

Syndicates control Jamuna factory urea, sell at will

MIRZA SHAKIL, back from Tarakandi, Jamalpur

Powerful syndicates control distribution of urea produced in Jamuna Fertiliser Factory (JFF) at Tarakandi in Jamalpur district, creating an artificial crisis in 20 districts, sources in JFF and dealers alleged. Sixteen northern districts and four in greater Mymensingh are under the command area of the factory. Besides raising prices by forming cartels, they also smuggle urea across the border, sources said. The syndicates are led by at least 12 powerful local influentials enjoying political clout.

Much of the crisis of urea in northern districts is due to the malpractice by the syndicates, the sources said.

Jamuna Fertiliser Factory produces 5, 15,000 tonnes of urea annually, of which at least 2, 00,000 tonnes are smuggled across the border by these syndicates, the sources claimed.

Supply of urea in the 20 districts and the price depend of the syndicates as dealers are almost helpless due to their influence. At times dealers are compelled to sell their quota lifted from the factory.

The syndicates operate as government does not monitor fertiliser supply and distribution except during the peak season of IRRI-Boro cultivation (February-April) when its use increases, the sources said.

This correspondent during a visit to the factory area talked to JFF officials, dealers and farmers.

There are 1, 823 government approved fertiliser dealers who lift urea from JFF and supply those to 20 districts. A dealer is appointed for

a certain area.

After lifting their quota, dealers are supposed to carry the fertiliser to their respective areas. But they are often compelled to sell the lifted fertiliser or the allotment letter to syndicates at the factory gate.

Syndicates often offer them higher prices, particularly during the peak season, store it and profit from it by creating an artificial crisis, the sources said.

Many dealers even do not lift their quota from the factory and sell the delivery order (DO) to syndicates. Some dealers sell their quotas for the whole year, widening the scope of smuggling.

The syndicates have several large godowns in the area.

The production cost of urea is Tk 6,000 per ton in JFF while government sells it at Tk 4, 800, giving a subsidy of Tk 1,200 per tonne.

Dealers get the fertiliser at Tk 240 per 50 kg bag and are supposed to sell it at the government fixed price of Tk 290. But urea is now being sold at between Tk 350 and Tk 450 in different areas in northern districts.

Six fertiliser factories in the country produce 20 lakh metric tonnes of urea annually while the demand is 26 lakh tonnes in the country. Government imports the

rest six lakh tonnes at between Tk 10,000 and Tk 13,000 per ton to meet the demand.

The import could be reduced by at least two lakh metric tonnes if urea smuggling could be stopped, the sources said.

When contacted, a general manager of JFF seeking anonymity admitted the illegal practice by the syndicates. The factory authorities have nothing to do in this regard, he said. Monitoring of sale and distribution is done by government agencies. He however said smuggling can be reduced and distribution streamlined if monitoring is done round the year.

'Fake' dealers in Rajshahi sell urea at double price

RU CORRESPONDENT

Urea crisis is affecting cultivation of IRRI-Boro and winter vegetables in Rajshahi. The fertiliser is being sold at between Tk 450 and 500 per 50 kg bag in different markets against the government fixed price of Tk 290.

Sources in Rajshahi district fertiliser distribution monitoring committee said 9,180 metric tonnes were allotted to 90 dealers in the district till January 10.

Farmers in many areas alleged that they have to buy urea from black markets at high prices as dealers sell their quotas to unauthorised traders, who manip-

ulate prices.

The district agriculture extension officer last week asked law enforcing agencies to arrest unauthorized traders who will sell urea in the unauthorized shops.

Deputy Director of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) in Rajshahi, Rabindra Kumer Majumder said, till January 9, 180 tonnes of urea were distributed among dealers.

The crisis continues because 35 out of 90 fertiliser dealers in the district are fake who lift their quota and sell it in the black market, other sources said.

Some fertiliser dealers at a recent press at Rajshahi Press

Club alleged that out of 90 dealers, 35 are from other districts who collected dealership in the name of their wives or relatives. They lift fertiliser from Rajshahi government ware house and sell those in black markets at higher price.

DAE sources said 1.60 lakh hectares were brought under IRRI-Boro and winter crop cultivation in the district this year.

Farmer Alamgir of Premtali village in Godagari upazila said, urea is not available with dealers at the upazila headquarters. Farmers buy urea from Dyingpara and Hatpara bazaars at Tk 480 to Tk 500 per bag, he said.

Late blight destroying potato plants in 8 northern dists

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Potato plants on vast areas in eight northern districts have been attacked with late blight disease, caused by a virus due to cold wave and dense fog for last ten days.

Once attacked, potato fields dry up in 3-4 days, causing huge loss to farmers.

In many areas, farmers are spraying costly insecticides, but to no result, farmers and agriculture extension department officials said.

Farmer in Rangpur, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari and Dinajpur said their cost of cultivation was much higher this year because of high price of potato seed.

A 40 kg bag of BADC potato seeds was sold at Tk 1600 to Tk 1300 in the market against the government fixed price of Tk 1000, they said.

Sowing potato in one acre cost between Tk 25,00 and Tk 28,000 this year as price of fertiliser was also higher, they said. The disease will simply add to their miseries, farmers said.

The late blight disease appeared as the temperature fell up to 8 degree celsius and the sun was not visible due to dense fog, said Shakhawat Hossen, Deputy Director of Nilphamari Agriculture Extension Department (DAE).

He said potato is affected if temperature falls below 10 degree celsius and the sky remains cloudy.



PHOTO: STAR

A frustrated farmer in Akashkuri village in Dimnla upazila in Nilphamari district at his potato field affected by late blight disease.

DAE's plant protection specialist Ali Reza said spraying Mancozeb Metalauyl is effective in controlling the viral disease but it is costly. The insecticide has to be sprayed after every seven days for at least eight weeks.

Farmers said a 800 gm packet of Mancozeb costs Tk 380. The total cost for one acre will be

around Tk 3,040, which is difficult for them to bear, they said.

Farmer Nazab Ali of Panch Peer village in Panchagarh district said he spent Tk 33,000 to cultivate Potato on an acre. He has already spent Tk 3,000 on insecticide to protect the crop.

Sources in Rangpur regional DAE office said potato has been

cultivated on 1,04,190 hectares in eight northern districts. Of this, 16,475 hectares are in Nilphamari, 44,50 in Lalmonirhat, 4,461 in Kurigram, 6,570 in Gaibandha, 32,875 in Rangpur, 11,400 in Thakurgaon, 4,500 in Panchagarh and 23, 359 hectares in Dinajpur.

Shibir cadre arrested in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Army men arrested former activist of Islami Chhatra Shibir Gazi Nasir from his house at the city's Pathantola area in the early hours of yesterday. He was handed over to Sylhet Kotwali Police.

He faces charges of doing vandalism and attack on an Awami League public meeting in the city during its countrywide blockade programme, police sources said.

Gazi Nasir is a former student of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST). Hailing from Barisal, Gazi Nasir is now a businessman in the city.

Gazi Nasir along with a group of armed Shibir cadres attacked a peaceful gathering of Awami League at Chondi Pool area during its blockade. They burnt at least 15 motorbikes. At least 20 people were injured in the attack.

Journos attacked inside police station in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Supporters of an arrested ward commissioner assaulted five journalists inside Boalia police station yesterday when they were on professional duty.

Some 50 supporters of Maniruzzaman Sharif, commissioner of ward no. 19 in Rajshahi city, beat up Azharuddin, staff photojournalist of Prothom Alo and Abdullah Iqbal, photojournalist of Jugantor in presence of police.

The cadres also assaulted Rajshahi Union of Journalists' president Hasan Millat, Acting President of Rajshahi Metropolitan Press Club Shafikul Islam and its secretary Anisuzzaman when they tried to save the photojournalists.

They dragged and beat the photojournalists and drove them out of the police station when they were taking photos as police was taking Sharif to court, witnesses



Maniruzzaman Sharif

said. Police did not try to protect the journalists, witnesses said.

Army personnel arrested 'listed terrorist' Sharif in the early hours of Friday and handed him over to police after interrogation.

Since the handover, over 100 Sharif loyalists started gathering in and around the police station. Sharif was kept at the police

official's room. Many police officials were seen taking care of him, following instruction from former BNP lawmaker and Rajshahi Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, sources said.

The injured journalists lodged a complainant to a Deputy Commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

Soon after the incident, Rajshahi Union of Journalists (RUJ), Rajshahi Photo Journalists' Association (RPJA) and Rajshahi Editors' Forum (REF) held a protest meeting at the Metropolitan Press Club (MPC).

RUJ President Hasan Millat, REF member Golam Mugni Niro, RPJA President Asaduzzaman Asad, MPC Secretary Anisuzzaman addressed the meeting.

They condemned the attack and demanded arrest of the attackers.

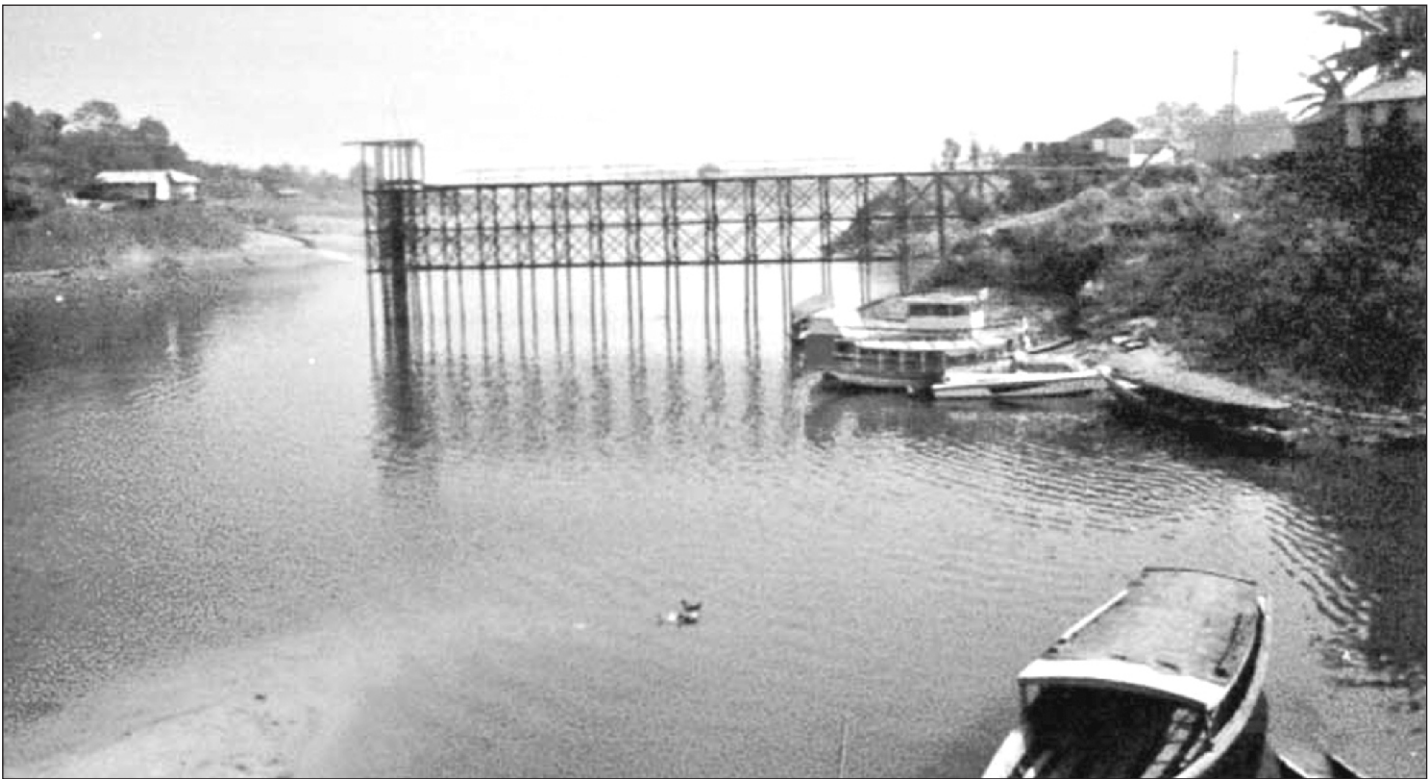


PHOTO: STAR

Water level of Kaptai Lake in Rangamati has fallen abnormally, creating worries for the town dwellers as it is the only source of water supply for them.

Suspected JMB man held in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A suspected activist of banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) was arrested on Friday soon after he came out of Satkhira Jail on bail granted by a court here.

The arrestee is Hafizur Rahman Dulu, son of Kawsar Ali of Shikri village in Sadar upazila. Kawsar is a typist at Satkhira judge court.

Sadar police station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Nawsher Ali said Hafizur Rahman was arrested on suspicion of being an alleged JMB militant and sent to jail under Section 54. He was granted bail on January 10 in another case.

Hafizur was arrested again in connection with a case for threatening nine lawyers soon after the August 17 serial blasts in 2005, police said.

JMB cadre remanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A court here yesterday granted five-day remand for a cadre of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

On production before a first class magistrate's court, Tangail Sadar police prayed for seven-day remand of JMB cadre Arman, 25. But, the court granted his five-day remand.

Earlier, members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Arman with many bomb making materials from a rented house at Karatia in Sadar upazila Friday morning.

During preliminary interrogation Arman admitted to his involvement in JMB activities, police said.

Sonamasjid port silent for 19 days

RU CORRESPONDENT

Port activities at Sonamasjid Land Port remained stopped for the last 19 days following an indefinite strike enforced by importers demanding realisation of their four-point demand.

As a result, import of goods from India was stopped since December 26 turning at least 5,000 port workers jobless.

The demands include right to store imported goods in own warehouses, fixation of import tariff rate as that of Benapole port, permission to import of 46 items instead of 16 items and extension of port by acquiring 20 acres of surrounding land.

However, the government has taken a move to break the stalemate. A meeting will be held at the office of the Board of National Revenue (NBR) on January 16. Representatives of Sona Masjid Importers and Exporters associations, Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) Association representatives, members of Chapainawabganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) and other related bodies will sit with the NBR authorities to resolve the crisis.

On contact, CCCI president Abdul Wahed said if the meeting succeeds, the port will be reopened the following day.

Port sources said, the government incurred a loss of crores of taka due to suspension of port activities.

Meanwhile, Sona Masjid Truck and Motor Sramik Union on Friday demanded of the NBR authorities for immediate opening of the port.

Earlier, a meeting was held at Chapainawabganj Deputy Commissioner's office to resolve the crisis on January 11. Bangladesh Landport Authority joint secretary ATM Mostafa Kamal, Chapainawabganj deputy commissioner Faizul Kabir and other higher officials of the government attended the meeting.

But it yielded no fruitful result.

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