

Import, smuggling ruin salt industry

Farmers demand import ban as production begins with a carryover of 6 lakh tonnes

MUAZZEM HOSSAIN SHAKIL,
Cox's Bazar

Salt production has started in coastal areas of Cox's Bazar with a carryover of about 6 lakh tonnes from last year's yield with farmers and traders.

Many producers can not produce salt in the current season due to loss from the unsold salt, they told this correspondent during a visit to the salt producing areas on Friday.

They said their products could not be sold due to import and smuggling of salt from Myanmar and India.

About 50,000 people including at least 50,000 marginal farmers are involved in salt production and trade in eight upazilas of Cox's Bazar district.

"I lost my capital", said Korshed Alam, at Moheshkhali.

Cox's Bazar Salt Producers' Action Committee President Anwar Pasha Chowdhury said a maund of salt was supposed to be sold at between Tk 300 and Tk 350 during June-August rainy season. But due to easy availability of smuggled salt from Myanmar, price of locally produced salt fell to Tk 50.

Many producers have lost their capital as they could not sell their hoarded salt. They may not go for production this season, he said.

General Manager of BSCIC's (Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation) Salt Project Salahuddin Chowdhury said 14 lakh 83,000 metric tons of salt were produced on 70,050 acres of land in eight upazilas of Cox's Bazar and one upazila (Banskhali) of Chittagong district last year.

As the production exceeded the target of 11,70,000 tonnes, producers could not sell their salt due to lower price, he said.

Cox's Bazar Salt Factory Owners-Producers Oikya Parisad Convener Raisuddin alleged that some vested quarters are active to ruin the industry.

They import salt from India and Myanmar in large quantities, much higher than the demand. Only 5 per



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer in a coastal village in Cox's Bazar producing salt using the latest technology provided by Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC). But many, with carryover quantities, are reluctant to do the business this year.

cent import duty is imposed on salt, he said urging the government to ban import altogether to protect the local industry.

Raisuddin also alleged that at least 100 smugglers in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong are engaged in smuggling salt from India and Myanmar. They also barter urea fertiliser for salt, using sea routes.

Hasanul Abedin Shuba, a salt producer in Uttar Nalibila village in Kalar Mar Chhara union in Maheshkhali upazila, said he has a carryover of about 40,000 maunds. He has no ability to produce salt this year, he said.

Sarwar Azam Manik of Hoyanok union has a stock of 30,000 maunds, Rezaul Karim of

Mazergona 20,000 maunds and Aby Tahir Chowdhury of Dailiyaghona has 15,000 maunds.

Police, navy personnel and coast guards seized 7 cargo vessels with 70,000 maunds of smuggled salt in Teknaf, Ukhia, Maheshkhali and Chakoria coasts in last three months, police sources said.

In most cases police can not arrest smugglers because they usually use deep sea routes.

Salt is produced here from drying salty seawater on lands close to the sea. This is done mostly through cutting forests and raising embankments.

Influential own most of the salt growing lands and lease those to landless salt farmers, who grow

salt on contract basis.

In the new method salty water from the sea is collected on polythene-covered salt-beds. The salt thus produced is clean and white, as they do not get mixed with sand or mud, farmers in Kotobdia told this correspondent.

Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) sources and farmers said the production in the new method is at least 30 per cent higher than in the traditional method.

BSCIC officials said they started research on the new method in 1999 to increase production and develop the industry to avoid import.

UNICEF provided assistance in the project.

Tk 50 lakh illegal timber seized in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Moulvibazar

Juri upazila administration in a joint drive with forest department has recovered illegal timber worth about Tk 50 lakh from seven saw-mills.

A team led by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Zakir Hussain conducted raids at seven saw-mills in the upazila on Thursday and recovered five truckloads of costly timber. The UNO said market value of the timbers are about Tk 50 lakh. These were collected illegally from different reserve forests in the area, he said.

Bird fair begins at RU today

RU CORRESPONDENT

A two-day bird fair, organised by Rajshahi University Institute of Environmental Science and Bangladesh Bird Club, begins today at RU.

Several seminars, as part of the fair, will be held at the venue at the science building. RU Vice-chancellor Prof Altaf Hossain will open the fair, organizers said.

Bird watchers from home and abroad including James Pender from England and environmentalists will attend the fair and the seminars.

The fair includes a bird watching programme by telescope at the T-groine beside Padma river and a bird census at Pachamaria Beel in Rajshahi.

Pistol snatched from Rab recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Moulvibazar

A joint force of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police has recovered a snatched pistol belonging to a Rab official from Gandhichhera tea garden in Srimongal upazila.

But, Kamal alias Driver Kamal, a listed criminal of Moulvibazar district, who snatched the pistol, evaded arrest.

Rab and police sources said Kamal and his accomplices snatched the pistol from Rab sub-inspector (ASI) Abdul Mannan at Amrai-chhera tea garden in Srimongal upazila on Monday night.

Twenty-seven people including mother, wife and two other family members of Kamal were arrested during the drive to recover the pistol. All were freed after recovery of the pistol.

4 seismic observatories in sight without agri forecast

Equipment installation in Sylhet, Chittagong, Rangpur and Gazipur begins in couple of weeks

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

After over four years' uncertainty, the much talked about Tk 14 crore Seismological Service Development Project is finally going to be materialised.

Seismographs and other sophisticated machines will be installed in four seismic observatories in Sylhet, Chittagong, Rangpur and in Gazipur within a couple of weeks, official sources said.

Four broadband seismographs along with machines have been imported from China. A technical team from China will reach Sylhet this week to start installation of equipment on the premises of the meteorological office in the city's Shahi Eidgah area. Installation

work in Chittagong, Rangpur and Gazipur will be done by the same team after that, the sources said.

Works on the project hit snags time and again in last four years due to bureaucratic tangles, causing upward revision of the project cost, they said.

"We are trying hard to start the seismic observatories at the earliest", a high official of the Meteorological Department told this correspondent.

After sitting on the project for about three years, the government approved the revised project last year and allocated funds. Buildings constructed for the observatories in Sylhet, Rangpur and Gazipur three years ago remained unused due to apathy of officials concerned, the sources said. In Chittagong, the

decades-old observatory will be renovated.

A Tk 10 crore project was taken up in 1999-2000 financial year to set up seismic observatories in the four areas considering their 'highly vulnerable to earthquake'.

Later, a revised project was prepared raising the cost to Tk 18.17 crore. The work was stalled in 2002 after construction of specially designed new buildings.

Last year, the project was revised scaling down the cost to 14.02 crore taka by dropping the system for forecast for agriculture.

Greater Sylhet region on the foot of Meghalaya hills in India is considered an earthquake prone zone, the officials said.



PHOTO: STAR
Children at a painting competition at Edward Park in Bogra, held yesterday marking a cake festival organised by Bogra Theatre.

9X3

6X2

10X3