



STAR FILE PHOTO

Saidur Rahman at his grape garden.

Grapes no more 'sour' to them

Landless erosion victim Saidur leads many to earn profit from commercial grape cultivation in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Costly and sweet grapes are now no more beyond the reach of many of the poor. They also earn good profits by growing the nutritious fruit, thanks to the efforts by landless farmer Saidur Rahman, an erosion victim.

Educated Saidur no more hankers after job. He is now solvent by growing grapes, grape plants and other fruits on the homestead at Modanerpara village in on the bank of Brahmaputra river in Fulchari upazila. His grape garden earned him about Tk 40,000 in the last season.

Following him, many marginal and landless farmers have also raised grape gardens. Saidur did not inherit any cropland from his father due to erosion by the river.

Faced with acute poverty, Saidur left home in search of a job

in 1998. He went to Kashipur in Gajipur district. Disappointed, he decided to return home.

There, he met a caretaker of a BADC nursery and purchased a graft of grape plant at Tk 25.

Saidur planted the plant on his homestead. In the first year, he produced 10 kilograms of grapes. He sold it at Tk 200 per kilogram and earned Tk 2,000.

He gradually expanded his garden and also started growing grafts of grape plants. He also thought of growing grafts of other fruit and medicinal plants.

In addition to grapes, he earned Tk 12,000 from grape grafts this year, selling each for Tk 15.

Grape plants are planted in May-June. He also earned Tk 5,000 from grafts of other fruit and medicinal plants.

While talking to his correspondent at his garden recently, Saidur said grape cultivation is not costly. Around Tk 200 is spent for erecting

a bamboo fence for a small garden of eight to 10 plants. Nearly 700 grafts can be sold from such a garden in a year.

Grape farming is gaining popularity in the area. Many people have started growing grapes to earn profit.

Nurul Islam of nearby Falia village procured ten grape plants from Saidur and raised a small garden in the backyard. He earned Tk 45,000 in the last season.

"I am grateful to Saidur Bhai who inspired me for grape cultivation. Now I am solvent by the grace of God" said Nurul Islam.

Another marginal farmer of the village, Mahbubur Rahman, planted two grape plants, collected from Saidur. He earned Tk 4,000.

Freedom fighter Habibur Rahman of Gholdaha village earned Tk 6,000 from grapes last year.

Kanchipara Union Parishad

Chairman Akbar Hossain Sarker, Nabi Baksh, Mukul Mia and Mohammed Ali are among many who now grows grapes with plants collected from Saidur.

Nazrul Islam, Bock Supervisor of Agriculture Extension Department at Bonarpara is locally known as 'tree surgeon' for his expertise in gardening and crop production.

Talking to this correspondent, he said sweet grapes like those imported from Pakistan and other countries can be grown in Gaibandha. Soil of the area is suitable from growing good quality grapes.

AED Deputy Director Abdur Rouf said soil is fertile enough for grape cultivation. It is a more profitable than our traditional fruits.

AED has launched a motivation campaign in the district to encourage people to grow grapes, he said.

Gas to N dists a prime need

Many industries closed down, investors shying away for lack of gas

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Lack of gas supply has forced closure of many small and medium scale industries in the district and shied away prospective investors.

Even the government-offered Equity and Entrepreneurship Fund is lying unused with banks.

In 2002, the Bangladesh Bank offered loans up to Tk one crore at four per cent interest rate through commercial banks for setting up of agro-based industries, with a provision to share the loss.

But none of the commercial banks received any proposal so far for agro-based industry in greater Rangpur, banking sources said.

Business circles and prospective investors here say industries without gas supply will not survive the uneven competition from those in other areas having gas.

Many industries have been closed down and many others have become sick as their products are costlier, they told this correspondent.

Absence of gas is one of the main obstacles, they said. At least 10 medium scale industries using furnace oil and electricity were closed in only Rangpur district in the last several years due to uneven competition from units using gas, they claimed.

Notables are RV Audible Oil Refinery Ltd, Dimple Biscuit Private Ltd, government owned Rangpur Distilleries and Chemicals Ltd, Rangpur Automatic Rice Mills Ltd, Rahateen Industries Ltd and Rangpur Flour Mills Ltd. All were agro-based.

Shariful Islam, Managing Director of RK Metal Industries which produces fan said his industry is limping and may be closed any time. The production cost could be reduced by at least 25 per cent if he could use gas instead of electricity in the factory, he said.

Manager of Rangpur Auto Rice

Mills Ltd. Sarwar Jahan said he could save at least Tk one lakh a month if his mill could use gas.

Talking to this correspondent, a good number of prospective entrepreneurs in agro-based industries said they have shunned their plans due to uncertainty in gas supply.

The Rangpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) on several occasions submitted memorandums to the authorities for initiative to bring Rangpur and Dinajpur region under the government's five-year gas supply plan.

"None dares to take any risk without gas (supply)", said RCCI President Mostafa Azad.

So the Equity and Entrepreneurship Fund (EEF) still remains unutilised in Rangpur and adjoining districts, he said.

"Whereas major portions of EEF in southern districts have been disbursed", he claimed.

After the present government took over, a RCCI team called on the minister-in-charge of the district and State Minister for Housing and Public Works Alamgir Kabir and handed over a memorandum for gas supply.

"But no initiative has been taken", Mostafa said. "There are good prospects for setting up agro-based industries in Rangpur but we can not avail the scope", he regretted.

The people had hoped that they would get gas after commissioning of the Jamuna Bridge. But their hopes have been shattered.

Bogra would be brought under gas pipeline network by 2006 but there is no government declaration when Rangpur and Dinajpur will get gas, he deplored.

RCCI Vice President Jahangir Hossen said, over 91000 hectares of land are brought under potato cultivation in eight districts in

greater Rangpur and Dinajpur region every year. Export quality potato chips, bear and other items could be produced from potato, he said.

The Brihottor Rangpur Unnayan Forum (Greater Rangpur development Forum) held a rally on June 14 at the town to press their 12-point demand, including gas supply to northern districts.

A high official of Bangladesh Bank at Rangpur seeking unanimity said commercial banks are eager to give loan for setting up industries but entrepreneurs are not coming forth due to lack of gas.

Vice President of National Credit and Commerce (NCC) Bank Ali Ashraf said the Rangpur branch of his bank has invested a huge amount of money in maize cultivation. "We are ready to finance small industries to produce food products from maize", he said.



PHOTO: STAR

The Rahateen Industries Ltd., now closed due to uneven competition from products produced in units having gas supply in other areas of the country.

Hawkers occupy Barisal BIWTA land with mayoral nod!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Hawkers, evicted from the bank of the District Council pond in the city on Wednesday, occupied a four-acre land of BIWTA on Thursday, allegedly with a nod from the Mayor's office.

They moved onto the BIWTA land selected for construction of a river port terminal complex and a market with blessings from a section of Alliance leaders and law enforcers, it was gathered.

During a visit to the area on Friday, many of the 124 illegal occupants were seen even raising pucca constructions on the site close to offices of the Deputy Commissioner, the Police superintendent, BCC and land settlement office.

Sources there said the hawkers moved to the area Thursday night and raised constructions overnight.

They were evicted from bank of the pond for expansion of a road and beautification of the area, sources said.

When asked, Md. Rintu, a leader of a hawkers' association aligned with the ruling party, claimed that they moved to the BIWTA land (Balur Math) on a verbal order from the Mayor of Barisal City Corporation (BCC)

and so they do not have to bother about any problem with BIWTA.

He claimed illegal slum dwellers on the Balur Math were evicted to make room for them.

Rahim Mia, an evicted slum dweller now living under the open sky, said they were given five to six hundred taka per family and assured of rehabilitation on newly emerged shoals in the port area.

Ranjit Kumar Das, Chief Executive Officer and Md. Nurul Islam, Chief Engineer of BCC, when contacted, declined to make any comment regarding occupation of the BIWTA land by hawkers.

When contacted, BCC Mayor Majibur Rahman Sarwar MP told local journalists that the hawkers were "temporarily sheltered" on the Balur Math for their survival.

The BIWTA land was under illegal occupation earlier also. BIWTA never evicted the illegal occupants, he said.

When contacted, Aslam Hossain, an official at Barisal port, said they will go for legal action against the illegal occupation of BIWTA land.

Local people hailed the eviction of hawkers from near prime administrative buildings but deplored their occupation of the land in the port area.

One killed, 20 hurt in B'baria clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

One persons was killed and 20 people were injured in a clash between two groups of people over refund of loan at Shahpur village in Kasba upazila on Thursday.

One Hossain Mia had borrowed Tk 500 from his neighbour Habibur Rahman.

As Habibur Rahman demanded the money, Hossain Mia expressed his inability to pay. This ensued a quarrel, which turned into a clash, joined by neighbours of both.

Critically injured Hossain Mia later died at a hospital.

Police arrested two persons -- Abdul Haque and Ranara Begum -- is this connection. A case was filed.

Arms recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Brahmanbaria Sadar police recovered one cut rifle and one USA-made revolver in a raid in a house in the railway station area Friday night.

Acting on a tip-off, SI Noor Uddin Zahid made the raid, police said.

A patrol team found 14 cock-tails in a bag, left in an abandoned condition in Bhadughar area of the town.

Police arrested 36 people from different areas of the district on the same night on different charges including murder, rape and theft.

Land dispute: BNP activists ransack houses at Netrakona village

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Ruling BNP activists led by the brother of a local party leader ransacked houses of six families at Satashi village in Durgapur upazila over a land dispute recently.

Attackers led by Hatem Ali, brother of Durgapur upazila BNP leader and Chandigor Union Parishad chairman Abu Chand also looted 400 maunds of paddy, 25 maunds of rice, five maunds of pepper, 500 maunds of potato, eight bundles of tin and all of their cows.

On June 7, they attacked a village, Rostom Ali with lethal weapons in presence of police and injured him seriously. Rostom is now under treatment at Durgapur Health Complex.

On June 8, they took away Amena Begum, 19, wife of Abul Kalam and gangraped her at a nearby jungle. On the same day they also defiled two other women.

On June 9, the attackers defiled five other women in presence of police as was told by the victims. The raiders confined the family members inside their houses for days together.

However, after eight days of confinement, Rahima Begum, wife of Rostom Ali and Abul Kalam, husband of Amena Begum managed to flee from their houses and filed two separate cases with Netrakona magistrate's court.

Earlier, Durgapur police declined to register their case.



PHOTO: STAR

The inoperative sluice gate at Jatrabari in Kalmakandha upazila has made the flood water stagnant.

Recurring 'manmade' flood

50,000 people suffer in 2 upazilas in Kishoreganj, one in Sunamganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

An inoperative sluice gate on the Jatrabari canal has become a cause for sorrow for over 50,000 people in Kalmakanda and Khaliajuri upazilas in Netrakona district and Drama-pasha upazila in Sunamganj district.

IRRI-Boro crops on at least 50,000 hectares of land are damaged by floods every year as flood water entering the areas by overflowing a damaged embankment of Gomai river remain stagnant because of the sluice gate, local people told this correspondent during a recent visit.

The flooded areas include Nania Beel, Mada Beel, Monduil Beel,

Jangia Beel and Gora Duba haor in Kalmakanda upazila; Rakha Beel, Maricha Beel, Togar haor, Ganda Duba and Machki in Darmapasha and Tolar haor, Shanir haor in Khaliajuri upazila.

The sluice gate was built by the Water Development Board in 2000 at cost of Tk 33 lakh to protect the areas from flooding. But it has become a bane instead of being a boon for the people, they said.

The local people said they lodged several complaints to authorities to reconstruct damaged portions of the embankment to control the flooding.

Local leaders of different political parties and farmers also staged demonstrations on several occasions to stop the flooding, but to no effect.

to be damaged by flooding, making scope for contractors to misappropriate money, they claimed.

Netrakona WDB officials have a ready answer to this. Every year during the wet season, local people cut the embankment at different places making the reconstruction work useless, they say. When contacted, Netrakona WDB Executive Engineer Abdul Baten told this correspondent that he talked to higher authorities for construction of a permanent embankment to check the flooding.

Local leaders of different political parties and farmers also staged demonstrations on several occasions to stop the flooding, but to no effect.

Shrimp farm looted for toll

Prawn poisoned to death in another incident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Shrimps worth about Tk three lakh were looted from four farms allegedly by outlaws on Wednesday night at Khajira village in Assassuni upazila for refusing to pay them Tk two lakh toll, police said.

The outlaws identifying themselves as activists of Chhinnamul Communist Party had demanded

the toll from Biswajit Das, Indrajit Das, Abdul Haq Sana and Karim Molla a week back.

As they did not pay, the outlaws swooped on their farms, beat the staff and looted shrimps.

While leaving, they also threatened them with death if police is informed, according to cases filed with Assassuni police. The incident has panicked shrimp farm owners.

In another incident on the same night, shrimps worth about Tk 2,60,000 were poisoned to death at a farm in the Sadar upazila, allegedly due to enmity.

The miscreants poured insecticides into the farm owned jointly by Jamshed Ali, Habibur Rahman and Anowarul Islam at Ghona village. A case has been filed with Satkhira thana.

SNAPS

Disabled robbed off Tk 100!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Believe it or not, a disabled beggar was robbed off 100 taka by a group of drug addicts here on Tuesday.

Police said disabled beggar Liton, 25, of Paikgachha in Khulna lives by begging. When he was returning home after begging a group of drug addicts led by Babu, son of Abdus Sattar of Palashpote in the town waylaid him in the New Market area and snatched away the entire amount of money he belonged to.

Man gets life for possessing Phensidyl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A man was sentenced to life term rigorous imprisonment (RI) for possessing Phensidyl syrup by the Special Tribunal Court No 3 here on Tuesday.

The convict is Rabiul Islam, son of Nesar Ali of Kuchpukur village in Sadar upazila, according to court sources.

The court also fined him 5,000 taka, in default, to suffer six months more RI.

Earlier, a team of Narcotics department here raided Rabiul's house and recovered 81 bottles of Phensidyl syrup from there.

4 outlaws arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Kushtia police on Thursday arrested four outlaws from Belgachi village in Kumarkhali upazila.

Police said the criminals belong to the outlawed Gono Bahini (GB) of Jatya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD).

They are Bazul, 30, Siddik, 25, Osman, 26, and Faruk, 35.

Two held with fake notes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police on Thursday arrested two persons with 200 fake one hundred taka notes from Rajbari town.

The arrested are Rabiul, 25, and Hakim, 40.

According to police, the two persons brought some goods from a shop at Jall Super Market and handed over five one hundred taka notes to the shopkeeper.

On suspicion the shop owner informed police.

Police found the notes to be fake and arrested them at once. Police were interrogating both of them till filing of the report on Thursday night.