

Fertiliser price hike scourges farmers in 8 northern dists

RAFIQ SARKER *back from Lalmonirhat*

Rangpur: High price of Urea fertilizer is scourging farmers in eight northern districts in Rangpur and Dinajpur, threatening the prospect of Aman crop.

The crisis has shattered the flood recovery efforts by farmers, particularly in greater Rangpur, which was badly affected by the recent deluge.

Retail price of Urea has gone up by Tk 50 to Tk 100 per 50 kg bag at places, farmers alleged. The government-fixed price is Tk 290 per bag.

They alleged that some unscrupulous fertiliser dealers have created an artificial crisis to mint money, an allegation refuted by dealers.

On Friday, at Boderganj in Rangpur, the Upzila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) raided the godown of a fertiliser dealer.

He found 500 bags of urea there and disbursed those among farmers at fair price. Two farmers were injured in a stampede.

In Gaibahdha, two dealers were arrested for selling Urea at high price.

When contacted, Rangpur Deputy Commissioner Rafiqul Islam said there is a buffer stock of Urea and Potash fertilisers in Rangpur and adjoining

districts and there is no chance of price hike.

The DC also said the District Fertiliser Monitoring Committee has kept a close watch on the fertiliser market and action will be taken against dealers who manipulate the price.

But fertiliser dealers at different places differed with the DC's view.

Dealer Abul Kashem in Rangpur said, "The supply of Urea and Potash is less than the demand and so the prices have gone up."

Farmer Sohel Khondoker of Mahiganj alleged that dealers are realising Tk 350 to Tk 400 per bag.

During a visit to Lalmonirhat it was gathered that there are 50 BCIC (Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation which runs Urea factories) fertiliser dealers in the district but the market is controlled by one bid dealer who is a member Bangladesh Fertiliser Association. He buys quotas from other dealers during peak seasons and manipulates the market.

Lalmonirhat Additional Deputy Commissioner Babul Chandra Roy, now DC-in-charge, said action is being taken in this regard.

"We raided the fertilizer depot of one Morshed at Hatibandha and found 280

Urea bags in place of 800 allotted. He lifted the quota and sold the rest in the black market".

Some fertiliser dealers in Rangpur, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat seeking anonymity said a section of dealers are realising high prices on the plea of short supply because of lax vigilance by upazila fertiliser monitoring committees.

They said suspension of fertiliser supply to flood affected farmers in Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Gaibandha districts under the government's flood rehabilitation programme also accentuated the crisis.

The government earlier announced free distribution of 25 kg Urea per head along with Aman seed among flood affected farmers.

Fertiliser supply to about 20,000 flood affected farmers in Kurigram and Gibandha has been suspended.

Sources in Kurigram Agriculture Extension Department (DAE) said the programme has been rescheduled. Affected farmers in these districts will get the free fertiliser and seeds in the coming Rabi season.

Some farmers in Panchgachhi in Kurigram Sader upzila said, after the suspension, they thronged local mar-

kets to buy Urea. The price is higher since then.

There is confusion among people about the free fertiliser distribution programme.

Official sources in Lalmonirhat said the Deputy Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation formally inaugurated programme in the district on August 24.

But many farmers this correspondent talked to in Azitmari, Hatibandha, Khunigachh and Sader upzila said they have not heard anything got free fertiliser.

Our Nilphamari Correspondent reports: Urea prices are soaring in different areas of the district due to alleged manipulation by a section of dealers.

It is selling at between Tk 320 and Tk 350 at places in remote areas.

Requested by dealers, the Deputy Commissioner sent a fax message to the Ministry of Agriculture on August 23, seeking additional allotment of 2000 tonnes of Urea on emergency basis, sources said.

According to sources, the district agriculture office has sought 8,970 tonnes of Urea for July; 9, 680 tonnes for August and 5, 860 tonnes for September. They got 2300 and 6000 tonnes in July

and August respectively. The allotment for September is 32,000 tonnes, of which 1200 tonnes reached the district yesterday. But this is inadequate, they said.

Sources in the district agriculture office however said Amon sowing in the district has crossed the target of 1, 14, 635 hectares in the district.

Now is the peak season for farmers to use Urea in Aman fields. Some farmers this correspondent talked to said fields will turn yellowish and production will be affected if they can not use Urea within a week.

The President of the Nilphamari Fertiliser Dealers Association Abdul Wahed said prices are soaring because the supply is less than the demand. He denied the allegation of market manipulation by a section of dealers. There are 73 dealers in the district.

But many farmers alleged that some dealers at times hide their stocks and tell them that the stock is exhausted only to realise high price.

HANDOVER OF POWER LINES TO PBS IN KHULNA ZONE PDB employees begin agitation today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Employees of West Zone Power Distribution Company (WZPDC), a concern of Power Development Board (PDB), begin a two-day agitation programme today to protest a government decision to handover PDB power distribution lines in urban areas to Pally Biddut Samitee (PBS) in 21 southern districts.

They will hold demonstrations at offices and outside. The next programme will be announced on Thursdays, leaders of employees unions said yesterday.

Recently, the government decided that power supply lines in urban areas consuming less than three megawatt power will be handed over to PBS.

According to the decision, power distribution in six municipal areas including Bakerganj, Hizla and Muladi municipalities in Barisal

district, Kathalia and Nalchhity in Jhalakati and Swarupkati municipality in Pirojpur district are to be handed over to PBS.

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hussein Mahmud at a meeting with WZPDC officials during a visit to Barisal on July 8 emphasis immediate handover of power distribution lines in the six municipal areas to PBS.

WZPDC employees then lodged cases in courts in their respective areas against the government decision.

In the cases, they stated that PBS was formed only for rural electrification, not for power distribution in urban areas. Besides, the order is applicable for areas consuming less than three megawatt power but the six municipalities each consume much more than that.

On Friday WZPDC employees at Boira held a meeting, which was

attended by PDB Chief Engineer A M Shamsul Huq, Khulna Zone Chief Engineer Md Abdullah and CBA (collective bargaining agent) leaders.

At the meeting, the CBA leaders threatened of tougher action programmes if distribution lines in the six municipalities are handed over to PBS.

According to Chief Engineer A M Shamsul Huq, the handover can not be made now as the cases are pending in courts.

M G Faruk, CBA Secretary of Barisal PDB, said they are opposing the handover fearing loss of jobs. The WZPDC has over 3,000 employees in Khulna Zone.

RU teachers urged to take classes

Procession, rally by pro-BNP teachers

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University teachers supporting BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday brought out a procession and held a rally on the campus to protest the grenade attack on Awami League (AL) rally in Dhaka on August 21.

Prof Abdus Salam led the procession. Speakers at the rally held on the Senate building premises said hartal will not bring any solution to bomb attackers and other incidents of violence.

They urged Awami League to withdraw the indefinite strike in all educational institutions in the country in national interest.

They also called upon pro-Awami League teachers to take classes and examinations.

The rally was addressed by, among

others, Arts Faculty Dean Prof Abu Daud Hassan, Prof Amjad Hossain and Prof Nazrul Islam.

The RU Officer Association, Fourth Class Employees Union, Third Class Employees Union and newly appointed 544 employees also brought out an anti-hartal processions and held a joint rally on the campus.

The employees union leaders told the rally that they would go for tougher programmes if classes are not resumed soon. Meanwhile leaders of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS) have decided that will go to teachers and request them to take classes, sources in the parties said.

Threat to Iqbal Sobhan protested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

The Manikganj unit of Bangladesh Sangbadik Samity (BSS) at a meeting held at the local press condemned the 'death threat' to Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Editor of Bangladesh Observer and President of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ).

Speakers at the meeting urged the government to nab and punish the culprits.

BSS Manikganj unit President Md Liakot Ali presided over by the meeting, addressed by among others, BSS Central Committee Secretary Kalyan Saha, Office Secretary Golam Sarwar Sanu, Cultural Secretary Mojibur Rahman and its Manikganj unit secretary Mustaque Ahmed.

Manikganj unit president of Bangladesh Bar Association Md Meher Uddin and Manikganj ADAB President Abdul Mojib and Dipak Ghosh in separate statements protested the incident and termed it a threat to press freedom.

How poor Anjoli changed her life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Four years back, poor Anjoli Rani thought of ending her life, failing to feed her four children.

Now there is a television, electric fan and other facilities at her house on a 10-katha land at Golapnagar village in Gheor Uupazila in Manikganj.

She also owns one bigha cropland. She told her success story when this correspondent visited her on Thursday last.

She was the eldest among five brothers and sisters. Her father was a day labourer. At the age of 12, she started her life as a domestic help at a house in the village.

At 14, Anjoli entered her husband's house in the same village. Poverty followed her there. Starvation started when she became mother of four as her porter husband could not feed the family, said Anjoli, now 28.

A "miracle" happened about four years back when a team from ASA, an NGO, visited their village. They enlisted her name in the Surjomukhi Samity (a women's association).

A few days later, ASA men visited her again and gave her Tk 4000 loan for cow fattening.

After eight months she earned a profit of Tk 3000 by selling the cow.

She took more loan. She bought a rickshaw van for her husband and five milch cows. She herds the cows herself and earns around Tk 200 a day by sells their milk. Her children now go to school.

SI closed for harassing rape victim

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Sub-inspector Rezaul Karim Bosunia of Pirganj Thana was closed to Rangpur Police Line on Saturday for alleged harassment to a rape victim in name of investigation.

The SI even refused to register the case when the victim along with her father Hamed Ali insisted him to accept a rape case against alleged rapist Abdur Rashid, son of Hamid Ali of Khotitgram village on Saturday.

Being informed, Additional Police Superintendent Grish Chandra visited the thana and ordered to close him.

The rape incident took place on Thursday.

BNP MP, 4 others get 'death threat' from Bangla Bhai

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Kushtia Jubo Dal Organising Secretary Abul Kalam Azad on Saturday received a letter in the name of Bangla Bhai that he and four top district BNP leaders including Reza Ahmed Bachhu Mollah MP would be "bombed to death" within a week.

Bangla Bhai is a clandestine so-called militant Islamic group blamed for violence including murder in some south-western districts including Kushtia.

Others named in the letter are Daulatpur BNP President Altaf Hossain, secretary Sahid Sarkar Mongal and Sahidul Islam.

Azad filed a general dairy (GD) with Daulatpur police.

When contacted the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Daulatpur thana said they were trying to trace the source of the letter.

SNAPS

Workshop on local govt held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A work shop was held at Debhata yesterday to ensure transparency in local government activities.

It was organised jointly by Debhata Union Parishad up and local NGO Agragati Sangstha with financial assistance from Manusher Jonney, another NGO.

With Afsar uddin in the chair, it was attended by local body leaders, teachers and representatives of the local elite. Asit Bannerjee conducted the workshop.

Woman killed by 'in-laws' in B'baria

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A housewife was allegedly slaughtered by her in-laws at Maligong village in Sarail upazila on Saturday.

The victim is Halima Akter, 20.

Halima was living with her in-laws as her husband Md Osman Ali was staying in Saudi Arabia. She had a quarrel with her sister-in-law on Friday night. Next morning neighbours found her slaughtered on the floor.

In a critical condition she was rushed to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital where she died.

But her in-laws made a good escape.

Kushtia journo gets HC bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The High Court has granted ad-interim bail to Kushtia journalist Munshi Torikul Islam, accused in a "false extortion case" filed by a clinic owner in the town following publication of a report.

A High Court Bench comprising Justice Nazrul Islam Choudhury and Justice Kamrul Islam Siddique also asked the government to show cause why the journalist would not given permanent bail within six weeks.

Torikul Islam is Kushtia Correspondent of UNB (United News of Bangladesh) and Dhaka-base daily Ajker Kagoj as well as Executive Editor of local daily Ajker Sutropat.

The "false extortion case" was filed after a report was published in Ajker Sutropat that one Dr Aminul Haq Ratan, an Awami League (AL) leader and owner of Tofazzol Hosain Health Centre, on June 8 gave a certificate to government employee to save him from punishment.

The employee was arrested in June for an alleged offence, confined in jail for six days and then served with a show-cause notice.

But the doctor's certificate said the employee was sick and was under his treatment, according to the newspaper report.

On June 9, some hoodlums having alleged link with the doctor also threatened the journalist of "dire consequences" for publishing the report.

Dr. Ratan filed a case under the Speedy Trail Act alleging that the journalist and his school going younger brother Munshi Habibur Rahman had demanded Tk one lakh toll for him.



PHOTO: STAR

Double decker BRTC buses kept idle on a Barisal city road while other vehicles stopped plying during hartal yesterday

Two absconding killers get life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Two killers were awarded life term rigorous imprisonment (RI) in absence in a verdict given by a court here on Saturday.

The convicts are Zillur Rahman and Mohammad Ali. Both of them are absconding. Each of them was fined Tk 50,000, in default, to suffer additional five years imprisonment.

On June 28 in 1998, Zillur called his friend Babul, son of Kefatuddin out of his house at Dolapara village in Magura union of Kishoreganj upazila. Then he took him to Moulovirbazar. There he bought a betel leaf from Mohammad Ali's shop and offered it to Babul. According to a pre-planned conspiracy earlier Zillur mixed poison in the betel leaf in collaboration with betel leaf shopkeeper Mohammad Ali. Ill-fated Babul died instantaneously after chewing the poisoned betel leaf.

Youth beaten to death by Indian nationals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A Bangladeshi youth was beaten to death by a group of Indian nationals at Hakimpur village under Swarupnagar Thana in 24 Parganas (West Bengal) on Saturday.

The victim is Saiful Islam, 23, son of Mujibar Rahman of bordering Keragachhi village in Kalaroa upazila here. In response to a call by the killers, Saiful went to the opposite side of Bangladesh border, but did not come back home, according to local people and police.

On Sunday, villagers found the body lying on a cropland at Hakimpur. The victim's relatives went there to bring back the body but failed. The cause of the murder was not known immediately.

134 km roads damaged in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The recent floods damaged 134 km pucca roads and destroyed 404 bridges completely and another 866 partially.

Five kilometres of the roads in the 12 upazilas of the district are now unfit for use.

The flood damaged 1249 km kutcha roads totally and 4149 km partially, according to District Relief and Rehabilitation Office (DRRO) sources.

Repair of the roads and bridges will cost at least Tk 42 crore, they said.

Haluaghat-Munshirhat-Dhubaura and Gafargoan-Monipur-Bhaluka road links, snapped following collapse of bridges and culverts, are yet to be restored, Roads and Highways Department sources said. The badly affected roads include the Mymensingh-Phulbaria road.

They said 13 Union Parishad (UP) office buildings out of 20, 34 'growth

centres' out of 60 and 561 primary schools out of 923 have been damaged by the flood, which will need Tk 36 crore for repair.

The floods also damaged many

roads in the town, creating water-logging.

The authorities concerned could not say when the repair will begin as funds are yet to be placed.



PHOTO: STAR

Pitiable condition of flood damaged Boro Bazar road in Mymensingh town.