

Farmers in hills benefit at cost of ecology

Cultivation of vegetables and spices on Khagrachhari hill slopes causes massive soil erosion, destroys bio-diversity

JASHIM MAJUMDER, Khagrachhari

Vegetable growers in the district are happy with high prices of their produce. They benefit, but at the cost of ecology.

They choose hill slopes for growing summer vegetable in rainy season. They clear forests and shrubs and till the lands, which causes massive soil erosion, thereby destroying the natural conditions of hills.

Besides change in the ecology, destruction of forests and soil erosion may cause catastrophe like massive landslides, officials of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) said. Landslides triggered by heavy rains killed so many people in Chittagong during the current rainy season, they said.

AED officials in Manikchhari said vegetable cultivation on hill slopes is increasing in the upazila as farmers are earning good profit from it. Vegetables produced in Manikchhari upazila are also sent to other district and exported, they said.

They said vegetables and spices brought hefty gains for both Bangalee and indigenous farmers this year because of high prices of the items. This will expand their cultivation in the hill slopes, the officials said.

This correspondent visited 10 villages in Manikchhari and Dudukchhari upazilas and talked to farmers. They said this year, vegetable prices were more than double the prices of previous years.

According to Manikchhari AED officials, at least 15,000 farmers are involved in vegetable cultivation in the upazila, which benefit around 30,000 people directly or indirectly.

Vegetable cultivation on hill slopes in the upazila covered at least 2451 hectares in Manikchhari upazila alone, the officials said.

Farmer Abdul Karim in Gachchhabil village said, he got very good prices for vegetables this year due to flood. But last year, most of the vegetables he produced perished due to transportation problem and lack of storage facilities, he said.

Hasan Mia of remote Hathimura village said good prices this year have become a boost for many in his village, who are planning to expand vegetable cultivation.

This correspondent asked the farmers whether they are aware of

the problem that may be caused by the massive soil erosion in hills. They said they are not aware of the it.

Jum cultivation in eight upazilas in Khagrachhari, mainly by indigenous people by clearing forests, also damages bio-diversity and destroys sanctuaries of birds and animals.

AED sources said, due to favor-

Panchhari, 864.5 in Dighinala, 1111.5 in Mohalchhari, 494 in Matiranga upazila, 271.7 in Ramghor, 172.9 in Manikchhari and 889.2 acres in Laxmichhari upazila, he said.

Jum farmers produced 2839 tonnes of rice and vegetables in the current season.

Another SAAO, Pranab Barua, said jum cultivation washes away

extinction of wildlife.

The government should take note of the situation and find out alternatives to avoid natural disaster, he said.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Shah-E-Alam said most of the unclassified forests were wiped out due to jum cultivation.

Such damage to bio-diversity may bring natural disaster in the

aram in hill slopes is very much destructive though it benefits farmers, he said.

Deputy Director (DD) of Khagrachhari DAE T M Monjurul Islam said farmers are getting bumper yields and good prices due to soil fertility and favorable weather condition. But this may bring a disaster in the long run, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Vegetable fields on hill slopes in Khagrachhari that causes soil erosion and damages the ecology as natural forests are destroyed.

able weather, indigenous farmers brought 5411.77 acres of lands on hill slopes in the district under jum cultivation in the current season, according to Babatosh Chakrabarti, Sub Assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) of District AED.

Of the total lands, 753.35 acres were brought under jum cultivation in Khagrachhari, 839.8 in

the micronutrients of soil which caused massive soil erosion. He claimed that the unprecedented floods in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHIT) this year was caused mainly due to soil erosion.

Pradip Chowdhury, Programme Supervisor of Center for Sustainable Development (CSD), said jum cultivation is profitable for farmers but it is responsible for

region some day, he said.

Manikchhari Upazila Agriculture Officer Mohammad Zahedul Islam said besides soil erosion, vegetable and spices cultivation need chemical fertilizer and insecticide, which also damage the environment.

He said they are trying to make farmers aware of the problem. Among all crops, cultivation of

Farmers should cultivate lands in a way that there is least soil erosion. Vegetable cultivation can not be stopped. He said the AED will launch an awareness campaign to make farmers cautious about the problem.

Policy makers at higher level should take note of the problem and take up long term programmes to evolve alternatives, he said.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Blooming sheuli adorns the nature at the end of early autumn.

BANGLADESHI WORKER'S DEATH IN MALAYSIA Family demands punishment of offenders

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Family members of Mahesh Sarkar, the ill-fated Bangladeshi job seeker who died of cardiac arrest in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, have demanded immediate punishment of the people who are responsible for his tragic death.

Mohesh Sarkar, 38, was one of the 55 Bangladesh workers scheduled to return home from Kuala Lumpur as their Malaysian employers failed to provide them with the promised jobs.

After flying to Malaysia in February this year, Mohesh had been languishing in a Kuala Lumpur accommodation, rented by their Bangladeshi recruiting agency.

Mohesh's mother and his widow wife along with her two minor daughters were crying when this correspondent visited their house at Parkhi village under Bir Basinda union in Kalihati upazila on Saturday.

Mohesh along with Lal Miah, Latif Bepari, Tapan Chowdhury, Modar and Sumon of the same village went to Malaysia with the help of local manpower traders (brokers) Shamsul Haque and Siddique Munshi, working on behalf of recruiting agency Golden Arrow in Dhaka, Mohesh's brother Krishna Sarkar, a hotel leaf vendor, said.

"They paid Tk 2.30 lakh per head on assurance of good jobs and high salary. But they did not get any job after reaching Malaysia," he said.

Sumon of Padhrail village in Delduar in Tangail, who is also detained in Malaysia, informed Mohesh's brothers on Saturday over telephone that Mohesh died on Thursday morning. He had fallen ill due to torture and intake of scanty foods, relatives of Mohesh quoted

Sumon assaying.

"I want my son back," said Mohesh's mother Jashna Sarkar who lost consciousness several times.

She demanded due punishment to the responsible recruiting agency and its brokers.

Jhama Sarkar, widow of Mohesh, said her husband had told her over telephone about his sufferings after a few days of going to Malaysia.

"Mohesh and other job seekers who were kept confined to a room did not have any regular food supply. They even had to eat raw vegetables. They were also tortured for minor protests," she said.

She and her mother-in-law had gone to local manpower trader Shamsul Haque and requested him to bring Mohesh back to the

country but he behaved very rudely and drove them out, she said.

"My husband had to borrow money from several moneylenders on high interest to go to Malaysia. Now how will I survive with my two children?" she said.

This correspondent could not contact Shamsul Haque.

When contacted over phone, another manpower trader Siddique Munshi said, "We had informed the recruiting agency owner Mostafizur Rahman about Mohesh's condition but he did not take any effective step."

Golden Arrow owner Mostafizur Rahman could not be contacted over cell phone despite repeated attempts.



PHOTO: STAR

An uncertain future awaits the wife, children and mother of Mohesh.

Farmers seize AED office for fertiliser

UNB, Sherpur

Around 300 farmers demonstrated in front of local Agriculture Extension Department (AED) at Khamarbari in the town and confined the office staff from 12:00pm to 3:00pm yesterday demanding immediate supply of fertiliser.

Later a joint force team led by Major Shaukat went to the spot and persuaded the farmers to move away on an assurance that fertiliser would be provided within two days.

Farmers said they are not getting fertiliser from the dealers or agriculture office although they need badly it following two spells of flood.

Against the demand of around 1,000 tonnes of fertiliser in the district they have a stock of only 250 tonnes, an AED official said.

However, the situation will improve by Tuesday when some 350 tonnes of fertiliser will arrive, he said.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Fertiliser-hungry farmers throng the agriculture office in Madarganj upazila yesterday as urea crisis affects Aman crops.

Woman cop suspended for torturing maid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dharia

A woman constable of Brahmanbaria Sadar police station has been suspended and closed on charge of torturing a domestic help.

Police sources said the action was taken by the police superintendent following verbal complaints to him by the victim.

Along side the departmental action against constable Doly, the SP also ordered investigation into the allegation.

The investigation report submitted to the SP on Saturday found the allegation correct, the sources said.

Special Branch Inspector Kamal Uddin who investigated the allegations said constable Doly tortured her domestic help Mazeda Begum, 40, off and on.

On October 1, as Doly beat Mazeda again, she went to SP Ataul Kibria and lodged a verbal complaint.

Seeing signs of physical torture, the SP suspended constable Doly, closed her to the police line and asked Inspector Kamal Uddin to probe the matter.

ONION IMPORT 'THRU' FORGED DOCUMENTS C&F agent sued at Bhomra land port

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Saikhira

The customs department at Bhomra land port in Saikhira on Saturday filed a case with Sadar police station against owner of a clearing and forwarding (C&F) agent for importing onion from India by using forged documents including letter of credit (LC).

Customs Inspector Raihan Uddin filed the case against Abul Hossain, owner of M/s Khaja Enterprise, for releasing onion imported though forged documents.

The case was filed after investigation proved that the C&F agent imported 165 tonnes of onion through forged documents.

The probe committee members

went to Dhaka to locate the office of M/s Almiria International in its address but could not find its office there.

They also went to South East Bank where officials told them that no one opened LCs with the bank.

On contact, joint commissioner of customs Mahbubur Rahman confirmed the incident and said primary investigation proved that M/s Khaja Enterprise was involved in the forgery. A case was with Sadar than in this connection, he said.

Sadar thana officer-in-charge Abdul Kader Beg confirmed filing of the case.

No official of M/s Khaja Enterprise was available for comment despite several attempts on cell phone.

Voter listing begins in C'nawabganj

A CORRESPONDENT, C'nawabganj

Work on voter list preparation and national ID card registration with photograph has begun in Chapainawabganj municipality area here yesterday.

Chapainawabganj Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shahadat Hossain opened the programme in the morning on the DC office premises.

The work will be done in two phases, election officials said. Work on voter listing will continue in the poura area till October 19.

In the second phase, ID card registration will start on October 20.

As many as 15 assistant registration officer, 72 supervisors and 359 enumerators are working in 46 centres in Chapainawabganj Pourasabha.

ARREAR DUES Retired jute workers begin sit-in

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Over 1,000 retired workers of Star Jute Mills, Crescent Jute Mills and Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills of Khulna industrial belt and Carpeting Jute Mills of Jessore industrial belt began their sit-in demonstration on Saturday.

The demonstration is part of what the workers termed their peaceful agitation to realise their dues including retirement benefit, gratuity and provident fund.

The sit-in will continue for an indefinite period from 10 am till 1 pm everyday until their demands are met fully.

Khulna regional committee convenor of Patkal Sangram

Parishad (PSP) Sarder Motaharuddin threatened a tougher agitation after Eid for failure of the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) to pay their dues.

Meanwhile, BJMC zonal coordinator Abu Taher said payment of dues to retired workers does not arise at all until full payment of all dues to retrenched workers of the state-owned jute mills of Khulna-Jessore industrial belt.

The BJMC zonal coordinator said the threat of tougher agitation in the industrial belt will be faced properly.

But he did not clarify whether he had meant police action or not.

Squally wind stops cargo handling at Mongla port

Downpour in southern coastal areas

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Southern coastal districts including Barisal, Patuakhali, Khulna and Bagerhat experienced downpour and squally winds yesterday under the influence of a depression in the Bay.

Meteorological offices in the district headquarters issued cautionary signals and advised fishermen to move to safety, according to reports by our correspondents.

Cargo handling at Mongla port was suspended from 3 pm yesterday due to inclement weather and did not resume till 8 pm, our Staff Correspondent reported from Khulna.

Cautionary signal number three was hoisted there.

Three foreign ships were moved to safety as strong winds started blowing over the part at about 4 pm.

Two of the ships carried imported clinker and exportable jute goods while the other was waiting for loading frozen shrimps, said Member (operation) of Mongla Port Authority Lutfur Rahman.

There has been downpour accompanied by squally winds in Khulna and Bagerhat districts since 4 pm yesterday.

All fishing boats and trawlers were asked to move to safer places and not to venture into the deep sea.

Khulna district administration has opened a control room to monitor the situation, sources said.

In Patuakhali, several hundred fishing trawlers have moved to safety in Kuakata and Pathorghata coasts due to downpour and squally winds in the coasts since Saturday midnight, our correspondent reported

yesterday evening.

Fazlu Gazi, president of Mohipur trawler owners association said told hundreds of fishing trawlers went to the deep sea as good catches of Hilsha were available in last few days. They are returning to the coasts, he said.

The weather office hoisted cautionary signal No. 3.

Meteorological offices recorded 96 mm rainfall in Patuakhali and 102 mm rainfall in Kalapara till 3 pm yesterday.

In Barisal, port authorities hoisted cautionary signal no. 2 and stopped plying of small motor launches in 28 internal routes from till further notice.

Heavy rains since Saturday night also affected normal life in the divisional city.

The weather office recorded 71 mm rainfall in 9 hours from 6 am to 3 pm yesterday.

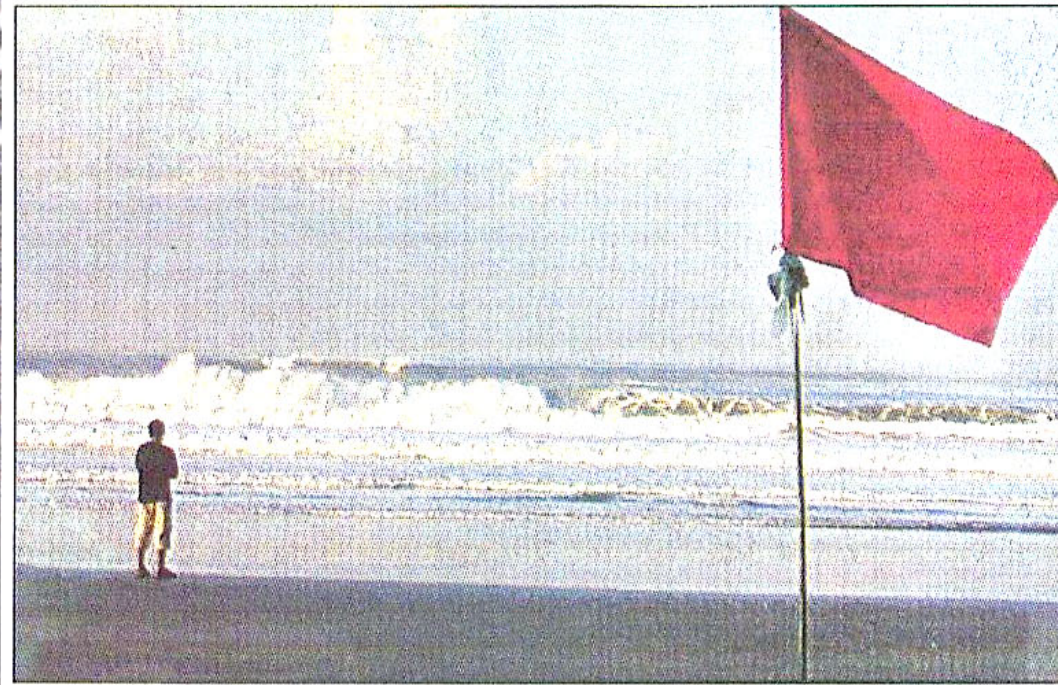


PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

A red flag is hoisted in Cox's Bazar sea beach as a sign of warning as the sea became turbulent following a depression.