

Silent revolution in a remote village

Farmers in Nilphamari replace harmful tobacco with pineapple, are affluent now

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

The remote village is abuzz with life now.

Tea stalls have sprung up at Sundar Khata village where pineapple traders from distant areas gossip amid transactions with well to do farmers.

Buildings are replacing thatched houses of once-poor farmers.

Their lot started changing when the poor farmers began growing pineapple, giving up harmful tobacco. Tobacco cultivation has been eliminated from Sundar Khata village in Dimla upazila.

The credit goes to educated farmer Abdur Rahman Bachchu Mia who initiated it in 1992. He now earns Tk four to five lakh a year from pineapple.

Alimuddin, Tobarak Ali, Hori Mohon and Ramjan Ali are among many like Abdur Rahman, who gave up tobacco and are now big pineapple farmers.

"Now I earn many times more

profit from pineapple than from tobacco", Alimuddin said. There are about 30 big pineapple farmers in the village.

Farmers in neighbouring areas have also started growing pineapple, giving up tobacco cultivation.

A remarkable thing is that high lands left fallow earlier are now valuable as those earn good profit from pineapple.

The farmers have also developed a unique system of inter-cropping. Shed trees of seasonal fruits like mango, jackfruit, blackberry, guava and olive, planted in pineapple lands, also earn them good profit.

The pineapple grown at Sundar Khata is of good taste and flavour and is acclaimed by traders as well. Dimla Upazila Nirbahi Officer Iftekhar Alam calls it 'Dimla Pineapple'.

"I read in newspapers about the harmful effect of tobacco cultivation and started thinking to replace it with an environmental friendly and more profitable crop", Abdur Rahman told this correspondent

during a visit to the village on Saturday.

"I planted some roots of Modhupur variety of pineapple plants out of curiosity on a small land.

"After two years, I and my neighbours were surprised to see the size and taste of the pineapple.

"This inspired me. I went to Dimla Agriculture Extension Department (AED) office. They gave me advice and also suggested me to plant shed trees. I planted fruit trees in rows.

"I gradually expanded pineapple plantation to ten bighas".

Now Abdur Rahman grows pineapple on three 10-bigha plots. He keeps the plots fallow alternately after each harvest.

Around 13,000 roots are planted in one bigha and around 10,000 pineapple can be harvested, he said.

The production cost is around Tk 2.50 per piece, which is sold at around Tk 6. On an average, he earns around Tk 3.5 lakh from pineapple and Tk one lakh from fruits in one

plot annually.

Nilphamari AED Deputy Director Shaukat Hossen calls it 'agroforestry'. "It (planting shed trees) makes pineapple juicy and sweet and also gives other fruits and timber". He said they will spread its cultivation in entire Dimla and Domar upazilas.

Abdur Rahman had to face marketing problem initially as no body knew that pineapple was grown at Sundar Khata.

"I engaged some hawkers who moved door to door and sold pineapples at Tk 2 to 3 per piece."

Now traders come to my farm.

Dimla AED Officer Monju Alam Sarkar said, seeing the success of Sundar Khata, many farmers in surrounding areas are becoming more and more inclined to pineapple farming.

This correspondent came across several traders at the village.

Ramjan Ali of Shubitari Hat of Dimla said he used to buy pineapples from wholesale traders in Modhupur or Chittagong Hill Tracks earlier. The price was around Tk 10

per piece because of high transportation cost. Besides pineapples used to rot that incurred loss at times.

"Now we get the same quality of pineapple at our door step at Sundar Khata", Ramjan added.

This has brought about other changes also.

"My school is now crammed with students" said the headmaster of a Sundar Khata Primary School.

Dimla Upazila Agriculture Officer SM Mostafizur Rahman said many people now come to us for advice on pineapple cultivation.

Lands in entire Dimla upazila are suitable for this crop, he said.

"It (pineapple cultivation) is a discovery by Abdur Rahman", said former Union Parishad chairman Tabibur Rahman. "He has changed Sundar Khata into a flourishing village".

Abdur Rahman with a broad smile on his face said, "I wanted to divert people's attention from tobacco cultivation. I am successful. Even fallow lands are now very useful".



People repairing the erosion-affected bankment of the Bangali river at Balua in Mohimaganj, Gobindaganj upazila.

People repair dyke in Gaibandha voluntarily

Allotted rice diverted on alleged 'political consideration'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The people of Mohimaganj in Gobindaganj upazila in the district are repairing an erosion-affected embankment of Bangali river at Balua on self-help basis as the rice allocated for the renovation work was diverted elsewhere on alleged political consideration.

Local people are working in shifts, erecting bamboo groynes and dumping sandbags to protect the embankment threatened with rising water level of the river.

Erosion by the Bangali river intensified there in the past few

days. Local people said at least 40 villages in the area will be inundated if the embankment gives in.

Abdul Latif Proddhan, an Awami League leader and Chairman of Mahimaganj Union Parishad while talking to this correspondent said that the relief ministry allocated 20 tonnes of rice in January for renovation of the embankment under a special programme. But the rice was later diverted to nearby Rakhil Buruj union, as desired by local BNP lawmaker Abdul Mottaleb Akanda.

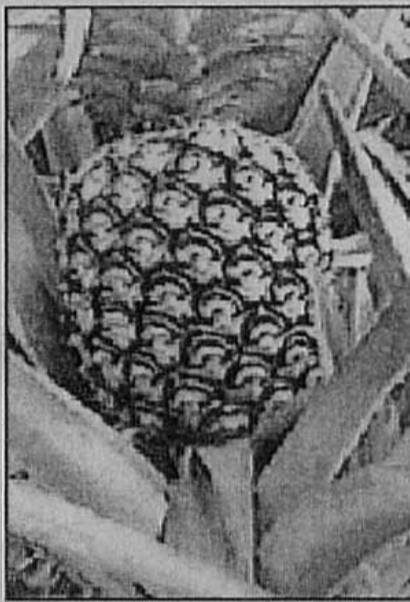
"It is a politically motivated disparity because the people

elect me", Proddhan alleged.

On June 25, a public call was made through loud speakers to protect the embankment voluntarily. Several hundred people of all sections spontaneously joined hands. They came with spades, baskets and collected bamboos and gunny bags and started the renovation work.

Nearly 200 people of the area have been working in shifts now.

Lawmaker Abdul Mottaleb Akanda, when contacted, denied the allegation. "Distribution of rice is made on priority basis", he said.



Educated farmer Abdur Rahman at his Adarsha Krishi Khamar (middle) and pineapples produced at his farm ready for sale. The photos were taken on Saturday.

SNAPS

Noakhali dist AL council July 7

A CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Noakhali district Awami League (AL) council will be held on July 7, according to party sources. The last AL council was held here on December 4, 1996, but its committee was declared by the central leaders on April 15, 1999. This year, names of some new faces are being widely discussed. Among them, names of Robiul Hossain Kochi, former Noakhali Poura chairman and Dr Jaffar Ullah, president of Begumganj upazila AL are worth mentioning. However, Muhammad Ali is also a popular figure here. The number of district councilors is 346.

Heroin smuggler nabbed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A heroin smuggler named Aziz was arrested from Kandipara on Saturday. Aziz was selling drug when members of Kandipara Sacheton Jubo Sangha, a youth association, informed the Sadar thana police, according to police sources. A police team headed by sub-inspector (SI) Farouq rushed to the spot and arrested him from the spot. A case was filed with Sadar thana and the arrested was sent to court.

39 posts of AC Land vacant in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

About 20,000 land-related cases are awaiting disposal in Barisal division as 39 out of 40 posts of Assistant Commissioner of Land are vacant.

The cases involve mutation, correction of records and other land disputes.

Besides, land survey is also being seriously hampered because landowners can not collect required information officially from AC Land offices, official sources said.

There are forty upazilas in six districts in the division. In each upazila, there is one AC Land office.

But all the 40 offices except the one at Bhola Sadar upazila are without Assistant Commissioners, who are responsible for all land-related matters.

A Upazila Nirbahi Officer usually discharges the responsibility of AC Land in his absence.

The vacant posts are 10 in Barisal, four in Jhalakati, seven in Patuakhali, six in Bhola, five in Barguna and seven in Pirojpur districts.

Land grabbers demolish aborigines' houses in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Land grabbers allegedly belonging to the ruling party in a series of attacks on two aborigine families injured two persons, razed their houses and looted those at Shinga village, a few hundred yards off the Durgapur police station on Wednesday.

Chinta Moni Bala, 60 and her son Parimal, 21, were injured as the attackers beat them up as they resisted them. The attackers also damaged houses of Naren Roy and Tara Rani.

The miscreants threatened the families with death if they inform police or journalists.

Sources there claimed that the

attack was made in a bid to grab government fellow land on which the aborigine families have been living for years.

The victims are now living under open sky but do not dare to file case, the sources said.

Police said that no complain was filed in this regard while affected families said.



Families of Chinta Moni Bala and Parimal in front of their demolished houses, snapped on Saturday

MONPURA TRIPLE MURDER Main accused dropped from charge sheet, victims' relatives claim

A CORRESPONDENT, Bhola

Eighteen innocent people were falsely implicated in the sensational triple murder case in Latakhalia of Sakuchin union in Monpura upazila.

This was alleged by Taslima Begum, daughter of slain Haji Abu Taher and relatives of two other victims Yousuf Dalal and Alam Majhi at a press conference held in the town on Friday.

They alleged that Monpura Police have submitted the charge-sheet by dropping names of the main accused, Abdur Mannan Chairman of Hajirhat union parishad (UP), Seraj and their accomplices.

Rivals killed the victims over lease of Char Nizam fish ghat on September 4 in 2003.

In a written statement they alleged that a gang of pirates patronised by ruling BNP leaders in Monpura used to commit piracy, collect toll from fishermen in the

Meghna and at Char Nizam fish ghat for long. On the fateful day, the pirates chased Taher Haji's trawler to Latakhalia. The victims took shelter in the house of Selim, a leader of Monpura unit of JCD. The killers searched and found the victims, Abu Taher, Yousuf Dalal and Alam Majhi and were beaten to death.

It was alleged that three separate cases were filed with Monpura thana. But police recorded a case only filed by Abul Kalam.

They also alleged that the killers had been threatening them to withdraw the case. They urged the prime minister, home minister, local parliament member and administration for a fair trial and an investigation of the case by the criminal investigation department (CID).

Rezia Begum wife of slain Taher, Rabeya Begum, wife of Yousuf Dalal and other relatives were also present in the conference.

'Bangla Captain' held in Bagerhat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Joint forces have arrested one Alfaz Shaikh who had allegedly created a panic among people by declaring himself 'Bangla Captain' of Bagerhat.

He used to collect illegal toll, said Bagerhat Police Superintendent Mahub Alam.

"We are trying to arrest accomplices of the self styled 'Bangla Captain', he said.

After arrest on Tuesday, he was produced before court, which sent him to Bagerhat district jail.

Several hundred people brought out a procession and thronged the 'joint forces' camp at Chitalmari upazila to see him.

Some sources said Alfaz Shaikh of Kafurpura union under Bagerhat Sadar thana was an informer of joint forces.

Death for killing father

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

One person has been sentenced to death for killing his father.

Nilphamari Additional District and Sessions Judge Zahidul Islam recently handed down the punishment to Golam Rabbani Dalal for killing his father Abdur Karim Kazi at Chand Khana village in Domar upazila on August 17, 2002 with a spear.

The victim's other son Golam Hossen Belal had filed a murder case with Domar Thana.

WDB officials beaten to realise 'fake' bills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Two contractors and their musclemen on Saturday swooped on the Water Development Board (WDB) office here, beat four officials including the accounts officer and damaged furniture for not approving 11 "fake" bills amounting Tk three lakh.

The incident forced the authorities to temporarily close the account section.

Sources said the hoodlums asked account officer Tajul Islam to sign Tk 2.75 lakh "fake" bills for supply of stationery goods.

Islam declined to sign the bills, saying those were fake. The hoodlums then started beating him.

The miscreants tore Tajul's shirt and damaged furniture. They also beat up accountant Alauddin, assistant accounts officer Musabbir Ali and billing clerk Abdur Rahman when they came to save him.

They complained to the chief engineer in writing about the incident and demanded action against the attackers.

Some senior WDB officials when contacted said legal action is being taken in this regard.

JCD leader sued by party man for extortion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Fifteen Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists of Kishoreganj unit including its president and his four brothers were sued on Friday by the unit general secretary (GS) for snatching toll money on June 25.

Kishoreganj JCD GS Abdullah-Al-Masud Sumon filed the case with Karimganj police station against the unit president Saiful Islam, his four brothers Saddam, Sayam, Rumon, Nadi, JCD activists Rumal, Kala Ahamed, Deen Islam, Sawpon, Rubel and five other JCD activists.

Police sources said Sumon was collecting toll at Karimganj sea port when Saiful and others equipped with fire arms and sharp weapons appeared and demanded 50,000 taka from Sumon. On refusal, Saiful's brother Saddam snatched away 24,700 taka.

Police arrested Deen Islam.

Diarrhoea alarming in Rangamati hills

11 die, scores attacked in 11 villages: drinking water scarce, no medical team sent, says UP member

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

At least 11 people including nine children, all of them indigenous, died of diarrhoea in remote hilly areas of Raingkyong reserve forest in Farua union in Bilaichhari upazila in last fifteen days.

Several hundred people are now suffering from the disease in Bortholipara, Pukurpara, Hatchihara, Dhopalichhara, Sajing Para, Chalpara, Thegapara, Hatimara, Gongyaramchhara, Pukurpara and Prongajpara villages, local Union Parishad member Jakob Tripura told this correspondent when contacted on Saturday.

The disease is spreading, he said.

The dead are Ma Che Pru Marma, 40, Bum Pru marma, 4, U

Ma Pru Marma, 4, Pru Sing Marma, 34, Mon Sing Marma, 9, Manu Pru Marma, 4, U Nu Sing Marma, 8, Mong Pru La Marma, 6, Mong Thoai Marma, 8, Mong Sing Marma, 7 and Khulsi Tripura, 12.

The death toll may rise if steps are not taken immediately to control the spread of the disease, he said. "Army personnel from Ruma are treating the diarrhoea affected people but they have limited supplies of medicine", he added.

The areas are mostly inhabited by Tripura, Marma and Tanchangya tribes.

There is crisis of medicine and drinking water in the area. The only source of water in the areas is fountains, Jakob said.

He said he submitted an application to the Deputy Commissioner (DC) on July 1 seeking

medicines and a medical team. He also informed Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC) Chairman Maniklal Dewan of the situation.

But no medical team was sent till Saturday, he said.

When contacted, the Civil Surgeon said he ordered the Bilaichhari thana health officer to send a medical team to the area immediately.

But other sources claimed that no team was formed till Saturday.

The DC however handed over Tk 10,000 to Jakob to buy medicine for his area.

"I have asked the Headman (Mouza Chief) and local UP chairman to visit the area and report to me as early as possible", DC Dr Jafar Ahmed Khan said.

50 hurt in B'baria clashes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

At least 50 persons were injured in two separate rivals' clashes in two days in the district.

In an incident on Saturday, 30 persons were injured in a rivals' clash at Behair village in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila.

The clash occurred when a five-year-old child, Anwar Hossain, son of Hejbu Mia belonging to Kalagazi group was beaten by the rival group as he was fishing in a pond belonging to one of Nagar group, according to eye-witnesses and police sources.

Later on, both the groups equipped with lethal weapons locked in a clash which lasted for one hour till noon.

In a critical condition, Khayes Mia, 24, Rubu Mia, 50, Salam Mia, 30, and Billal Mia, 25, were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital.

On information, a police team led by officer-in-charge (OC) of Brahmanbaria police station Md Ismail rushed to the spot and controlled the situation. Police arrested Md Afzal, Jay Mia and Sikandar Mia from the spot.

In another incident on Friday, 20 persons including three women were injured in the clash between two rival groups over a disputed land at Ahmadpur village in Nabinagar upazila.

Modon Mia and Monir Mia of the same area had previous enmity for long over a disputed land, according eye witnesses and hos-

pital sources.

The clash ensued when Modon Mia attacked Monir Mia when he was cutting bamboo in the land. Both the groups armed with lethal weapons locked in the clash sustaining injuries to 20 persons.



Hazipur Union Parishad office in Kulaura upazila, Moulvibazar collapsed during a recent flood there.