

Traders lament as potato price plummets in N-dists

Tk 150 crore loss feared: Govt steps to set up potato-based industries demanded

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Potato traders and cold storage owners in northern districts will incur a loss of about Tk 150 crore this year as the price of potato is falling fast.

The fall in price will have a fallout effect on farmers in the coming winter seasons.

Unless potato-based agro-industries are set up and export of potato is promoted, farmers may be discouraged to grow the vegetable in coming seasons, some farmers, cold storage owners and traders said.

Potato cultivation increased in northern districts over the years. Farmers took it as a cash crop.

According to Agricultural Extension Department (DAE) here, production of potato in the country exceeded the target last year. One fourth of the about 40 lakh tonnes was produced in northern districts.

DAE Deputy Director in Nilphamari Sakhawat Hossain told this correspon-

dent that about 2.26 lakh metric tones of potato were produced in Nilphamari district last year against a target of 1.88 tonnes. The district turned into a major potato growing area in the region.

Some cold storage owners and potato traders said that out of 10 lakh tonnes produced in the region, about 5 lakh tonnes are still preserved in about 50 cold storages.

Of them, one lakh tonnes are in four cold storage in Nilphamari.

Trader Habibullah Mia said he purchased potato during the harvesting season at Tk 350 per 84 kg bag. With transport cost and cold storage charge, the cost is now Tk 550 to 600 per bag but it is sold at Tk 300 to 350 only. The loss per kilogram is Tk 3.00 to 3.25. The total loss to traders in northern districts would be around Tk 150 crore, he said. The loss will rise if the price falls further, Habibullah Mia said. There was a bumper production of potato last year, he added.

Rashidul Islam, Chief Store Keeper

at Shaon Cold Storage having a capacity of 1.5 lakh bags said that though it is now time for early sowing, traders and farmers are taking delivery of only 300 to 350 bags every day instead of last year's 1000 bags on an average.

He also said that only one fifth of the total stock has been delivered so far. Traders and farmers are now observing the situation, he added.

Traders said they had to incur losses last year. If they incur losses this year also, many of them will be out of business and become bank loan defaulters, they said.

It is learnt that per kg potato is now sold at Tk 13 to 14 in Indian markets. There is good demand of Bangladeshi potato in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and some European countries. Export of potato to those countries may salvage the traders, cold storage owners and farmers as well, traders suggested.

Syed Ali, owner of Mukta Cold Storage in Nilphamari said it would

not be possible to realise even the cost of running a cold storage if the low price continues.

I am worried about repayment of the huge bank loan as there is sign of repetition of last year's situation", he said.

Monsurul Islam Danu, owner of Shaon Cold Storage said the govern-

ment should come forward to help investors to set up potato-based industries like the one in Joypurhat where exportable starch is going to be produced from potato next year. The plant has been set up with technical assistance from a European country. The plant will utilise five lakh tonnes of potato annually to produce starch.



Traders with potato on the corridor of a cold storage in Nilphamari awaiting buyers. The market is very dull as prices have plummeted.

PHOTO: STAR

Security blanket in Khulna city

Journalists alerted against 'attack' by Islamist militants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Intelligence agencies have been asked to keep vigil in Khulna Press Club, all courts, Khulna station of Bangladesh Betar, residences of all government high officials and judges, Sonadanga bus terminal, Rupsha Bridge and all local newspaper offices and Khulna Bureau offices of national dailies fearing attacks by Islamist extremists.

All local journalists have also been asked by Rab and police administration to remain alert against any such attack and inform police in case of any help needed on security reason.

Khulna law enforcers have begun a massive search in courts and other places where key installations are situated. Intelligence men of Rab are also keeping round-the-clock vigil in all primespots in the city.

Additional forces have been deployed at different key places including judges court premises and CMM Court. Vehicles are being checked.

Security has also tightened in all the 54 puja mandaps in Khulna city to avert any destructive activities.

Combing operation was launched in city on Monday night to arrest listed JMB (Jamaa'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh) ctivists and operatives of PBPC (Purba Banglar Communist Party).

Rupsha thana police on Monday night recovered a foreign revolver, four sets of Ansar uniform, from the house of Maruf Hossain at Icegati union. Maruf is an alleged outlaw, police said. He escaped after getting information about police raid, police sources said.

KU VC receives 'death threat'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Vice-chancellor of Khulna University Prof Dr Mahbubur Rahman has received a 'death threat' in a letter sent to him by post. He received the hand-written letter on Thursday.

The Vice-chancellor has been provided with two gunmen for his security in addition to deployment of a platoon of policemen to guard his residence.

According to a source at Khulna University, the letter written with red ink has warned the VC not to take help of police to save his life. A little piece of white cloth termed it 'Kafan' (burial cloth) has also been attached with the letter.

The Vice-chancellor brought the matter to the notice of all high officials of Khulna Metropolitan Police and Rapid Action Battalion for necessary action.

"I am really feeling insecure after receiving the death threat", the VC told this correspondent after filing a general diary with Batiaghata thana yesterday. Police seized the letter sent by an unidentified person.

Keshobpur journos observe Oppression Day

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Journalist Oppression Day was observed yesterday at Keshobpur Press Club in Jessore.

On October 7 some local journalists were tortured and false cases were filed against them. The journalists had to keep hiding for one month and a half fearing harassment. Since then the day is observed every year by journalist in Keshabpur.

To mark day, journalists held a rally on the press club premises. Presided over by Azizur Rahman, president of Keshabpur Press Club, the rally was addressed by, among others, Ashoke Sen, Mizanur Rahman Tota, Kiron Saha, Shajed Rahman, Moynul Haque, local Workers Party leader advocate Abu Bakar Siddiqui and Ashrafuzzaman.

JCD cadre sent to jail in arms case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Magistrate court in Sylhet yesterday sent notorious JCD cadre Rezaul Karim Nachon to jail hajat as Sylhet Kotwali police produced him before it.

Rapid action battalion men caught Nachon from his house at city's Jotortur area Thursday evening. Rab handed him over to the Sylhet police same night after preliminary interrogation.

Nachon was wanted in at least 10 criminal cases including four for murder and for keeping arms, explosive and extortion informed.

Nachon is Social Welfare Secretary of Sylhet city JCD.

KUAKATA SEA BEACH

Greens disappear as dam plan gathers dust

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Erosion has turned serious in Kuakata sea beach, a prime tourist spot.

One-third of the coconut gardens and other eye soothing greens disappeared in the sea in last five years but a project to protect the beach taken up two years ago is yet to be approved.

The Tk 28.75 crore project was taken up by Bangladesh Water

Development Board (BWDB) and sent to the ministry in 2003 to build a four kilometre embankment, reinforced with concrete blocks.

But the water resources ministry in sitting on it, WDB Executive Engineer Abdul Mazid Mollah told this correspondent.

Erosion is now threatening the LGED rest house and some other government installations, he said.

The coconut gardens with over 15,000 trees were raised along the eight kilometre area along the beach in the 1960, local people said. Over 5000 trees have disappeared due to erosion, they said.

The September 18-19 tidal surge washed away many supermarkets in the beach due to lack of a flood control embankment, they said.



Left over roots of coconut trees devoured by the sea in absence of an embankment in Kuakata beach.

PHOTO: STAR

Two RU teachers punished by Syndicate

VC says an example set

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University authorities have taken punitive action against two teachers of Law and Justice department for giving 'poor marks' to a student six year ago.

The teachers-- Khorshed Alam and former Dean of Law Faculty M Badruddin have been barred from examining answer scripts for nine years and five years respectively.

The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the Syndicate with Vice-chancellor Prof Altaf Hossain in the chair, according to official sources.

Abdul Mannan Bhuinain, a former student of law department was given 62 percent marks in all 15 papers out of 16 in LLB (honours) examination in 1999. Mannan is now a lawyer in the Supreme Court.

said, 'I am very happy as action has been taken against the teachers.'

Khorshed Alam is now in Australia. When contacted, Badruddin said, "I did not give poor marks to Mannan intentionally".

RU VC Prof Altaf Hossain said the Syndicate decision is an example in the university.

Security for puja reviewed in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The Satkhira Deputy Commissioner on Thursday held a meeting with Hindu community leaders, law enforcers, official and elite of the city on holding of Durga Puja in the district, beginning on Saturday.

The meeting discussed in detail measures including security steps for smooth holding of the greatest religious festival of the Hindu community.

The meeting was addressed by, among others, 41 Rifles Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Sobhani, 1 Rifles Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Arif, Satkhira Municipality Chairman Sheikh Ashrafal Haque, Assassuni Upazila Nirbahee Officer (UNO) Iqbal Hossain, Kaligonj UNO Sheikh Maniruzzaman, Satkhira district Imam Samitee President Abdur Rashid.

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