

Tea cultivation in 5 northern districts now in sight

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

A long cherished dream of the people of five northern districts to have lush green tea gardens in the area may come true.

The government is finally going to take steps to promote tea plantation in the region.

This was known from a team of Bangladeshi Tea Board (BTB) officials from its Panchagarh Regional Office, who visited Nilphamari and talked to interested farmers, Chamber leaders and the administration.

At meetings with possible stakeholders during their day-long visit on Tuesday, they detailed the government's intention to create a new tea-producing region comprising Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur districts and initial plans for this.

The team comprised Scientific Officer Ismail Hossain and Development Officer Ameer Hossain.

They told the meetings that an inter-ministerial meeting in Dhaka on March 23 decided to

raise a new tea growing areas covering the five districts and ordered preparation of a revised project proposal. Initially, Tk 11.10 crore has been estimated for this, they said.

They visited Nilphamari as per a June 13 directive of BTB Chairman Brigadier General Mosaraf Hossain to collect data on tea plantation prospects in the district and talk to interested quarters.

The team visited different villages in Domar upazila and talked to farmers. They told farmers that tea cultivation is three times profitable than paddy, five times profitable than sugarcane and seven times profitable than jute.

They also told farmers that BTB would provide all possible assistance in raising tea gardens in this region.

The BTB team also met leaders of Nilphamari Chamber of Commerce and discussed prospects of tea plantation. They also told prospective tea planters about the prospects and possible government assistance in this regard.

Commissioner, who assured them of all possible cooperation to encourage tea plantation in Nilphamari.

At a meeting with Agriculture Extension Department (AED) officials, they collected data on annual rainfall and total area of high lands where tea plantation is possible. They were told that there are 42,300 hectares of high land in Nilphamari district, where average rainfall was 2532 mm last year, which is ideal for tea gardens. Annual rainfall of 2000 mm is enough for tea cultivation, they said at the meeting.

He said many businessmen who have big land holdings would be interested to raise tea gardens if the assisted by the government.

This new prospect would obviously create employment in the monsoon affected five northern districts.

Industry sources said tea production in the country now increases by 1.23 per cent annually and consumption by 3.50 per cent. If this trend continues, the country would have to import tea if production is not increased. So more areas should be brought under tea plantation, they added.

The team's visit created great enthusiasm and different sections of people, particularly the business class. Talking to this correspondent later, Nilphamari Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Sohel Parvez said they are enthused after talks with the BTB team and learning about the prospects and possible government assistance in this regard.

The government should take up a five-year pilot without delay, he said.

Tea is now being cultivated in

the hilly region of Chittagong and Sylhet. Panchagarh showed the path for tea cultivating in plain lands. Its will now spread in Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat districts and open up great prospects for the people and the national economy, he noted happily.

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This correspondent tried to contact the superintendent of police (SP) of Khulna, Habibur Rahman several times but failed. Rupsha Police Station officer-in-charge (OC) too refused to talk to him regarding the matter.

2 suspects in Balu murder case sent to jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two arrested suspects in journalist Humayun Kabir Balu murder case were sent to jail on Wednesday. Police arrested Monir, 30, and Riton, 28, two armed careers of outlawed BPCB Janajuddha from Shahnewaz Shrimp Processing Factory at Ramnagar in Rupsha upazila on Monday.

But they were shown arrested in two other murder cases.

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3 flee from Nilphamari Shishu Sadan, rescued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Three orphans fled away from Nilphamari Shishu Sadan (children's home) on June 9.

They are Sadekul Islam, 11, Nasiruddin, 12, and Majnu Mia, 14.

After a frantic search by their relatives, they were rescued from Parbatipur upazila in the neighbouring district of Dinajpur after a week on Thursday. They were found working as helpers in cheap hotels in an unhygienic condition.

Two of them—Sadekul Islam and Nasiruddin—were brought back to the children's home. But Majnu Mia's mother took her son to her village home.

Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid visited the Shishu Sadan twice. During his visits, he expressed his dissatisfaction and asked the officials to improve the condition of the children's home.

The probe bodies found involvement of the three persons in the scam at Pathgram branch, he added.

"Investigation into the scam at Pathgram branch is also complete, where involvement of Mojibor Rahman was also detected", the AGM said.

Cashier Mojibor Rahman was transferred to Pathgram branch from Barokhata branch of the bank in Lalmonirhat in 2003. After his transfer, authorities at Barokhata branch detected defalcation of Tk 10 lakh from depositors' money.

The bank will go for action against them soon and return the defalcated money, the AGM said.

Acid thrown on 2 brothers in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Unknown miscreants threw acid on two brothers at a remote village of Nabiganj upazila in the early hours of Wednesday.

The victims are Jubayer Ahmed Shipu, 18, and Faisal Ahmed, 15, sons of Haji Ashiqur Rahman. Police and local people said, the culprits threw acid on them at about 2-30 am when they were asleep in their house at Bargaon in Dighalbukh union.

Immediately, they were rushed to Nabiganj Upazila Health Complex, wherefrom were sent to the Habiganj district Hospital. On deterioration of their condition, they were sent to Dhaka for better treatment.

Previous enmity might have been the cause of the incident, locals have apprehended.

Gaibandha AL council tomorrow after 8 yrs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A council of Gaibandha district Awami League is scheduled to be held here tomorrow after eight years.

The last council of Gaibandha unit was held on March 11, 1997.

The present district committee led by its president Mohammed Khaled and secretary Sayed Shamsul Alam Hiru is holding office since then though its tenure expired long ago.

About 290 councilors are expected to attend council AL central secretary Abdul Jalil, organising secretary Abul Mannan and president member Motia Chowdhury are expected to attend the council, party sources said.

There may be two panels if election is held. One panel will be led by Mohammed Khaled and the other by Syed Shamsul Alam Hiru.

Tk 16. 95 cr Bandarban dist council budget

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC) has declared a budget of Tk 16, 95, 61,500 for the 2005-06 fiscal year on Wednesday.

BHDC chairman Ma Mya Ching announced the budget at a meeting held at the council auditorium. An amount of Tk 1 crore and 40 lakh will come from its own resources and Tk 16 crore 25 lakh 61 thousand 500 are expected from government as annual donation/sanction.

Bandarban Hill District deputy commissioner (DC) Seikh Alauddin, superintendent of police (SP) Iqbal Bahar, BHDC chief executive officer Khorshed Alam Chowdhury, BHDC councilors, other officials and journalists were present.

EIGHT YEARS AFTER MAGURCHHARA BLOWOUT Compensation from Unocal still remains elusive

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Successive governments failed to realise compensation from US company Unocal for the Magurchhara blowout even eight years after the incident.

The Lawachhara National Park as well the Reserve

Forest attached to the gas field is also yet to get back their original look even after new plantations in the last few years.

The energy ministry and the environment ministry separately claimed Tk 4,000 crore compensation for damages to gas resources and environment.

The government in May 2003 decided to file a lawsuit to realise compensation but nothing mentionable has been done. Rather, the company has been given permission to drill more new wells near the location.

The company started drilling of a

well there two weeks ago and will start another within weeks, sources said.

The company has also been allowed to lay pipeline through the National Park and the Reserve Forest areas to connect the National Gas Grid with the gas processing plant set up in nearby Kalapur area.

Environmentalists' protests in this regard were ignored.

The much talked about Magurchhara blowout took place in the early hours of June 15, 1997 when US company Occidental was drilling a well. It was contracted for hydrocarbon exploration in blocks 12, 13 and 14.

The blowout destroyed 245.96 billion cubic feet of gas worth over 600 million US dollars in addition to vast forest resources, according to a government estimate.

Occidental handed over its business in Bangladesh to Unocal in 1999 and left Bangladesh.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources earlier asked the government to apprise it on the so-called five per cent supplementary share agreement, signed on November 25, 1998, to adjust the compensation claim for the blowout, through which Unocal was trying to get rid of its obligations.

The parliamentary body had identified 15 flaws in Occidental's operations that led to the Magurchhara explosion.

Unocal claimed that the demand for compensation was been met through the 'supplementary agreement' and the claim is no longer valid after that agreement.

Environmentalists say at least 110 years will be needed to restore the forests there to their original look.

A Unocal official, when contacted said yesterday that the company met the compensation claim through the 'supplementary agreement'.

Daily Star Readers' Club formed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The Daily Star Readers' Club was formed here on Tuesday with a slogan to create enlightened citizens.

The club was formed at a meeting held at Dr Syed Mujtoba Ali Auditorium of the Public Library.

Moulvibazar Correspondent of The Daily Star Rajat Kanti Goswami presided over the meeting while the Coordinator of The Daily Star Reader's Club Rafi Hussain attended as moderator. Moulvibazar Correspondent of Prothom Alo Akmal Hussain Nipu attended the meeting as chief guest.

A large number of young people most of them college students attended the meeting and expressed their desire to become club members.

An 11-member committee of the club was formed with Syed Monsur Ahmed Sumal as its convener and Tuhin Taufiq and Shahriar Mustafa Tanim as joint conveners.

A lush green tea garden at Bura Buri village in Tentulia upazila in Panchagarh district.

PHOTO: STAR

RUPALI BANK SCAM IN RANGPUR

Defrauded depositors yet to get back money

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Depositors defrauded by some Rupali Bank employees at Pathgram and Barokhata branches are yet to get back their money.

About Tk 40 lakh was misappropriated from their accounts in the two branches.

The scam came to light in April when some depositors found that amounts in their accounts were less than they had deposited. At a recent press conference at Pathgram, some of the depositors urged higher authorities in Bangladesh Bank and Rupali Bank to take immediate steps to return their money and punish the culprits.

When contacted, Rupali Bank Manager at Pathgram Abdur Razzak said after complaints by depositors, he conducted a preliminary probe and detected the scam. He filed a case with Pathgram police against Cashier Mojibor Rahman, employee Abdul Wahab and Godown Keeper Anwarul Islam.

Police arrested Abdul Wahab, but Mojibor Rahman and Anwarul Islam are absconding since then.

This correspondent also contacted Assistant General Manager of Rupali Bank in Rangpur Abdul Mannan. He said three probe bodies in their investigation also found defalcation of depositors' money at Barokhata and Pathgram branches.

The bank will go for action against them soon and return the defalcated money, the AGM said.

The probe bodies found involvement of the three persons in the scam at Pathgram branch, he added.

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ALLEGED SHIBIR ATTACK

BCL man fighting for life at Comilla hospital

A CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

Faroque Hossain Siddique alias Kamrul, 22, is fighting for life at Comilla National Private Hospital in the town following attacks allegedly by activists of ruling Jamaat-e-Islami's student front Islami Chhatra Shibir at Kunjasreepur village in Alkora union under Choudhogram upazila on Monday.

Doctors at the hospital yesterday said he is not out of danger because of head injury and severe beating on the body.

Kamrul is an activist of Chhatra League, student front of opposition Awami League.

Six persons including three Chhatra League activists were injured and ten houses ransacked by the Shibir activists in the village. They also looted valuables from some of the houses, locals alleged.

The local people alleged that on Monday, 40 to 50 Shibir activists belonging to ATM Taher, a local Jamaat leader, swooped at houses owned by Awami League supporters.

Jamaat leader Dr Abdulla Md Abu Taher is lawmaker from the area.

The injured included Zihad Hossain Javed, Jahangir Alam and Minto who were treated at local clinics.

The attackers were led allegedly by Khorshed, Shahadat, local mosque Comilla Sadar police, who came and tamed the attackers, they claimed.

Asked over cell phone yesterday why he did not record the case, OC Mozamal Hossain said he was in Sylhet on Monday.

When contacted, the Comilla Police Superintendent said he has been informed of the incident.

The local people said Al-Kora union is a stronghold of Jamaat Shibir. Faroque Hossain Siddique alias Kamrul being treated at Comilla National Private Hospital.

moazzain Nur-un-Nabi, Hayder Shujon, Riton and Nayan.

Kamrul's relatives at the hospital told this correspondent that they went to Choudhogram thana but OC Mozamal Hossain declined to record any case.

Local people also alleged that even after being informed, the police did not come from the thana to the spot.

As the Shibir activists also launched another round of attacks on Wednesday, local people informed

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