

Farmers say good bye to tobacco

Wheat, vegetable and maize cultivation more profitable, farmers tell Field Day meeting in Gaibandha shoal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Several thousand farmers at a 'field day' in a remote shoal area in Sunderganj upazila have vowed to replace tobacco with vegetables and wheat on their fields, thanks to the motivation by the government's Agriculture Extension Department and some NGOs.

Wheat and vegetable cultivation is easier and more profitable than tobacco, many of the farmers declared happily at the 'field day' held at Bangla Bazar in Ujan Teura shoal on Friday.

It was jointly organised by the District Agriculture Department, donor agency Oxfam, Dhaka-based NGO Padakhep (step) and local NGO Ekota.

The day's programme included crop harvest, visiting HYV wheat and maize demonstration plots and

a discussion meeting.

Several thousand farmers including women from far away areas attended the programmes.

The discussion meeting was held at Bangla Bazar Primary School ground. Tarek Hossain, Director General of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) was the chief guest at the meeting, presided over by Haripur Union Parishad Chairman Habibur Rahman.

Farmers representatives told the meeting that traditionally, tobacco was the main cash crop in Teesta shoal areas. It was labour intensive and the processing at home was hazardous to health. They had to go for this crop as there was no alternative. They could hardly go for one rice crop in a year because the areas are crisscrossed by tributaries of the Teesta.

Motivated by officials of AED and NGOs, some of the farmers experimented with high yielding varieties of wheat, vegetables and maize on small plots, which gave encouraging results.

The farmers pointed out that the areas are surrounded by tributaries of Teesta river and are vulnerable to flood and erosion.

During rainy season, people take shelter on flood protection embankments and suffer much for want of food and work.

All if the farmers said they earned more profit from vegetables, wheat and maize than from tobacco.

"I cultivated high yielding variety of wheat on five decimal land and hope to get about two maunds", said farmer Abdul Hamid.

"Vegetable cultivation is easier than that of tobacco", said Hyder Ali. Rafiqul Islam who cultivated

maize on a five-decimal plot by spending Tk 200 is expecting to earn Tk 1000. This is more profitable than tobacco, he said.

Addressing the discussion meeting, Tarek Hossain, Director General of Agriculture Extension Directorate, said the agriculture department alone can not do the job of motivating farmers and supplying them with inputs.

The government has given priority to the Char Jibikayon Project to change the life of shoal people but its implementation needs support of all concerned, NGOs in particular, he said.

The meeting was also addressed by, among others, Oxfam representative Kabita Bosh, Padakhep Director Rafiqul Alam, AED Deputy Director Abdur Rouf and Ekota Coordinator, Lutfar Rahman.

SSC exam under candlelight

A CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

Unbelievable though, SSC examinees at many centres in Madaripur district town had to appear at examinations under candlelight.

They had to face the rare experience due to power outage and a cloudy day.

Power went shortly after the examination of English Second Paper began at 10 in the morning. The authorities at many of the centres hurriedly arranged candles for them. The power supply resumed at about 12 noon.

But at many centres, examinees had to face problem as the authorities could not arrange candles, it was gathered.

When contacted later, Power Development Board (PDB) officials said this was not due to load shedding. They said it was due to a technical problem "somewhere" but could not specify the problem and where it took place.

The townspeople, particularly SSC (Secondary School Certificate) examinees are suffering a lot due to severe load shedding for the last several days.

PDB officials here said 25 megawatt of electricity is required for Madaripur district alone but only 17 to 20 megawatt is supplied for Madaripur, Sharidpur, Gopalganj districts and Gournadi upazila of Barisal district.

A Reserve Forest free for thieves!

Tk 15 cr timber taken away from forest under Modhupur Forest Research Centre: 13 employees get salary without work

JAHANGIR ALAM back from Modhupur

It looks like a house abandoned long ago. But actually it is the Charaljami Forest Research Centre at Charaljami in Modhupur forest.

Thirteen employees at the centre get salary without any work. The government spends Tk 60,000 a month on this count.

The vast forest area around the centre also gives a barren look as big timber trees have been stolen by thieves.

About 2.5 lakh trees worth over Tk 15 crore were taken from its area since 1990, according to Abdul Latif, Ranger of Modhupur Forest Range.

But officials of the centre and the Modhupur Forest Range blame each other for the pilferage.

The centre is about four kilometres from the Modhupur upazila in Tangail, along the Mymensingh-Tangail road.

The research complex was set up in 1968 with 425 acres of land around and an office building, research building and residences for employees were built subsequently.

In 1997, the forest department took away 293 acres of land, leaving 132 acres under it for research on local and foreign trees. Many varieties of foreign trees including Ucaliptas and Minjum were raised along with local ones. But there is none now.

The centre is in a poor state with virtually no work only because of lack of a research officer. Research Officer Mohammad Ahilul Islam was transferred to Chittagong in 1997. The post is still vacant.

Ranger Subrata Kumar Das, who is in-charge at the centre, told this correspondent that there is no work there due to absence of a research officer. The government has also stopped funds.

He claimed that taking advantage of lack of work, thieves, in collusion with a section of employees of Chararjami forest bit and Modhupur forest range office have taken away most of the local and foreign trees from its area. The area was full of trees till 1997, he claimed.

Deputy Ranger Manindra Nath Das said he is at the centre since 1980 and had raised numerous

timber trees of local and foreign varieties.

Abul Kashem, Forester at the centre, also blamed the forest department men for the pilferage. The centre has no security force to protect trees from armed thieves, he said.

To a question, Subrata said they gave several representations to the Ministry of Forest and Environment to depute a research officer. The ministry gave only assurance.

Ranger Abdul Latif claimed that till 1990, there were about 2,50,000 foreign and local varieties of big timber trees worth about Tk. 15 crore in the reserve forest area of the research centre. Thieves stole those in connivance with employees of the research centre.

"Had they not been involved in the pilferage, they should have filed case or General Diary (GD) with police. But they did not file any case or GD in ten years," he said.

Abdur Rahaman, Bit Officer of Charaljami Bit, alleged that most of the pilferage took place during the period when Research Officer Ahilul Islam at the centre.



PHOTO: STAR

Officials of AED and NGOs (left) and participants at the Field Day held at Bangla Bazar in Sunderganj upazila in Gaibandha on Friday.

Rescue JS from 'dishonest' people

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Workers' Party (WP) President Rashed Khan Menon on Friday told his party men to prepare for the next general election.

He told this while addressing the congress reunion at Jessore Zia School auditorium.

Menon said 'dishonest' people have captured Jatiya Sangsad. It is time for party men to rescue the parliament from their captivity and turn it into people's parliament. He further said that representation of the leftists in parliament must be ensured in the next election.

"Leaders and workers of the left-leaning parties carry on the movement but others enjoy its fruit," he said adding it will not be allowed any more.

Baidhya Nath Biswas presided over the meeting, organised by the party district committee while it was addressed, among others, by party General Secretary Bimol Biswas and leaders like Anisur Rahman Mollik, Iqbal Kabir Zahid, Prof Afsar Ali, Zakir Hossain, Anil Biswas, Harun-ur-Rashid, Zillur Rahman, Hafizur Rahman Dulu and Ruhul Amin.

Dacoity at Nilphamari ASA office

Bid at BRAC clinic foiled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

NGO officials and employees in the district have been panicked following an armed robbery at ASA office and a failed bids at BRAC office and Civil Surgeon's (CS) office here in the last two days.

Bandits looted goods worth Tk 35,000 including cash amounting to 10,000 from the main branch of ASA on Thursday, according to its district team leader Md Khademul Islam.

Armed robbers entered the office at dead of night by breaking open its grill. They tied up two employees, Anwar Hossain and Belal Hossain and broke 12 file cabinets, an iron safe and a steel almirah.

A robbery bid was foiled at Shantinagar BRAC clinic in the town by night guards when bandits tried to break open the clinic's grill on Wednesday night.

The same night, another robbery bid was foiled at the store room of the CS office.

Two cases were filed at Sadar Police Station (PS) on Saturday.

Technology exhibition ends

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

A two-day exhibition on application and extension of appropriate technology concluded here on Wednesday.

The exhibition was organised by the Ministry of Science and Information Technology. BSCIR exhibited their products in the exhibition held at Bandarban Sadar Upazila Complex. NGOs, science clubs and individuals also participated there.

Satkhira villagers raise voice against early marriage, dowry

Two NGOs arrange motivation meeting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

It was a unique day for the people of Machhkhola, a remote village in the Sadar upazila, as people from all walks of life at a motivational meeting yesterday raised their voices against early marriage and dowry.

The meeting on Early Marriage and Dowry was jointly organised by Amar Sonar Paribar (my golden family), a newly floated local social body and Rishilpi, an Italian NGO working against the social vices in the district.

Amar Sonar Paribar's Shamima Nasrin presided over the meeting while Rishilpi Director Enzo Falcone was the chief guest.

Kamana Bairagi, Secretary of Amar Sonar Paribar; Program Animator of Rishilpi Midula Rani; its Assistant Co-ordinator Altaf Hossain (Dev) and Nazma Khatun from among the villagers spoke at the

meeting. The programme also included a film show, drama, group discussion and a musical soiree highlighting bad affects of early marriage and dowry.

The programme created awareness among parents about early marriage and the need for educating girls.

Speakers at the meeting said, early marriage and dowry still prevail in the society because of very poor rate of literacy, particularly among girls.

They urged parents to send their daughters to school instead of setting their marriage at an early stage.

The main cause of violence against women is lack of proper female education, poverty and dependence on husbands, they said.

Though early marriage is punishable under law, it is increasing because of lack of education and corruption by a section of marriage registrars, who falsely show under-aged girls as above 18.

This has to be checked by the authorities, the speakers said. They also called upon the educated section in the society to join the campaign against the social vices.

Enzo Falcone told the meeting that Rishilpi could provide educated girls with employment.

This correspondent talked to some parents at the meeting.

They said they would give their daughters proper education first and then think about their marriage. They said they could realise that early marriage and dowry are responsible for unhappy family life and violence against women.

Reception for dowry-free marriage in Gaibandha

Campaign by Oxfam, GUK bears fruit: 500 marriages so far

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A reception was accorded to 50 newly married couples here on Tuesday whose marriage ceremonies were solemnised without dowry.

Over 500 dowry-free marriages were held in different areas of Sadar upazila following two-year campaign jointly launched by international donor agency, Oxfam and local NGO, Gano Unnayan Kendro (GUK). The drive was launched against repression on women, early marriage and dowry, according to GUK Chief Executive M Abdus Salam. Rally, procession, discussion, drama and folk songs were included in the campaign.

the reception ceremony was formally inaugurated by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Gaibandha.

A crest was handed over to each couple on behalf of GUK.

While addressing the welcome address, Anjum Naheed Chowdhury termed the incident as a social revolution against dowry.

Earlier, on board horse carts, newly married couples were moved around the town. A large number of women, NGO workers, students and people from all walks of life participated chanting slogans against repression on women. The colourful event was followed by a rally.

Poor guardians heaved a sigh of relief following the dowry-free marriages.



PHOTO: STAR

Italian and Bangladeshi NGO employees at a discussion meeting on 'Early Marriage and Dowry' held at Machhkhola village in Satkhira sadar upazila yesterday.