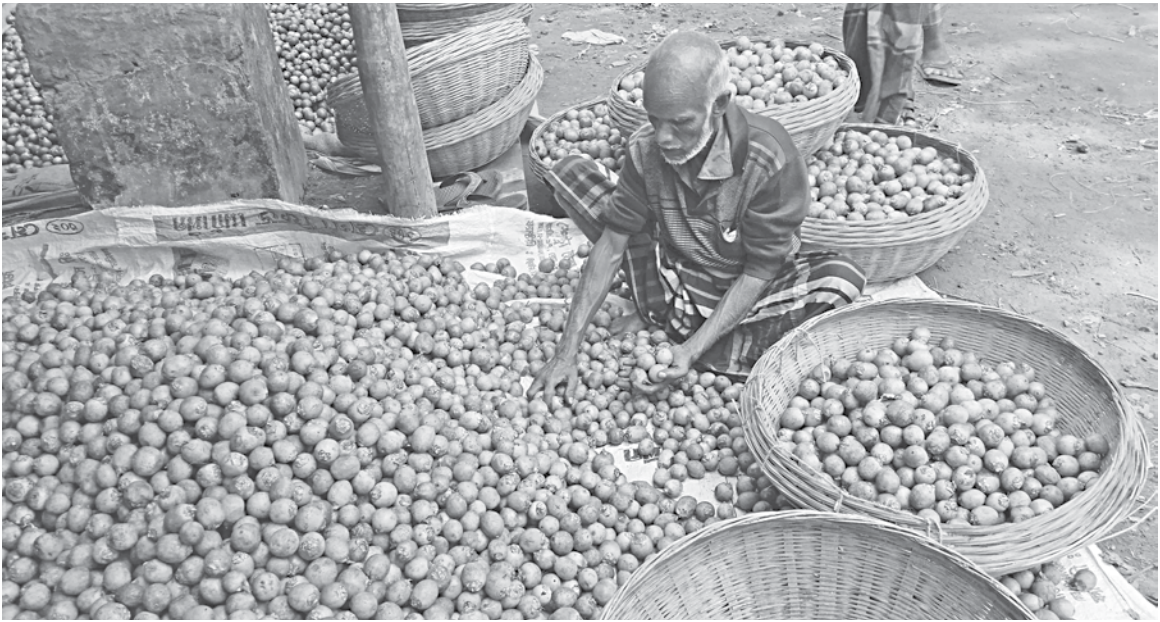
Betel nuts are sold here for more than crores of taka weekly, said traders, adding that over 50 wholesale traders buy betel nuts on the haat day.

The traders send the nuts to the wholesalers of around 20 districts including Dhaka, Chattogram, Rangpur and Dinajpur. In Kachua upazila, about 4,114 tonnes of betel nuts are produced on 1,210 hectares of land annually.

The nuts are also sold in Badhal, Taleswar, Tangrakhal, and Gajaliya haat of the upazila.

Apart from Kachua, more betel nuts are produced in Morrelganj and Sadar upazilas of Bagerhat. Betel nuts are also produced in Fakirhat, Chitalmari and other upazilas of the district. About 26,000 tonnes of betel nuts are produced on 4,725 hectares of land in the district every season.

Sishir Das, a betel nut seller of



A worker at a market in Bagerhat's Kachua upazila remains busy as huge quantities of betel nuts are ready for sale.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Sreerampur village in Kachua upazila, said they used to get bumper production of the nut.

"But this year our betel nut production has been decreased due to cyclone Amphan. However, this time the price has increased," he said.

Ashim Chakraborty of Sangdia village in Kachua upazila said, the yield of betel nut is good in their area. Currently, the production of betel nut has decreased due to waterlogging and saline water intrusion towards the canals.

Workers Pranab, Motaleb and Jafor said the haat sits twice a week. Each

of them gets Tk 5 for sorting nuts per kuri.

Narayan Bawali, president of Kachua Bazar Betel Nut Businessmen's Association, said they buy these betel nuts from different haats and then send them to different districts of the country.

Chairman of Kachua Union Parishad Shikder Hadiuzzaman said quality betel nuts are produced in Kachua upazila. Every family in this area has a betel nut tree.

Kachua upazila agriculture officer Lovely Khatun said 18,000 growers in the upazila are involved in betel nut farming. This year the

production has decreased due to storm and intrusion of saltwater.

But if saline water intrusion from the Taleswar Sluice Gate at the border of Kachua upazila can be prevented, the production of betel nut will be increased, she said.

Sanjay Das, deputy director (acting) of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Bagerhat, said in recent times, the production of betel nut has decreased due to various reasons.

To increase the production, the farmers can use organic fertiliser in their betel nut orchards, he said.



Defying the restriction, stone-laden trucks are seen plying freely over the Teesta Barrage, posing serious threat to the largest irrigation project of the country. The photo was taken from Dowani area in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila a few days ago.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY