

TEA PLANTATION IN PANCHAGARH- 4 (CONCLUDING PART)

Politicians demand policy

Local BNP MP to raise issue in JS: AL leader wants processing factory

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, back from Panchagarh

**Nilphamari:**The government should formulate a policy immediately to promote tea plantation in Panchagarh and Thakurgaon, keeping in view the interest of small farmers, leaders of political parties and professional groups said.

Development of a tea industry in northern districts would not be possible by ignoring small farmers because unlike in other tea growing areas, most lands there are owned by small farmers.

They also demanded of the government to set up a tea processing plant, purchasing centres, and a well equipped and properly manned regional office of Bangladesh Tea Board (BTB) in Panchagarh to promote tea plantation and help growth of a tea industry in the highly prospective area.

The area, suitable for cultivation of world famous Darjeeling variety of tea, could be turned in a tea hub if proper steps are taken timely, they told this correspondent.

Ruling BNP lawmaker from Panchagarh-2 Mozahar Hossen said big companies deserve appreciation for initiating tea plantation in the area but there is no alternative to promoting plantation by small farmers because the situation in Panchagarh is different from Sylhet

where lands are owned by the government and leased to tea companies.

Regarding indiscriminate purchase of small farmers' lands by big companies, he said the issue was discussed at the district law and order meeting in presence of minister-in-charge of the district Rezaul Karim a few months ago.

As per a decision of the meeting, letters were sent to different land registration offices so that no one can purchase land beyond the government ceiling.

He said he will raise the issue in the Jatiya Sangsad for discussion on government policy and steps to promote tea cultivation in the area.

The lawmaker said tea cultivation on plain land by small growers is a new idea in Bangladesh. But this has become successful in India and Sri Lanka.

He said steps taken by the BTB are pragmatic and too inadequate to the needs.

Mozahar Hossen said as per the policy of the present government, small tea planters are given bank loan and other technical support.

He demanded immediate setting up of a tea processing factory, some tea purchasing centres and fixation of price for green tea leaves to promote cultivation by small growers.

Panchagorh district General Secretary of Bangladesh Awami League Mazaharul Haq Prodhhan said it was a long-time demand of his party for government initiative to promote tea cultivation in the district.

Responding to the demand, the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina ordered BTB in 1999 to conduct soil tests in Panchagarh and Thakurgaon.

The regional officer of BTB was set up in April 2001 on orders from the then AL government, he said.

Prodhhan said small farmers should be encouraged and provided with all facilities including loan and training to promote tea plantation in the neglected and backward region. This is the only way to change the socio-economic condition of the area, he said.

He also demanded formulation of a policy and setting up of a processing factory and some purchasing centres.

Prodhhan said indiscriminate land purchase by some companies is a matter of great concern. This will increase the number of landless people and create social strife in future, he said. He mentioned that there were some unhappy incidents between local Shantali people and a tea company in Tetulia few years back. Land purchase should be as



The poorly manned Tea Board office at a rented house in Old Panchagarh.

PHOTO: STAR

peer law, he said. He suggested that small tea farmers should form an association to protect their interests.

Expressing the same sentiment, Panchagarh Krishok League President MA Rouf demanded that the price of green tea leaves be fixed at Tk 12 per kg because the tea grown there is of better quality than those in other areas.

He demanded that the ceiling on land purchase by companies for tea garden should be enforced.

Former president of Panchagarh

Lawyers Association advocate Wahiduzzaman Suja said, tea plantation by small farmers has opened the scope for their economic uplift and development of the area. The government should act keeping this in view and patronise small growers, he said.

Kawsar Ahmed, a senior Journalist in Panchagarh, said a tea industry has grown just across the border. The potential here lies in cultivation of tea by the vast majority farmers, not by a few individuals, he said. (concluded)

SNAPS

Attack on Rajshahi journalist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Local people on Tuesday night foiled an attempt to murder a senior journalist at Kumarpara near Rajshahi Metropolitan Press Club, Quazi Gias Uddin, Rajshahi Correspondent of Dainik Orthonthi and organising secretary of the club sustained critical stab injuries on his head by a group of five extortionists led by Motaharul Islam Tony Anik. They swooped on the 53-year-old Gias while he was taking tea at a tea-stall. Anik and his accomplices stabbed him and attempted to shoot him. But local people rushed there, saved him and drove away the attackers. Later, Gias told reporters that the attack was made as he denied Anik's entry to the press club after receiving allegations of extortion. A case was filed accusing Anik and five others who are yet to be identified.

Rab nabs SCC employee with 3 revolvers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Thursday arrested an assistant tax-collector of Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) with three foreign-made revolvers. While patrolling in the city, a Rab team challenged Shekhor Devnath as he was moving suspiciously at the Choukidekhi area at about 9 pm. Shekhor, bearing his SCC identity card, held a shopping bag containing three foreign-made revolvers. Shekhor is son of Champak Das of 16, Rangdhanu Residential Area, Choukidekhi, Sylhet. A case was filed after Rab handed him over to Sylhet Kotwali Police on Friday. He will be produced before the magistrate's court on Saturday.

Rice mill machinery looted for toll

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Extortionists looted machinery from a rice mill at Thangai in Sadar upazila on Wednesday as its owner refused to pay them Tk 50,000 as toll.

Police said, a gang of ten led by Afjal Hossain came to the mill and had demanded Tk 50,000 from its owner Ruhul Amin Talukder.

As he refused, they took machinery worth about Tk 70,000. A case was filed with Sadar Thana.

9 hurt in clash over land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

At least nine persons including two women and a police officer were injured in a clash between the two groups of people, one led by Sheikh Shahjahan Ali and the other by Ataur Rahman, over disputed land at Nakipur village in Shyamnagar upazila on Friday.

Eight of the injured sustained serious injuries. They were admitted to Shyamnagar Upazila Health Complex in a critical state.

Bumper Aman crop likely in 10 south-western districts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Farmers in some areas unaffected by flood in 10 districts are expecting a bumper production of Transplanted (T-aman) paddy this season, according to a source in the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) here.

The districts are Jessore, Jhenidah, Magura, Narail, Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur.

This season an official target was fixed to bring 7,38,682 hectares of land in the 10 districts under T-aman cultivation. The total targeted area included 5,91,000 hectares of land for HYV aman farming and 1,47,682 hectares for local variety aman cultivation.

Enthusiastic farmers cultivated High Yielding Variety (HYV) of T-aman on 6,03,185 hectares and local variety on 1,45,215 hectares exceeding the target of DAE by 9,718 hectares.

Flood damaged T-aman on 1,68,783 hectares including HYV aman on 1,50,413 hectares and local variety on 18,370 hectares. Five lakh 79 thousand and 617 hectares of T-aman in the aforesaid districts remained unaffected by the deluge. If weather remains favourable in the coming days, a bumper production of T-aman paddy is expected despite colossal loss caused by flood.



Rice fields with expected good crops in Mathurapur village along the Jessore-Jhenidah highway.

PHOTO: STAR

4 outlaws arrested from Kushtia, Chuadanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Four outlaws were arrested from Kushtia and Chuadanga and two firearms and ammunition were recovered from their possession.

Chuadanga police on Thursday arrested two cadres of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho).

They are Rintu, 27, and Litu, 35, of Boleswar village in Alamdanga upazila.

Alamdanga police raided a house at the village and arrested them. Police said both of them were accused in several cases including murder cases.

Kushtia police arrested a cadre of outlawed Biplobi Communist Party (BCP) on Friday night.

Sirajul Islam alias Siraj, accused

in the triple murder case in Daulatpur on October 22 was arrested from a house in Badda area in Dhaka.

Police said Siraj hailed from Kazipur village in the upazila. He is an accused in 12 cases including five murder cases filed in different police stations in Kushtia and Chuadanga.

In another raid, Mirpur police arrested two cadres of BCP from Kakiladah village and recovered a firearm with bullets.

Policeraided the house of Taleb Ali and arrested his son Sujon, 18, with a BCP cadre named Amirul, 25. Police also recovered a country made rifle with four bullets.

Separate cases were filed with concerned police stations.

Relief distribution in N dists fair

Dulu tells newsmen in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

There is no corruption and anomaly in relief distribution in moga-affected northern districts as adequate precautionary measures have been taken, Deputy Minister for Relief and Disaster Management Ashadul Habib Dulu told newsmen at Gaibandha Circuit House Friday night.

Monga is a common phenomenon in northern districts during September-October when acute job crisis prevails ahead of paddy harvest. Farm labourers remain without work during the period.

The government has allocated a

large number of VGF cards for distribution among flood affected people of Gaibandha to over come monga, Dulu said.

The deputy minister sought co-operation of journalists for fair distribution of rice under VGF and Open Market Sale (OMS) operation.

He called upon journalists to project good things like fair distribution of relief by the present government.

The deputy minister also visited some areas in the district to see rice distribution under VGF cards.

He was accompanied by BNP leaders, the Deputy Commissioner and the Police Superintendent.

Ploy to stop Dhaka-Barisal Biman flight again?

Vested quarters allegedly acting on behalf of a private airline

AKTER FARUK SHAHIN, Barisal

Some vested quarters in Bangladesh Biman and Tourism Ministry, allegedly working at the behest of a private airline, are engaged in a ploy to stop Biman's flights in Dhaka-Barisal route.

They are trying to stop the flight though passenger and people including the business community in Barisal have been demanding Biman's daily flight in the route, it is alleged by different quarters.

Nagarik Samaj, a citizens' body in the city, observed different programs including sit-in in front of Biman's Barisal office and formation of human chain for daily Biman flight in the route.

Biman started its flight in the Dhaka-Barisal-Dhaka route in December 1993 during BNP rule. The flight was formally inaugurated by the then President Abdur Rahman Biswas.

After the Awami League government came to power in 1996, the vested groups managed to top Biman's operation in the route, allegedly to benefit private sector GMG Airline, which was operating a daily flight.

This gave GMG a monopoly business in the route.

After change of government in October 2001, the people of Barisal again started movement for resumption of Biman flight in the route.

As per an order by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Biman resumed operation on April 24 last year, with twice

weekly flights on Sunday and Friday.

The vested quarters became active again. The schedule was changed to Sunday and Thursday and then the Sunday flight was cancelled.

But their move to stop the flight altogether failed due to opposition by a number of ministers hailing from Barisal division.

The vested quarters then stopped carrying the passenger from Biman office in Barisal city to Barisal Rahmatpur Airport. The number of Biman passengers dropped as the private airline carried its passengers to the airport from its city office.

Biman's one way fare in Barisal-Dhaka route is Tk 1375 and that of GMG is Tk 1800.

The vested quarters try to justify stopping Biman flight in the route on the plea that Biman is incurring Tk one lakh loss per flight in the route.

But Biman sources said the airline loses Tk 65000 in a Dhaka-Chittagong flight, Tk 85,000 in Dhaka-Jessore flight, Tk 1.9 lakh in Dhaka-Sayedpur flight, Tk 1.50 lakh in Dhaka-Rajshahi flight and Tk 1.50 lakh in Dhaka-Cox's bazar flight.

The quarters have another plea that the number of passengers is not adequate to continue the flight in Dhaka-Barisal route.

It was gathered from Biman sources here that the rate of passengers per flight was 18.96 in Dhaka-Barisal flight and 23 in Barisal-Dhaka flight, 18.33 in Dhaka-Rajshahi route and 20.96 in

Rajshahi-Dhaka route, 22.33 in Sayedpur-Dhaka route and 23.07 in Barisal-Dhaka route during November 2003- July 2004 and carried 7884 passengers.

But Biman, with 25 per cent less fare (Tk 1575) carried only 3945 passengers during the period. This is only due to alleged manipulation by the vested quarters, the sources claimed.

Talking to this correspondent, some passengers who often travel by Biman alleged that Biman employees and officials in its Barisal office and at its Dhaka ticket counter are the main obstacles.

Officials at both the places discourage passengers, saying they cannot say whether flight will take off on schedule.

They also alleged that unlike in other routes, Biman flight in the Dhaka-Barisal route is often cancelled without any notice or explanation.

During April 2003- June 2004, 27 flights were cancelled and 43 flights were operated in time and 54 were delayed.

In contrast, the private airline maintains schedule even in bad weather.

DISTRIBUTION OF KHAS LAND

Children on list of landless people

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A Union Parishad (UP) member in Galachipa upazila on Monday lodged a complaint to the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Patuakhali against his chairman for his alleged nepotism in making a list of landless people.

UP member Jafar Sardar of Ward No 5, Char Kayal union complained that chairman Ali Ahmed Akan had submitted a list of 29 landless people to the DC office for approval showing his six children and relatives as landless people. According to the list, each person will get three acres of khas land of Chhotoshiba and Baroshiba village in the union.

The chairman's children and relatives are identified as Imran, son of Abdul Halim (Case No 385),

Alif, 11, son of Nur Mohammad (Case No 373), Nur Shahed, 12, son of Jafar Akon (Case No 424), Farhad Hossain, 10, son of Shahjalal (Case No 437), Jewel, 11, son of Majid Akon (Case No 424), and Reaz, 12, son of Moiar Rahman Akon, (Case No 418).

According to rule, the chairman was supposed to make the list in presence of landless people, but he prepared it privately.

Local people told this correspondent, about 300 landless people of two villages are being deprived of khas land. They urged the authorities concerned to cancel the flawed list.

On contact, Assistant Deputy Commissioner (ADC, Revenue) Sheikh Kabeedul Islam told this correspondent, necessary action would be taken against the chairman after proper investigation.

UP chairman faces no-confidence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Shahjadpur Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Md Sirajul Islam Khadem faces no-confidence from nine UP members for his alleged corrupt practices during his tenure in the last few years.

They lodged a complaint against the chairman and expressed their no-confidence on him to Sarail Upazila Nirbahi Office (UNO) on Thursday.

The members are Md Mofli Mia Khadem, Md Abdul Haque Khadem, Alamgir Mia, Asma Akter, Suhain Ahmed, Abdul Mannan, Sunlsh Bhaumic, Rekha Rani Ray and Niranjana Sarker.

There had been allegations of misconduct and misappropriation of over Tk 70,000 of different schemes and relief in the union.

Dealership cancelled for corruption

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Dealership of two Open Market Sale (OMS) rice dealers were cancelled for selling 1,000 kilogram of OMS rice secretly at Mugra union in Akhaura upazila on Thursday.

The corrupt dealers are Abdul Kasem and Aman Mia, according to sources in the UNO office.

Local people filed a complaint to Akhaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mezbah Uddin Chowdhury against them. After an investigating they were found guilty, according to UNO office sources. Their dealership was cancelled and two new dealers were appointed in place of them.

Kidnapped girl rescued from Dhaka

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Modhupur police rescued abducted school girl Sheuli Akter, 14, from a house in Badda in Dhaka city Thursday night.

Sheuli Akter, a student of class ten at Modhupur Rani Bhabani Pilot High School, was abducted on September 4 while she was going to school. She is the daughter of Abdul Subhan of Nagbari village in Modhupur upazila.

Police and family sources said she was abducted by a gang of seven allegedly led by Munnaf Ali allais Kalu of the same village.

Her father filed a case with Modhupur police on the same day under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act accusing seven persons.

But any of the accused is yet to be arrested, police said they are trying to nab the accused.

VGF rice seized from shop

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Kasba Thana police in collaboration with villagers seized 30 sacks of VGF rice from a shop at Chaubapur Bazaar in Kasba upazila on Thursday.

VGF rice were distributed among 1,522 distressed people in Mehari union by Union Aarishad (UP) chairman Md Alam and his members.

Though every person was supposed to get 30 kg of rice, yet each of them got 25 to 26 kg of rice only. This way the chairman and members saved rice weighing 2,500 kg.

When they were about to sell VGF rice to a shop keeper, local people informed police and recovered the sacks of rice.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Habibur Rahman visited the spot.

No move to repair rugged roads

80 per cent roads flood-damaged in Netrakona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

The recent floods damaged at least 80 per cent of the roads in the district but there is no move by the authorities to repair any of those.

According to officials of Roads and High Way Department, 252 km metalled roads and 824 km kutcha roads were damaged by the flood that ravaged the district twice this year. They can not say when renovation of the roads will begin.

Transports have to negotiate rugged roads at risk on most of ten routes from the district headquarters.

The busy Netrakona-Durgapur and Netrakona-Kalmakanda roads were completely damaged as those were under water for about three months.

Visitors have to undertake a tedious journey to go to tourist spots in Durgapur. Many tourists go there

every day to see historic places and for various activities at the Tribal Cultural Academy. Durgapur is also trading centre because of the large

est deposit of China Clay. Same is the condition of roads to Atpara, Madan and Kendua upazila headquarter from the district town.



PHOTO: STAR

A view of Netrakona-Kalmakanda road near Gutura market, snapped on Friday.

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