

Import keeps local potato unsold

Traders in 5 northern districts to incur Tk 175 cr loss: Even auction fails to draw buyers at cold storages

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

About 70 lack bags of potato stored in cold storages in five northern districts last year may remain unsold due to large scale import of Indian potato.

Traders will incur a loss of around Tk 175 crore as there is bleak chance for clearing the stocks, some traders and owners of cold storages told this correspondent.

This will also incur heavy losses to at least 30 cold storage owners because traders will not pay the rent if they do not lift the potatoes. The stocks will be burdens on cold storage owners.

Arrival of newly harvested potato in the market has aggravated the situation.

"The market price has fallen drastically, particularly in northern

districts, due to import of Indian potato and so traders are not lifting the stocks," said Mostafa Azad Chowdhury Babu, owner of Foyezunmecha Cold Storage at Deuti in Pirgachhagacha upzila in Rangpur district.

Indian potato for consumption was imported in huge quantities in the name of seed potato in the last two months, Babu said.

November 15 was the deadline for traders and farmers to lift their stocks from cold storages in Rangpur, Kurigram, Gibandha, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari.

Only one third of the stocks, mainly seed potato stored by farmers, has been lifted, he said.

The potato traders generally lift their stocks during September-December every year because the price remains high at that time.

This year, some of the importers

imported potato for consumption in the name of seed potato, creating a glut in the market.

This correspondent talked to a number of potato farmers and traders in Rangpur and Kurigram.

Most of them said they did not lift their stocks from the cold storage due to very low price in the market.

"If I lift my stock after paying the cold storage rent, I will incur a loss of Tk 200 per 80 kg bag," said Abdul Majid a big potato farmer in Mahiganj in Rangpur Sader upzila.

Mosaddeque Hossen Bablu, owner of Northern Cold Storage Ltd, said even an auction on December 26 to clear the stocks failed to attract any buyer.

"The problem lies elsewhere," said Masum, owner of Shapla Cold Storage at Mithapukur.

He said, "Most of the cold storage owners lend money to potato farmers and traders on their stored potato. They do it every year. They recover their loan money when the depositors release their potato."

Import of potato for consumption was not allowed this year. But a large number of importers imported potato for consumption in the name of seed potato and supplied those to markets at much lower rates.

Khondoker Tafakharul Islam, a big farmer in Mahiganj said the government should stop import of seed potato also.

If farmers incur loss in large scale, cultivation of the cash crop will dwindle, he said.

BSF returns body of Bangladeshi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Saturday handed over the body of a Bangladeshi to BDR after a flag meeting on Kushtia border.

Kamal Hossain, a cattle trader of Mahiskundi village in Daulatpur upazila, was shot dead by BSF at Jamalpur border on the night of December 24 when he was returning home. BSF took away the body.

BSF claimed that Kamal was an alleged cattle smuggler, an allegation denied by his family.

JCD leaders expelled for extortion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two leaders of Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of ruling BNP, were suspended from the party for their alleged involvement in extortion.

They are Abdur Rashid Asu, president of Mohespur upazila unit of JCD and Tofazzol Hossain, president of the Pouro unit of the party.

The decisions were taken at a party meeting on Saturday.

The sources said both were accused of involvement in several incidents of extortion. They are also facing extortion cases.

Food procurement 'nil' in Barisal division

Stocks meagre to face calamity

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The food department could not purchase any rice or paddy in the six southern districts under its Aman procurement programme, launched on November 25 with a target of 7,645 tonnes.

On the other hand there are only 25,000 tonnes of rice and 525 tonnes of wheat in government godowns, which are too small to face any natural calamity, officials said. The stocks are lesser than those in any previous year, they said.

There is little hope of making

any procurement during the programme period which will expire on February 28 because the market prices of rice and paddy are higher than government-fixed procurement prices, they said.

Market prices of paddy and rice are Tk 950 and Tk 1650 per quintal respectively while the government rates are Tk 860 and Tk 1319.

The procurement target is 1,168 tonnes for Barisal, 645 for Bhola, 792 for Pirojpur, 546 for Jhalokathi, 1,120 for Barguna and 2,800 tonnes for Patuakhali.

PHOTO: STAR

Noorjahan and her parents at their rabbit farm at Chachua village in Muktagacha upazila in Mymensingh.

Rapid gains from rabbits

Dowry victim Noorjahan now earns Tk 11,000 a month

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Young Noorjahan's miraculous success in attaining self-reliance is a surprise to many. Driven away by her husband for dowry, poor and illiterate Noorjahan started from zero and now earns around Tk 11,000 a month.

The success came in only in four years. She had started with something unknown in Muktagacha-rearing rabbits. She is now affluent and a source of inspiration to women like her.

Noorjahan Begum, daughter of Ismail Hossain of Chachua village in Muktagacha upazila, was married to Habibur Rahman of Natakure village of the same upazila in 1999.

Within a short time, her days became harder at her husband's house. Her husband and in-laws pressed and often tortured her for

dowry. One day, two months' pregnant Noorjahan was forced to leave her husband's house.

"It was very painful for me because I became a burden on my parents", said 22 year-old Noorjahan talking to this correspondent at her small farm built in the courtyard of her parents' house.

A pauper, I was in utter despair, thinking of myself and my baby".

Being inspired by her parents, Noorjahan started looking for something to survive. She took Tk 4000 loan from ASA, an NGO in Muktagacha in 2000 and bought 10 rabbit kids. She also took a short training.

Noorjahan and her poor parents reared those and earned over Tk 20,000 in a year. They invested the profit to expand the small farm. As things looked better, Noorjahan took more Tk 17000 loan from ASA

in two phases. This year she took another loan of Tk 12,000.

Now she has 120 rabbits in her farm and some 300 kids are born every month. It is very profitable because five to eight kids are born to one rabbit in a month. The kids can be sold within a month at around Tk 50 per piece, said Noorjahan.

The kids are sold for around Tk 15,000, which leaves a profit of about Tk 11,000 a month after meeting all expenditures including feed, she said.

"The work is very easy and we do not need any labourer", she said.

Noorjahan, now a self-reliant woman, is very keen to expand her farm. The enlightened woman wants to educate her only son Rony, now a two-year child.

Meanwhile, Noorjahan has filed a dowry case against her husband.

Rajpunnah in Bandarban Jan 13

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The traditional Rajpunnah Festival of Bomoung circle will be celebrated here on January 13.

The much-awaited festival, introduced 200 years back, is organised mainly for land tax collection from the inhabitants.

To mark the occasion, a five-day folk fair will be held at the 'Rajbari' (palace) ground. The Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry already donated Tk 2.5 lakh for the purpose, according to 15th Bomoung Chief (Raja) Aoung Sue Prue Choudhury. He hopes its befitting observance in association with local administration. Not only local people, but people from home and abroad wait eagerly for the festival.

Although the customary monarchy was abolished from the country much before, yet the system exists constitutionally in Chittagong Hill tracts (CHT).

The entire hill tracts are divided into three circles such as Chakma circle, Bomoung circle and Moun circle. Bomoung circle constitutes the entire Bandarban administrative district (95 Moujas) and 14 Moujas of Rangamati district. The Rajpunnah is arranged in 109 Moujas every year.

BARISAL EDUCATION BOARD

Order to hold employees' election in 45 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The Registrar of Trade Unions, Khulna has asked the Chairman of Barisal Education Board to hold election of Barisal Shiksha Board Karmachari Sangha (BSBKS) within 45 days to form a new committee.

The letter (no. ju-shra-pa/t u-299/2002/3004/1(2), Dt. 27/12/04) reached the Education Board office on Tuesday. The Board chairman is also president of the BSBKS.

Sources said the order followed a chaotic situation at the Board office marked by strike by agitated employees as Jatiotabadi Sramik Dal unit (ruling BNP's labour front) at the Board office 'imposed a committee on BSBKS without any election'. Normal activities ate being disrupted since december 21 following this, they claimed.

Board Chairman Prof Anwarul Huq, when asked, acknowledged receipt of the letter and said a decision for election will be taken as per law.

NGO charged for cheating

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Three officials of a local NGO, Satata Mahila Sangstha, were sued for allegedly misappropriating over Tk 10 lakh, collected from people on assurance of jobs.

Nasrin Akhtar Rosy of Puratan Satkhira area in the town, who was "cheated" by the officials, filed a case with a court on Thursday accusing them.

The accused are Rashida Mirza, vice-chairman of the NGO and two other employees-- Humayun Kabir Mirza and Rony.

In the case, Nasrin alleged that Satata Mahila Sangstha was registered with the Department of Family Planning on August 1, 2003 to work in the family planning sector.

They realised Tk 30,000 from her as security money and gave an appointment letter. But she neither got any salary since the appointment note could realise the security money despite repeated pressure.

She also alleged that the NGO officials realised security money ranging from Tk 30,000 to Tk 50,000 from 52 people and appointed them in various posts. But none got any salary.

The court after hearing ordered judicial probe into the allegation.

On road to autarky

High yielding summer onion production goes up to 12 tonnes per acre in Thakurgaon

A CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Bangladesh may soon attain autarky in production of onion, a largely used spice, thanks to the invention by Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI).

Two summer varieties of onion developed by BARI gave encouraging yields at farmers' level in Thakurgaon Sadar in the last summer season.

Zakir Hossain a farmer at Arasi Postanapur village got 40 maunds of onion from 20 decimal land.

He spent Tk 5000 on it and earned a profit of Tk 15000. It was a challenging job to Zakir, made possible under the supervision and assistance of Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Md Balal Hossain.

Talking to this correspondent, Belayet said summer onion can be grown in all types of soil except in clay soil.

The seed is to be sown in February-March and seedlings can be transplanted within 40-45 days. The spice can be harvested after 95 to 110 days of transplantation. The yield of summer onion is about 10 to 12 tons per hectare. One onion weighs about 250 gms.

The same varieties can be cultivated in winter also. In that case, seeds should be sown in May-June and transplanted in July-August. The crop could be harvested in



FILE PHOTO

Zakir Hossain got 40 maunds of onion from 20 decimal land by cultivating the summer variety at Arasi Postanapur village in Thakurgaon last year.

SNAPS

Fire in Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Mahogany and Arjun trees grown over three acres of land in the Sundarbans were gutted in a big fire on Monday. The affected spot is about two-kilometre west of Dhanshagar forest station under Swarnokhola range of the eastern wing of Sundarban Forest Division (SFD). According to DFO Mizanur Rahman, the fire originated from burning cigarette or bidi thrown by anyone. Trees of other varieties including Hogla were also gutted. DFO told this correspondent on return from the affected area on Tuesday. According to his disclosure, the blaze is now under control. Different species of trees including timber grown on over three kilometres of land at Pachakorhalla in the mangrove forest were gutted in fire on March 25 last year.

Stipend for poor students

A CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

Twenty poor and meritorious students were awarded stipends at a function organised by Islami Artho Samajik Unnayan Sangstha here on December 23. Each student was awarded Tk 1,000 annually. Prof Abdul Matin Khan was in the chair while Government Nazimuddin College Principal Prof Ruhul Amin was the chief guest. The organisation also distributes interest-free loan to poor students.