

Exportable betel leaf dwindles

Production in southern dists slides to one third due to unfavourable weather, lack of govt support

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Production of exportable betel leaf in the southern districts has decreased drastically due to adverse weather conditions and lack of government support.

The price has increased four to five times over that of last year, farmers and traders said.

Nine upazilas in Barisal, Barguna, Jhalakati, and Pirojpur districts are famous for producing good varieties of betel leaf, most of which are exported to countries in Europe, North and South America and the Middle East.

The upazilas include Uzirpur, Gournadi, Agailjhara, Kathalia, Bamna, Betagi, Vandaria, Kawkhali, Razapur, and Mathbaria.

Supplies to wholesale markets in

the region have come down to one third in last one year, according to traders.

This correspondent visited some of the markets at Batajore, Shikarpur, Kathalia, Amua, Binapani, Niamoti, Betagi, Fulhuri, Razapur, Baghri, Bamna, Ramna, Vandaria, Mathbaria, Kawkhali, Mirukhali and Indurkani.

Traders gave a frustrating picture. The total daily sale in these wholesale markets has come down to around 5000 kuris (one kuri is equal to 5000 pieces of betel leaf) from around 1500 kuris, according to their estimate.

Prices have increased up to Tk 2000 per kuri (5,000 pieces of betel leaf) from Tk 800, depending on the variety, they said.

Some of the wholesalers said

they even advanced money to growers but failed to get supplies.

The growers said adverse weather like excessive cold and fog and drought affect production. Long-lasting fog during winter this year affected the crop very badly, they said.

The Agricultural Extension Department (AED) in a survey in 1988 in 20 betel leaf growing districts found that three varieties of betel leaf – Mitha (sweet), Saji or Sanchi and Gachh – are grown in the country. Among these, the Mitha variety, which is the best and most popular, is mainly cultivated in southern districts.

Though an export-earning item, betel leaf cultivation never got any government patronisation. Even the AED has no arrangement to help and advise betel leaf planters.



A partial view of a betel leaf field at a village in Barisal, damaged by unfavourable weather this year.

PHOTO: STAR

Seminar at Barisal Teachers vow to resist cheating in exams

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Teachers' community leaders here have vowed to curb cheating in all public examinations including the upcoming Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination.

They vowed at a seminar organised by Barisal education board at Faria Community Centre here on Monday.

State Minister for Education Ehsanul Huq Milon was present as chief guest.

During his speech Milon said teachers and only teachers can prevent cheating in public examinations. This has been proved in the public examinations held recently across the country where teachers played a very active and positive role, he said. The present government has waged a holy war against cheating in examinations. Teachers will be rewarded for their active participation in the war, he added.

Barisal Education Board Chairman Principal Anwarul Huq presided over the seminar.

It was addressed, among oth-

ers, by Additional Divisional Commissioner AKM Manzurul Huq, Barisal Deputy Commissioner (DC) Sheikh Abul Kalam, Barisal Superintendent of Police (SP) Md Mohsin Hossain, Barisal Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Helaluddin, Teachers' Association leaders Santosh Mukherjee, Mohsinul Islam Habul, Majibur Rahman, Sekander Ali Howlader, Kazi Majibur Rahman, Kamrus Salehin, Maolana Abdur Rob, Shamsul Alam Firoz and Principal Mizanur Raman, BNP leader Mahmud Golam Salek and Controller of Examinations of the board Piaruddin Ahmed.

Speakers urged the government to adopt a balanced education policy.

Unscientific burning of methyl powder Barisal Food Deptt officials face showcause notice

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The Barisal City Corporation (BCC) served a showcause notice to the local Food Department officials yesterday. The notice was issued for burning date-expired methyl powder in an unscientific manner on Sunday without prior information of the corporation.

Meanwhile, the Food Department has dumped underground burnt methyl powder after over 100 children and old people fell sick inhaling toxic gas emitted from burning powder.

Barisal City Corporation (BCC) Commissioner K M Shahidullah and Regional Controller of Food Tabibul Huda told this correspondent that the authorities had taken the decision following complaints lodged by local people.

However, a lecturer of the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital Pharmacology Department Jamaluddin warned that water of shallow and deep tube-wells in the surrounding vast area might be contaminated due to unscientific dumping of methyl powder, scientifically known as Malathion powder. He

told this correspondent that scientifically one-fourth bleaching powder should be mixed with entire methyl powder while dumping underground.

Gradually inhabitants of the area who left their houses in panic are coming back. The panic will persist for sometime. Sources in the Medical Department said no death has been reported although more than 100 people took first aid from clinics and hospitals in the city. Patients of nearby Seba Clinic, Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital and Islami Bank Hospital also complained of respiratory problem inhaling the toxic gas.

Urea production resumes at Ashuganj factory

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Production of Urea fertilizer at Zia Fertilizer Company at Ashuganj remained suspended for 19 hours due to technical problem.

The production stopped at about 6 am Tuesday as one of the bulbs in the switch room went out of order. Production resumed at about 1 am Wednesday. The factory is running smoothly now, sources at the factory told this correspondent yesterday.

The production loss was 1550 tonnes, which can be recovered by more production, they said.

The sources said there is adequate stock of Urea and there is no apprehension of shortfall. They said 55000 tonnes have been supplied and 16,000 tonnes are in stock at the factory. Another 11000 tonnes have been kept outside the factory as buffer stock.



PHOTO: STAR

A partial view of the rally, held at Laki Bazar at Brahmanbaria town recently, demanding arrest and punishment of the killers of goldsmith Gautam Talpatra. People from all walks of life attended the rally, addressed by, among others, Additional Police Superintendent Md. Jahangir Hossain, district BNP Vice-president Hafizur Rahman Molla, Awami League leader and former state minister Humayun Kabir, Brahmanbaria Municipal Chairman Md. Helal Uddin, its former chairman AI Mamun Sarker and Taz Muhammad. Gautam was killed by unidentified miscreants on February 3.

Lease of 21 Satkhira ferry terminals JCD men force others not to vie, take all tenders

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

None but JCD leaders and activists could purchase tenders for lease of 21 ferry terminals in the district, it has been alleged.

The last for purchasing tender schedules expired on Tuesday.

Allegations have it that all the 61 tender schedules were taken by JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal) men, who did not allow others to enter the District Council office since the sale began on February 14.

Taking to this correspondent, Asaduzzaman Asad of Kachhari Para in the town alleged that he went to purchase tender schedule but JCD activists roaming on the Zila Parishad premises drove him out. Many others went there to purchase tenders but were driven away like me, he alleged.

On the last date (February 17), a large number of people went there but failed to buy any tender schedule as the Zila Parishad premises was virtually besieged by JCD activists, he alleged.

When contacted, Satkhira JCD general Secretary Hafizul Rahman

Mukul said he denied the allegations and said he went there to purchase a tender schedule.

Md Gaus, Chief Executive Officer of Zila Parishad, said he did not get any such allegation.

171 arsenic patients in Manikganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

One hundred and seventy one persons have affected with arsenic-related diseases in Harirampur upazila.

Over 1.5 lakh people are drinking contaminated water as 63 per cent tube-wells are arsenic affected.

This was revealed in a survey conducted by NGO Forum under the supervision of the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE).

There are approximately 13,198 tubewells in the upazila with a population of two lakh.

About 8,298 tube-wells have been marked red as water of the tube-wells are not suitable for consumption. Despite this, people are found to drink water of the tube-wells as there is no alternative source of pure drinking water. People also drink river and pond water. As a result most frequently people get affected with diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases.

Manikganj DPHE Executive Engineer Samsul Haque Pramanik told this correspondent the government has set up 19 ring wells in the upazila last year.

DPHE Sub-Assistant Engineer Abdul Mannan said 500 more ring wells are necessary in the arsenic-affected upazila.

Bid to kill Jubo Dal leader: Five outlaws arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Five outlawed New Biplobi Communist Party (NBKP) cadres were arrested by joint forces on Sunday on charge of attempt on a Paikgachha Jubodal leader on Saturday night.

They tried to kill Paikgachha upazila Jubo Dal Secretary and Kapiluni Union Parishad (UP) member Siddiqur Rahman on the night.

The arrested are Rahmat Ali, 35, Bidhan Pal, 26, Abdur Rahim, 22, Shariful Islam, 26, and a microbus driver named Abdus Sobhan, 28. Rahmat Ali, son of Aziz Shaikh of Kapiluni union in Paikgachha upazila was bullet-injured.

SNAPS

Rally for trial of killer husband

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj. Hundreds of people including women from Pouli village held a rally here yesterday protesting the killing of housewife Lucky and demanding punishment of the killers.

Bilkis Akter Lucky, 20, daughter of Billal Hossain of Pouly village under Manikganj Pourashava was murdered allegedly by her husband Rafiqul Islam of Basudevpur village under Manikganj Sadar upazila on January 23 for dowry.

Lucky's mother Firoja Begum filed a murder case with Manikganj Sadar police against Rafiqul Islam, his brother Hobi Miah and Holeka Begum, Hobi Miah's wife.

66 hurt in B'baria clashes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria. At least 66 people were injured and 10 houses and shops were damaged in clashes at Charachar Tola and Sharifpur villages in Ashugonj upazila in the district on Tuesday.

The clash at Charachar Tola village took place in a land dispute, leaving 60 people injured and shops and houses damaged.

Fourteen of the injured including two women have been admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar hospital. The rest were released after treatment at the hospital and other clinics.

At Sharifpur, six persons were injured when two groups fought for irrigation water. All the six were admitted to the Sadar hospital, where three were in coma, doctors said yesterday.

Police confirmed both the incidents but said any case was yet to be filed.

Body to probe rape of dumb woman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna. A one-man committee has been formed to investigate into a dumb woman rape incident at Monirampur.

The inquiry committee headed by Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Abdul Majid will begin work from next week.

Meanwhile, three out of six charge-sheeted accused named Robiul, 19, Shahab Ali, 30, and Monir, 20, have surrendered before the court on February 11.

The ADM has summoned two Union Parishad (UP) members named Abul Kalam and Akbar Ali to prove innocence with the incident. They have been asked to appear before the committee in the Upazila Nirbahi Officer's (UNO) office.



PHOTO: STAR

Enchanting greenery at Monpura, left, and a partial view of a rest house built at private initiative.