

2,000 knitwear units in Gaibandha limping

Govt apathy blamed for no bank loan, lack of support

REZAUL HAQ, Gaibandha

Jobed Hossain, a labourer-turned owner of a small knitting machine producing warm clothes, should be pinning hopes on his items as winter is coming. But he is worried as he sees little hope for survival.

"Neither banks nor any government agency gives us loan", he lamented while talking to this correspondent at his small factory cum dwelling house at Saktipur village in Gobindaganj upazila in Gaibandha district.

Same is the condition of owners of about 2000 small knitting units in the upazila, which grew in the poverty-

stricken area in a decade.

They produce cheap warm clothes which are supplied to other districts and to the capital.

"The problem was not so acute earlier because the market was good. Now we face competition from others but we can not develop our units because of lack of funds", young Jobed Hossain said. Our 'Angura' brand of winter cloths are still acclaimed in markets, he added.

The cottage industry grew in last one decade in 22 villages in Kochashaer and Salmara unions in Gobindaganj upazila. Seeking their success, many people in Sonatola

upazil in Bogra district and in some other areas took to the business, he said.

In Kochashaer and Salmara unions, almost every household possesses at least one knitting machine. There are people who own more, even 25 machines.

A man, once engaged as labourer in a unit, can own a machine after four to five years.

The products earned them good profit earlier. But now it has become highly competitive. So prices have fallen.

Now, many of the owners cannot afford the production cost due to low

market price. On the other hand, prices of inputs and labour cost are increasing day by day, the owners said.

Earlier, a sweater or a cardigan brought a profit of around Tk 100. It has come down to Tk 20-25, which does not cover the labour cost, if counted, they said.

To survive, most of the small owners themselves do the whole lot of work without employing labourer to cut the production cost, they said.

Landless Jobed Hossain has set up the machine in his dwelling house. Earlier, he was a labourer in another factory. After five years, he purchased a knitting machine at Tk 20,000.

Recently, he tried to take loan from a private sector bank and BSCIC (Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation). But no one provided him with loan as he has no land to mortgage. He is contemplating borrowing money from local money-lenders at Tk 20 per cent interest monthly.

"I bought the machine with great hopes but now I am nearly ruined after paying interest to the money-lender", said Jobed Hossain.

The small industries can survive with marginal profit if banks provide them with soft loan, he added.

Mizanur Rahman, President of Nayarhat Hosiery Owner's Association, said hosiery production has increased as such cottage industries have been set up elsewhere in the country. The products can be improved with a little attention from the government, which can also open up export prospects, he said.

Prices of yarn and other inputs are increasing day by day, he said.

The government can patronise the cottage industry by training the owners and workers in modern technology and helping them in exporting the products. The export prospect is good because of the cheap labour cost compared to other countries, Mizanur Rahman said.



PHOTO: STAR

Worried but still at work...An owner of a small knitwear unit, set up at his dwelling shed near Salmara railway station in Gobindaganj, is processing wool to make warm clothes.

Tobacco replaces crops, vegetables in CHT hills

A CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Tobacco is replacing rice, wheat, jute, sugarcane, vegetables and water-melon on fields in Khagrachhari.

Poor and illiterate farmers, lured by tobacco companies, now grow tobacco in large portions of plain lands in Dighinala, Manikchhari, Amtirang, Khagrachhari, Laxmichari and Mahalchhari upazilas. The farmers get assistance from tobacco companies to grow tobacco.

At least 2000 acres are under tobacco cultivation in Khagrachhari Sadar upazila alone, according to sources.

At least 12,000 tonnes of dried tobacco are produced in Khagrachhari hill district annually, according to an official of a big multinational company who talked to this correspondent on condition of

anonymity. About 600 kilograms are grown per acre.

He said the multinational company has 250 registered farmers who are given loan, seeds, fertiliser and even provided with shallow tube wells for irrigation under buy back contract. The total number of tobacco farmers in the district would be around 500, he said.

For tobacco cultivation, farmers use powerful fertiliser and insecticides like BSP, BAP, FMC, SOB, Fair-85, Deconal and DDT powder which are very harmful for soil, environment and human health.

Talking to this correspondent, some farmers admitted that the insecticides are so powerful that they cannot go to the field for three days after spraying those.

The insecticides increase the risk of incurable diseases like cancer and

asthma, according to Khagrachhari Civil Surgeon Subash Das.

Agriculture official Abul Kalam Azad said use of such powerful insecticides and fertiliser greatly damages soil fertility. Lands may remain unproductive for 3-4 years if these harmful medicines are used in large quantities for consecutive years.

The illiterate farmers are cultivating tobacco as they are unaware of their harmful effects, he said.

This correspondent also talked to local environmentalists Pradip Chowdhury, Oman Faruq, Bitan Barua, Sathowi Aung Kala and Mondira Dewan. They claimed that 7000 tonnes of wood are used for drying tobacco in different areas of the district, which is depleting forest resources.



PHOTO: STAR

Risking life unknowingly...A family engaged in processing tobacco leaves at Dighinala in Khagrachhari.

TK 8CR TENDER SCAM

Bhola WDB engineer suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Water Resources Minister Major (Retd) Hafizuddin on Saturday suspended the executive engineer of Bhola Water Development Board (WDB), Harun-or-Rashid following detection of Tk 8 crore tender scam in an embankment construction project.

The executive engineer allegedly issued work orders in favour of two firms in exchange of Tk 1.5 crore bribe. Earlier, the tender notices were published in three obscure newspapers.

It has been alleged further that 7 tender sets in Tk 5 crore group and four tender sets in Tk 3 crore group were submitted through secret negotiation. The scandal came to limelight when one of the two firms started work in Tajmuddin.

However, the executive engineer denied the allegations saying he is yet to receive the suspension order. He also said that the WDB Public Relations Department published the tender notices. Moreover, the work orders were given to pre-qualified firms by fulfilling all conditions of tenders, he added.

Plight of Rabidas community discussed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A view exchange meeting was held at Halichhara Tea Estate in Srimangol by the members of Rabidas community recently.

Harinarayan Rabidas presided over the meeting held under the aegis of Subhas Rabidas. The meeting discussed the discrimination and distress the community being minority and weak is facing and the developmental imperatives.

The speakers sought attention of the administration to the problems of the community.

In his address as the chief guest, Bangladesh Guru Rabidas (Dham) Mission Director General Master Kanallal Rabidas denounced a recent incident of rape of a girl of their community by local goons at Anantapur village under Aysa Rasulpur of Panchbibbi upazila. He demanded exemplary punishment to the perpetrators.

In the meeting, a 13-member Kulaura branch of Guru Rabidas (Dham) Mission was constituted with Dr Jagjibans Rabidas as its Director and Jagannath Rabidas as Assistant Director.



PHOTO: STAR

Diarrhoea patients on a floor at Satkhira Sadar Hospital.

Diarrhoea spreading fast in Sirajganj, Satkhira, Barisal

Eight killed, 7,000 attacked: Treatment poor at hospitals and health complexes

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Diarrhoea is spreading in Sirajganj, Satkhira and Barisal, claiming eight lives and afflicting around 7,000 in the last few days. Of the dead, six were in Sirajganj and one each in Satkhira and Barisal.

Our Sirajganj Correspondent Reports: Diarrhoea has spread to nine upazilas in Sirajganj district.

Six more people were killed in last few days, raising the toll to 13 this month. At least 3000 people have been attacked with the disease.

The dead are Abdul Barik, 3, son of Amez Ali of Sailazana village; Marzina, 4, daughter of Hazrat Ali of Khaspukuria, both in Chowdhaly upazila; college student Abul Hasnat Bapparaj of Simla village; Abul Hasan, 6, of Raiganj upazila; Bulbuli, 13, of Sorai Chandi village in Sadar upazila and Omish Khatun, 9, of Naturapara village in Kazipur upazila.

The disease has broken out in Ullapara, Shahzadpur, Raiganj, Belkuchi, Chowdhali, Tarash, Kazipur,

Kamar Khanda and Sirajganj Sadar upazila. Raiganj, Chowdhaly, Tara and Sirajganj Sadar are the worst affected areas.

This correspondent during a visit to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital on Friday saw diarrhoea patients on floors as all the beds were occupied.

Anwara, a nurse at Kazipur Health Complex, said 25 to 30 diarrhoea patient come to the hospital for treatment every day.

Official sources said the situation is under control and they have adequate stock of saline and other medicines. People are being attacked due to scarcity of pure drinking water as an aftermath of the recent floods.

Health assistants and working in 82 unions in the district, they said.

Our Satkhira Correspondent reports: Diarrhoea killed a woman yesterday and attacked at least 175 people in the district in last few days.

The dead has been identified as Rabeya Khatun, wife of Ekramul Hossain of Pairadanga village in the Sadar upazila.

According to sources in the district health department, 97 diarrhoea patients took treatment at Satkhira Sadar Hospital and at the six upazila health complexes yesterday, raising the number to 654 since outbreak of the disease in the second week of this month.

The situation is virtually unchanged in Sadar and Kalaroa upazilas. At least 30 diarrhoea patients were admitted to Sadar Hospital and 15 to Kalaroa Health Complex yesterday, sources there said.

On contact, Civil Surgeon Abu Aziz Al Monsur said, the district health department has formed a three member medical team comprising of Dr Maksudul Anam Siddique, Dr Abdul Gafoor and Dr Firoz Ahmed to oversee treatment of patients in the Sadar upazila.

Six emergency medical teams have been formed in six upazilas. These are headed by the Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer. Besides, nine other medical teams are working in rural areas of Sadar and Kalaroa upazilas, the Civil Surgeon said.

This correspondent during a visit to the Sadar Hospital yesterday saw all the floors were crowded with diarrhoea patients. Only oral saline is supplied to patients, an attendant of a patient alleged.

Our Barisal Correspondent reports: One person died of diarrhoea and at least 300 have been attacked with the disease in Agoiljhara upazila.

Absar Khalifa, 56, of Fullasri village died on Sunday.

The disease has spread to Fullasri, Jobsen, Bakal, Khazuria, Bagdha, Razihar, Sujankathi, Poisha, Shihipasha, Talta, Goila villages in the upazila.

Dr. Shafi, medical officer at Goila hospital said that on an average, 80 diarrhoea patients were treated every day at the hospital during the last four days. At least 30 patients were admitted to the health complex as their condition was critical.

The disease is spreading due to lack of pure drinking water after the recent floods, said Abul Hossain Laltu, chairman of Goila Union Parishad.

A promise not met in 10 yrs

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

No effective step has been taken to construct the proposed Regional Television Station in Sylhet even 10 years after laying of its foundation.

Cultural activists as well as people staged demonstrations on several occasions for setting up of the proposed regional TV Station.

The then Finance minister M Saifur Rahman laid its foundation on December 15, 1995 on a piece of fallow land of Radio Bangladesh at Tilagarh on the outskirts of Sylhet city.

An amount of Tk 20 crore was sanctioned for the project in the 5th 5-year

plan, officials said.

The project includes construction of a 150 square metre studio, three Electronic News Gathering units (ENG) for outdoor coverage, three editing studios, 120 metre tower, Microwave communication centre, machinery, equipment, dormitory, power sub-station, and police barrack.

But, everything was suspended after the change of government and the fund was also withdrawn.

Later, on February 15, 1997, the then state minister for information at a function in Sunamganj said the project would be implemented. He also said a

camera unit would be opened in the divisional city, pending setting up of a full-fledged Regional Station. But nothing has been done.

After BNP came to power in 2001, several demonstrations were held urging Sylhet BNP leaders to fulfil their promise. But the project is still in cold storage.

Recently, cultural activists in the divisional headquarters staged a demonstration, but this also failed to draw their attention. Talking to this correspondent they said they will launch a tougher agitation to press their demand.



PHOTO: STAR

The foundation of the proposed Regional TV station in Sylhet, laid 10 years back, till keeps the hope alive among people but the authorities failed to take any step to fulfil it.

Magura hospital staff not getting salary for 2 yrs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Eid will bring no pleasure to the 68 staff including five doctors of Magura Sadar Hospital as they are not getting salaries for 21 months.

They staged demonstrations and abstained from work several times in last two years demanding their salaries but in vain.

"We are leading a sub-human life. The Eid-ul-Fitr will not bring any pleasure for our children", Medical Officer Razia Sultana told this correspondent. Sources in Magura Civil Surgeon's office said that 76 staff including 11 doctors were appointed in 1998 under a development project to upgrade the 50-bed Magura Sadar Hospital to a 100-bed one. They were recruited on June 28, 1998.

Eight of them including six doctors resigned after working without salary for several months.

Their salaries became irregular after the tenure of the development project expired, they said.

They claimed that employees appointed under such projects at different hospitals in the country are getting salaries.

"Employees in Meherpur, Feni and Cox's Bazar hospitals appointed under the same project are getting salaries regularly", said Harun-or-Rashid, an employee.

On contact, Magura Civil Surgeon Farid Uddin Ahmed said, he informed the higher authorities and payment of salary may begin after clearance by the Establishment Ministry.