

Jute cultivation falls in 10 southwestern dists

23,100 hectares less than last year's due to seed crisis

AMANUR AMAN, *Kushtia*

Jute cultivation in ten districts under Khulna division has fallen drastically this year compared to last year due to scarcity and high price of seed.

According to sources at the Divisional Office of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), 84,280 hectares of land have so far been brought under jute cultivation in ten southwestern districts this season, which is 23,100 hectares less than last year's. The sowing season is virtually over. Jute can be sown till the end of April.

Mainly two varieties of jute, locally known as Deshi (Chorchorous Capsularis) and Tossa (Chorchorous Oltorius) are

cultivated in the country.

Of the total area in Khulna division this year, 83500 hectares have been brought under Tossa and 780 under Deshi in the ten districts.

The sources said besides scarcity and high price of seed, there is a fear of low price of jute among farmers, who did not get fair price in consecutive years earlier.

Sources in Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and DAE said 64,4280 kilograms of seeds of both Tossa and Deshi varieties were need for 1,07,380 hectares of land in the ten districts. But the government supplied only 30,487 kilograms in the division this season.

Mozammel Haq, Deputy Director of BADC's seed wing in Kushtia Zone said the government failed to procure seeds from farmers due to flood last year. "This was another cause of short supply of jute seeds this year," he said. This resulted in scarcity and high price of seed.

Farmers in the area bought seeds mainly from markets. Most the seeds available in the markets were smuggled from across the border and were of inferior quality, many farmers told this correspondent. Farmers who could not procure jute seeds went for cultivation of other crops like maize, rice and vegetables, they said.

According to farmers, Tossa

varieties O-4, O-9897 and O-M1 are most popular in this region, known for growing the high quality jute.

According to DAE statistics, the district wise breakup of sowing is 460 and 40 hectares under Tossa and Deshi varieties in Khulna, 160 and 390 in Bagerhat, 7000 and 10 in Satkhira, 10,000 and 60 in Jessore, 10,000 and 20 in Jhenidah, 9120 and 290 Deshi in Narail, 10,960 and 30 in Kushtia. Mainly Tossa variety has been sown on 10750 hectares in Magura, 14200 in Chuadanga and 10700 hectares in Meherpur district.



PHOTO: STAR

Some of the 20 imported donkeys at the Ass Reproduction Centre in Rangamati town.

Beasts of burden reach Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Rangamati

The asses imported by the government have finally reached the hill district, drawing curious 'visitors' in large numbers every day.

The 20 asses have been kept at the Ass Reproduction Centre, set up on the premises of the district livestock office at Asamboti in Rangamati town. People, particularly children, crowd around the centre to watch the animals, not seen in the hills before.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Affairs Ministry imported the beasts of burden from Punjab in India at cost of USD 1440. They will be reproduced to help hill people carry goods to inaccessible areas.

The special programme to reproduce asses was taken up by the Rangamati Hill District Council (RHDC) as a 'test case', said District Livestock Officer Pryanath Barua. The district council will provide

funds for the scheme, he said.

He said construction of sheds for 15 asses and five female asses are going on and will be complete soon.

Special care is taken for them as all the five females are pregnant, he said.

A total of 480 asses would be imported under a special ass procurement scheme. Fifty of them will be given for Bandarban.

Sources said that imported asses will be used to carry sacks of food grains, especially to remote hills at times of disaster.

Some of these could also be distributed to poor people for income generation.

The livestock department has been given funds for their rearing under the supervision of RHDC.

As per a preliminary estimate, Tk 10 lakh will be spent annually for rearing the animals.

Piracy up as hilsha season approaches

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

A large number of fishermen in coastal areas and in the Meghna estuary are facing hard times due to increasing attacks by pirates.

On Saturday, at least 11 fishermen were injured when pirates attacked 11 fishing trawlers in Majherchar in Borhanuddin upazila in the Meghna estuary.

They are Jasim, Rashid, Zakir,

Alauddin, Maksud, Shahed Ali, Lokman, Manirul, Nazrul, Ruhul Amin and Nurunnabi.

Jasim and Rashid have been admitted to Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital with critical eye injuries from bullet and the rest nine at upazila health complexes in Bholia Sadar and Borhanuddin.

Police visited the spot but a case is yet to be filed.

Earlier on April 16, pirates took away six fishing trawlers from near Telar Char and Bason Bhang areas in Tajumuddin upazila. The pirates also looted about Tk 15 lakh from the fishermen.

In last one month, over 50 fishing trawlers were looted, 15 hijacked and at least 100 fishermen were injured in such attacks, police and fishermen said.

The pirates mainly belong to two

gangs, one led by Shkawat, brother of notorious gang leader Alauddin and the other by Bachchu, sources said.

At times the gangs are also engaged in gunfight over their area of control.

Last week, at least 20 persons of both the rival gangs were injured in a gun fight. Three of them - Shamsuddin, Wali Majhi, and Abul Kalam, of Shakhawat's gang - were admitted to Tajumuddin upazila health complex with bullet injury.

Three others - Fazlu, Babu and gang leader Bachchu were treated at a private clinic to avoid police, sources said.

Tajumuddin thana police visited the spot and recovered six trawlers and some firearms used by the gangs but could not arrest any one.

The pirates realise Tk. 5,000 to Tk. 20,000 from each fishing trawler as toll and attack trawlers when refused.

Fishermen said the attacks increased in the last few days as the Hilsha season is approaching.

An ISPR press release in Dhaka says: Bangladesh Navy personnel now deployed in anti-piracy and fishery protection duties in the coastal areas seized nine nets worth about Tk 5.60 crore mainly used for catching Hilsha fry.

They seized about 16.30 lakh metres of illegal nets from coasts and Meghna estuary areas in Kadamtoli, Charmonai, Mirganj, Diarika, Shikarpur, Uzirpur Mosjidibari, Bonaripara, Swarupkathi, Jhalakathi.

These were burnt in presence of local administration officials, police and journalists in the areas.



PHOTO: ISPR

Illegal nets seized by Navy in the coastal areas recently.

2 bombs found near Jessore Circuit House

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jessore*

Police recovered two bombs from a place only 50 yards from Jessore Circuit House at about 11 am yesterday.

Sources at Kotwali thana local people saw the two bombs wrapped in red tape beside a house at Mujib Sharak. Being informed, police rushed to the spot, recovered and those in a tub.

Police said they are probing the matter but did not arrest any one till filing of the report in the afternoon.

80 hurt in clash over extortion in Bhairab

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Netrakona*

At least 80 people including five women were injured, 35 of them critically, in a clash between two groups at Manikdi village in Bhairab upazila in Kishoregonj district Monday night over toll collection from fishermen.

Sporadic clashes between the groups led by Golap and Angur continued for the whole night.

Nine of the injured have been taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition. They are Tofazzal, Rajon, Bachchu Mian, Mizan, Sohag, Rahima, Sohel and Rokonuddin.

Twenty-three others have been admitted to Bajipur Jahurul Islam Medical College Hospital.

Police and witnesses said rival Golap and Angur groups used to extort toll from fishermen in Gorautra river.

POWER SUPPLY TO CHT HILLS

Use of generators, solar energy suggested

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Rangamati

The Rural Electrification Board (REB) held a workshop here yesterday to discuss ways to supply power to about 56,000 rural people in the three hill districts.

In presence of State Minister of Power Iqbal Hassan Mahmud, the issue fell into a controversy with some of the speakers saying supplying power to remote areas from the National Grid would not be commercially viable.

Alternatives which would be more cost effective for the rural hill people should be studied, they suggested.

The DDCL (Development Design Consultant Ltd.), a REB-assigned firm, recently conducted

a survey, which said the Tk 413 crore project, estimated earlier for power supply from the National Grid, would not be commercially viable for this region with scattered human habitations.

CHT Regional Council Chairman Jotirindra Bodhipraya Larma, Deputy Minister for CHT Affairs Moni Swapon Dewan, CHT Development Board Chairman Wadood Bhuiyan, Rangamati Hill District Council Chairman Maniklal Dewan, Khagrachari Hill District Council Chairman Nakhatryalal Dev Burman and government officials joined the workshop, held at the conference hall at Rangamati Deputy Commissioner's office.

Moni Swapon suggested a study to set up small hydro-electric

5x3

8x3

Compost plant misses deadline

AMINUL ISLAM, *Mymensingh*

A project aimed at producing bio-fertiliser from garbage in Mymensingh Pourasabha has failed to meet its deadline.

The compost plant under the Ecological Park project was scheduled to go into production in February this year. But it failed to start operation for failure to appoint staff and non-completion of necessary infrastructure.

Despite funding from the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) in January this year, Mymensingh Pourasabha failed to wake up for the project. CARE, Bangladesh was authorised to monitor activity and assist in the entire project work.

Two partner NGOs, Save the Young and West Concern were also supposed to collaborate with the municipality. Save the Young started working in 21 municipal wards to motivate people about environment and total sanitation.

Initially, Mailakanda in Ward No 6

of the pourasabha was selected for the work and four trolley men were to collect garbage daily on experimental basis. The project was started through a survey conducted on July 25 last year and was scheduled to go into production in February this year.

When contacted, the Executive Engineer of the municipality, Md Akbar Hossain told The Daily Star it would take at least two more months to complete the necessary work although he was not sure about the project.

The Slum Development Officer of the municipality, Jugul Rahman who is in charge of supervising the project, told this correspondent the project would start as soon as possible.

Required staff including four who will sort garbage according to its nature, four trolley men, one caretaker and a supervisor would be appointed 'soon', he said adding staff salaries would be paid by the Unicef 'as long as the project continues'.



PHOTO: STAR

5x3