

Rice prices rise in N-dists in peak harvesting season

Tk 150 increase per 84 kg bag in wholesale market in two weeks

RAFIQUE SARKER from Rangpur

Prices of different varieties of Aman rice is increasing in northern districts though it is the peak harvesting period now.

The prices of coarse rice has increased by at least 7 per cent in last ten days, according to traders and farmers here.

A 84kg bag of BR-11, a medium coarse variety, is selling at Tk 1290 to Tk 1,350 against Tk 1,150 to Tk 1,180 two weeks back.

Lower yield of due to pest attack, inferior quality seeds, flood in some area in October and pest attack are the reasons for the price hike, they said.

Abul Kashem, a trader at Mahiganj, the largest rice wholesale market in northern districts, said the prices may soar further because traders are yet to start buying rice in full swing.

Asked, District Food Officer of Kurigram Rabiul Ahsan told The Daily Star that rice price will be

downing after the completion of aman harvest. "I think our enlisted dealers are waiting for taking the advantage," he added.

Sources in the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) said 10,49,000 hectares of land were brought under Aman cultivation this year in eight districts under greater Rangpur and Dinajpur. According to their estimate, the production is around 23, 95,000 tonnes against a target of 26,35,000 tonnes.

Sources at the office of the Regional Director of DAE in Rangpur said the production target could not be attained as Aman paddy on about 51000 hectares was damaged due to flood. The production is only 60 to 70 per cent of the target, which is a record fall in yield, they said.

Sohel Khondker, a farmer in Mahiganj in Rangpur Sader upazila told this correspondent that per acre yield of Aman was "very low" this year due to low rainfall and

pest attack during maturing stage of sheaf in September and October.

"Inferior quality of seed is another major cause. Most of the farmers cultivated BRRI-11 variety of Aman paddy this year."

Explaining, he said the same variety is being used for many years. This might have a degenerating effect, resulting in low yield.

As farmers has no alternative, they are to cultivate this variety, he said, adding, this should be replaced by other high yielding varieties.

To this, Rangpur DAE Additional Director Zakir Hossen said a variety of rice can yield paddy up to the expectation for three or four years. Gradually the variety loses its yield capacity, he added.

He suggested that BRRI-11 should be replaced with BRRI-dhan 44, introduced jointly by RDRS and Bangladesh Research Institute.

Price hike of agricultural

imputes like diesel, fertiliser and pesticides also account for soar in rice prices because of increase in cost of production, he said.

Farmer Udoj Chandra Barmon of Najirerhat in rangpur Sader upazila said, "Our production cost will not be recovered even if we sell rice at the present rate".

The high price of rice during the peak harvesting season also worries authorities about rice procurement.

Aman procurement will be difficult this year as the market price is higher by Tk 2 to 3 than the government's procurement price of Tk 14 per kilogram, while the market price hovers around Tk 17 per kilogram, traders said.

Though the drive began on November 25, there has not been any procurement as enlisted dealers did not show any interest to sign contracts with the local food offices, sources said.

AUGUST 17 BLASTS

JMB chief, 12 others chargesheeted in Barguna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Detective Branch Police has submitted charge sheet against 12 JMB men including its chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman in connection with the August 17 bomb blasts in Barguna district town.

Other chargesheeted accused are Hafez Mostafa Hsasan, 22; Al-Amin, 28; Asadul Islam alias Arif, 30; Rezaul Kabir, 27; Shahidul Islam, 25; Masum Billah, 26; Shalidul Islam alias Toil (oil) Shahid, 28; Abdul Haque Abbashi, 30 and Abdur Rahman, 24.

Of them, Hasan, Al-Amin, Asadul and Masum Billah were arrested on June 30 from a mosque at Shialia village in Barguna Sadar upazila. The rest are yet to be arrested, police sources said when contacted over phone.

The charge sheet was submitted to a barguna court on Thursday.

JMB suicide bomber Alam trained 200 men in Netrakona

Interrogation reveals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Arrested JMB suicide squad member Alamgir Fakir allies Alam of Netrakona confessed to his involvement in the December 8 carnage in the town in which eight people were killed and 42 injured.

He also told interrogators that he joined JMB in 2002 and recruited and trained 200 men in the district since then, intelligence sources said.

He was a close associate of JMB 'military commander' Aatur Tahman Sunny, arrested from Dhaka early this month.

Alam was arrested on December 19 in a raid on his Madanpur village home in Netrakona Sadar upazila. Police raided his house acting on a tip-off that he came home after Sunny's arrest. He was placed on four days' remand on Wednesday.

The sources said that of the 200 JMB cadres, 65 are from Atpara upazila and the rest are from Netrakona Sadar, Purbadhala, Kendua and Barhatta upazilas.

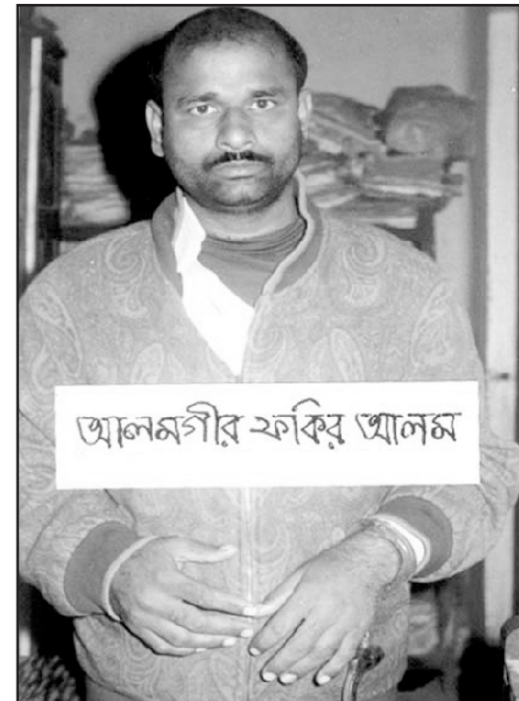
Ninety-five of the cadres in the district are Madrasa students, the sources said.

Police also arrested two other JMB suspects along with Alam. They are Akkas Ali of Faridpur and Badsha Mia of Gaibandha.

Police sources said the two are innocent and were not involved with JMB or in the December 8 blasts. A report have been submitted to court stating that they are innocent, according to investigation officer of the case, SI Sunil Chandra Sarkar of Netrakona thana. He said the report is based on reports received from relevant police stations in Faridpur and Gaibandha.

Meanwhile, police failure to arrest any more JMB activist fifteen days after the carnage in the town has raised questions and created panic among people.

Some townspeople talking to this correspondent



said they apprehend such suicide bombing again because the JMB activists are yet to be nabbed. They also alleged that police are not serious to nab the Islmaist militants.

High level sources in police claimed that their initiative in this regard is string-pulled by ruling party leaders in the district.

JMB 'commander' Asad among 50 trained by Sunny in 2003

Mymensingh arrestees to be produced in court again today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Eleven persons out of 12 arrested in connection with the December 17 recovery of bombs, explosives and bomb-making material from two JMB dens at Akua in town will be produced before court today with a prayer for fresh remand, police sources said.

Earlier, nine of them were remanded for five days and two were shown arrested under Section 54 when they were produced before a First Class magistrate court on December 18. Two separate cases under Explosives Substances Act were filed against the nine people including Asaduzzaman, 'area commander' of JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh).

The Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Kotwali police station informed that no new information was gathered from the arrestees except

Asaduzzaman. Asad was taken to Dhaka for interrogation by the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC). Asad will also be produced before court tomorrow.

Acting on Asad's statement, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police conducted combing operation in several areas in the district town to nab other JMB cadres.

Earlier, Asad told interrogators that he took training along with 50 other JMB men at Gharadap in Jamalpur Sadar in 2003 under the guidance of Aatur Rahman Sunny, JMB operation chief.

Residents in Akua area are still panic-stricken after arms haul. It was beyond our imagination that JMB men were in our area, said Abdul Berek, a resident.

Meantime, family members and relatives of Asad told newsmen that they want punishment of Asad if he is involved with such heinous activities of JMB.

Asad, five among his seven brothers and sister, passed the Secondary School certificate (SSC) examination from Phulbaria Al-Hera Academy in First Division in 2000 and obtained the HSC certificate from Phulbaria Degree Cin 2002. Later he got admitted to English department at Government Ananda Mohan College.

Asad comes of a well known family in Radhakanai village in Phulbaria. Asad's mother said he was meritorious and very gentle from his childhood. "We could not imagine that he is involved with militants", she said. Asad's elder brother Monjurul Haque Babu said they were astonished to hear the news his arrest for his alleged involvement with MB.

They also demanded punishment of those who lured Asad to become a militant.

Money borrowed from provident fund to pay KCC staff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna City Corporation (KCC) Mayor Shaikh Tayebur Rahman had to borrow Tk 80 lakh from provident fund of the staff to pay their salaries for the months of October and November as KCC has no fund, said a senior official serving there on deputation.

The Mayor told this correspondent that the corporation is yet realise about Tk 28 crore in holding taxes, which is a major source of revenue earning for KCC.

"It would be very difficult for me to pay salaries for the month of December", the Mayor said.

Sources in KCC said letters are being mailed to house owners informing them the decision to increase holding tax from next year. This time, the holding tax will be at least five times more, sources said.

As a result, house owners in Khulna city have decided to form a platform and chalk out an agitation programme against any further increase in holding tax.

City Mayor, on the other hand, regretted the habit of non-payment of holding tax by most of the house owners who also include political leaders and business tycoons. As a result, KCC is in grip of severe financial crisis, which has created a deadlock in implementation of different development projects, the Mayor said.

Convener of Khulna Citizens' Forum (KCF) Advocate Feroze Ahmed has threatened of a tough agitation against any more move by the Mayor to increase holding tax.



STAR FILE PHOTO

Two members of Charsindur Bannyapranī Sangrakkayn Samiti in Narshingdi carrying a river dolphin to deep water in Shitalakhya river in Charsindur after rescuing it from the shoreline.

River Dolphins face extinction

SHEIKH SHAHIDUL ISLAM, back from Narshindi

Brahmanbaria: River Dolphin, a rear species of aquatic mammal, is now on the verge of extinction in Shitalakhya river in Narshindi.

River dolphin, locally known as Shushuk, was once seen in deep waters in Meghna, Titas, Gumuti, Burinadi and Dakatia rivers. They used to move in flocks, jump and raise their heads above water and dive again. But such scenes are rare in the rivers now.

Pollution of river water due to release of toxic chemicals and effluents, excessive use of fertiliser and pesticide in agriculture lands that flow into rivers, indiscriminate use of mechanised boats on rivers and deposit of silt are the main reasons, environmentalists said.

In different spots, Titas and Burinadi have turned into canals. Shitalakhya river has also been silted.

The Shitalakhya river is being polluted every day at different points in Ghurashal of Polish due to release of toxic chemicals including ammonia from factories along its banks.

A section of fishermen also use big nets in Shitalakhya, which creates obstruction in the way of free movement of dolphins. As a result, they can not hunt fish and face malnutrition, which affect their growth and breeding.

Besides, river dolphins are caught from the Shitalakhya river at night by a

section of fishermen by using spears and other equipment.

Fisherman Nibaran Roy of Narshindi said the dishonest fishermen sell the mammals' fat. The oil produced from the fat is a good medicine rheumatic disease.

Last year, some fishermen caught a river dolphin at Debidyar in Gumuti river. But it was sold before members of Charsindur Bannyapranī Sangrakkayn Samiti (a wildlife protection body) of Narshindi reached there.

Talking to this correspondent recently, its officials said still there sare some river dolphins in Shitalakhya, Gumuti, Meghna and Bhuriganganivers.

If steps are not taken, the animal will be extinct soon, said its president Sarwar Pathan.

Recently, a dolphin got stuck up in shallow waters of the Shitalakhya in Charsindur.

On information, a four-member team from Charsindur Bannyapranī Sangrakkayn Samiti rushed there rescued and released it into deep water.

The animal may be extinct in next five to six years if steps are not taekn right now, they told this correspondent.

They urged authorities the concerned to take proper step soon to save the river dolphin in the country.

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