

Back to farming after 25yrs

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from the 13,395 hectares used over the years for shrimp farming.

Farmers in Paikgachha have brought 4,395 hectares of land under Boro cultivation while in Bataghata upazila Boro has been planted on 4,045 hectares.

The agriculture officer of Dakop upazila, Kazi Anisuzzaman, said crops over around 500 hectares of land were badly damaged due to the salinity in water while overall production was not satisfactory as saline water has been let in the fields for too long.

During visits to Kalinagar, Sharabab, Joynagar and Saighara villages in Dakop upazila and Deluti and Lata unions under Paikgachha upazila, farmers talked to this correspondent about the environmental damage caused due to shrimp cultivation and why they are saying no to it now.

Farmers explained that as shrimp cultivators brought in saline water from the sea through canals into the shrimp enclosures, the salt has seeped into the local ecosystem meaning the soil, groundwater and even the ponds of the area. The fertilisers and other chemicals used in these enclosures have also seeped into the water system.

As a result, there is now an acute scarcity of safe drinking water in the entire area, the children are often sick and the soil has lost most of its fertility. Even rearing domestic animals has become impossible.

Shyamol Kanti, 55, a farmer in Kamarkhola village of the upazila, told The Daily Star, "I have been cultivating Bagda shrimp for 20 years now, but today find myself in a situation where I don't even have sufficient food to live on. My children can't go to school, they constantly suffer from diarrhoea and dysentery. The saline water in the area means we cannot grow vegetables. Even the domestic animals have no grass to live on."

The gher owners have used lime and other kinds of fertilisers to cultivate shrimp which has caused serious damage to our soil," he said.

"Twenty years ago, I used to cultivate paddy over 53 bighas of cropland and I could harvest 15 to 20 maunds of paddy from each bigha. I had a herd

of 40 cattle, including dairy and beef cattle. In the early 80s, I was lured by some shrimp traders into leasing my croplands for shrimp cultivation to make more money. It was a huge mistake as now I don't even have sufficient drinking water," Kanti said.

Also, many farmers point out that though the shrimp cultivators have made huge profits from the trade, they have not compensated the farmers even according to the contracts.

Shukriti Mohon Sarkar, a teacher of Alokrip High School in Paikgachha upazila, said, "As a result of leasing our land for shrimp cultivation, some influential people in the area have become richer but small farmers have become poorer as gher (shrimp enclosure) owners have gradually grabbed their lands in the name of cultivation. Some didn't even make the payments they promised on leased deeds," he said.

Tushar Kanti, 45, of Madhukhali village of Paikgachha upazila said, "Shrimp gher owners provided Tk 800 to Tk 1000 per bigha for a year but if I cultivate paddy, I can easily harvest 15 to 20 maunds paddy a season per bigha which would save food security for my family."

Shahabuddin Gazi, 50, of Kalinagar village under Dakop upazila, has already bid goodbye to shrimp cultivation. He said, "I cultivated Boro paddy on five bigha this year. I harvested three maunds from each bigha and am expecting more next year if I can stop saline water from entering my land completely."

Shrimp traders however blame other problems behind the farmer's growing animosity towards shrimp cultivation.

Shafiqul Gazi, 48, a trader said, "Local farmers engaged in shrimp cultivation over the years are now losing interest in the business after having experienced huge loss due to viral infections of the fish."

The President of the Shrimp Cultivation Association Rafiqul Haque dismissed the discontent of the farmers as a conspiracy by outsiders.

The anti-saline water movement is a conspiracy by some local and international NGOs to destroy the shrimp

industry of the country which earns huge foreign exchange through exports. Around 11 lakh people are directly or indirectly dependent on this industry to earn their livelihoods," says the businessman who is the owner of a shrimp enclosure at Kamarkhola village in Dakop upazila.

"We have an integrated committee named Shrimp Resources Development and Management Committee comprised of members from different organisations, including the forest, environment, land and livestock departments. So there is no question of environmental degradation as all of our decisions are made through this committee," he said.

Leaders of Dakop Upazila Nagarik Parishad, a group campaigning against saline water in Dakop, and Labanjal Birodhi Krishi O Paribesh Sanrakshan Committee (Anti-saline Water, Agriculture and Environment Protection Committee) in Paikgachha claim that as a result of their vigorous anti-saline water campaign in the area over the last four or five years, today farmers are united against the

Mohosin Ali, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Dakop upazila, said, "For two or three years now, local farmers have been demonstrating against saline water. This year, almost all the farmers are united and no enclosure owners could not channel in any saline water to their gheres."

"As per government policy, at least 86 percent of the people in an area need to support the issue before any permits are given for shrimp cultivation in the area. So far we haven't received such support from the upazila so, no new shrimp enclosures were given permits for cultivation this year," he said.

Kazi Anisuzzaman said, "If we are able to block saline water, we can easily cultivate paddy and vegetables here," he said.

"The situation will not change overnight as saline water has been stored in these fields for many years now. It is necessary to store rainwater around the enclosures for one to two years to reduce the salinity gradually and prepare the land for paddy and vegetable cultivation."

The government will fix the price considering the interests of both farmers and consumers, the minister added.

OMS price

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started OMS programme of rice on April 1 in the divisional headquarters and labour-inhabited areas, including Narayanganj and Gazipur, to help the low-income people.

But a small gap between the prices of rice at local market and OMS programme failed to attract consumers this year. However, the OMS presented a completely different picture last year when a huge number of people thronged OMS shops to buy rice due to high price of rice in open markets.

Despite poor response to OMS this year, the food ministry argues that the programme is at least making a positive impact on local market in discharging its duties.

Razzaque, who chaired the meeting, said the current OMS programme will continue until April 30, also keeping in mind the garment workers for whom the government is going to sell rice at reduced price.

The government and apparel business leaders earlier planned to sell rice to garment workers at subsidised price but the plan could not be implemented yet due to decreasing price of rice at local markets and low demand for OMS rice.

The food minister hoped that the programme would be started soon but it depends on the decision of the garment factory owners.

The minister said the government had also launched various vulnerable group programmes under the social safety net. "Because of those programmes, food at low cost is reaching more people. As a result, the demand for OMS rice is low," he said.

On domestic procurement of paddy and rice, the minister said, "The government will buy six to seven lakh tonnes of paddy and rice. But the price has not been fixed yet. The purchase is likely to begin from May 1 while the amount of rice and its price will be set by the third week of this month."

The government will fix the price considering the interests of both farmers and consumers, the minister added.

ACC accused of contempt of JS

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the alleged 'offenders' to clarify the legality of their absence from yesterday's meeting, seven days prior to the joint meeting of the two standing committees.

The alleged 'offenders' might face charges of contempt of the parliament if they fail to come up with satisfactory explanations.

The committee had asked the two incumbent commissioners of ACC to appear before it and to send necessary documents including the commission's latest annual report, audit report, and reports on its activities, and on problems it faces in discharging its duties.

But the ACC top bosses refrained from attending the meeting and also did not send any document, saying the summoning was beyond the jurisdiction of the committee and that they are only accountable to the country's president.

Mashhud and Delwar were summoned as witnesses of the ACC's previous activities, but they also refrained from complying with the summons.

All summoned persons however in written letters to the committee expressed their inability to appear before the committee.

"They will have to come up with satisfactory explanations for not appearing before the committee. We will be bound to take appropriate actions against them on their failure to do so," Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, chief of the parliamentary committee, told reporters after yesterday's meeting.

Members of the committee said the 'offenders' might be jailed or fined for contempt of the parliament, and also for violation of the constitution.

"We decided to give them a chance before taking any harsh decision. We are assuming that they refused to attend the meeting due to their ignorance of the practice and procedures of the parliament," Alamgir said.

The committee chief said they already talked to the chief of the Parliamentary Committee on Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and all out efforts will be made for resolving the issue.

The next meeting of the committee on the issue will be held at a time when the parliament is likely to be in session. The committee might raise the issue in the parliament, if necessary, for taking actions against

the 'offenders', for undermining the sovereignty of the House, members of the committee said.

"We want to take such a decision, so none dares to undermine the dignity of the parliament in the future," Mainuddin Khan Badal, a member of the committee, said.

The comptrller, auditor general, cabinet secretary, and the chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) attended the meeting on invitation, and the meeting discussed the formation and activities of the ACC over almost last two years under the immediate past caretaker government.

The parliamentary committee also ordered the cabinet secretary to examine and report on whether due legal procedures were maintained by the caretaker government in appointing the immediate past ACC chief and the two other commissioners.

"The advisers to the caretaker government enjoy the status of ministers. We asked the cabinet to submit a report to the committee, whether persons who enjoy the status of ministers can also bestow the same status on others," the committee chief said.

Relying to a query, Alamgir

said the committee also ordered the cabinet secretary to examine and report on whether due legal procedures were maintained by the caretaker government in appointing the immediate past ACC chief and the two other commissioners.

"The committee has unanimously decided to examine the functions and activities of the ACC," he said.

Khaleda's house

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house allocation for having been made in violation of the leasing terms and conditions.

The existing rules and regulations related to lease would be applied to implement the cabinet decision "at any cost," the minister said.

Relying to a question, Mannan said the former prime minister and opposition leader, Khaleda Zia, should leave the house "showing respect to the law before taking legal steps."

"If she does not leave the house, legal steps would be taken as it is taken in case of other ordinary people in such cases," he added.

Asked about the period of time for the legal action, the minister said the steps would be taken in proper time.

Asked whether the opposition leader would be evicted if she does not comply with the final notice for vacating her residence, Mannan said steps would be taken as per the existing laws.

The minister said the set conditions on which the cantonment residence was leased out to Begum Zia were violated afterwards.

In this regard, Mannan cited some examples and said it is supposed that the lessee should pay tax every year into government exchequer, but it was not maintained except for the first two years after the leasing.

The residence was also used as addresses of businesses of Begum Zia's two sons, he pointed out.

The minister said the opposition leader can go to the official residence in Mint Road which has been made ready for living.

মোটরযান মালিকদের জন্য জ্ঞাতব্য

ঃ ০১ জুলাই, ০৮ থেকে কার্যকর মোটরযান কর ও ফিস এর হার :

যে সব মোটরযানের রেজিস্ট্রেশন অধিক সংখ্যায় হয়ে থাকে সেগুলোর কর/ফিস হার গ্রাহকগণের সুবিধার্থে নিম্নে প্রদান করা হলো :

ক্রমিক নং	মোটরযানের ধরণ	রেজিঃ ফিস (পরিদর্শন ফিস সহ) (টাকা)	বার্ষিক রোড ট্যাক্স (স্টিকার ফিস সহ) (টাকা)	বার্ষিক ফিটনেস ফিস (স্টিকার ফিস সহ) (টাকা)	মালিকানা বদলী ফিস (পরিদর্শন ফিস সহ) (টাকা)	নতুন মোটরযানের ক্ষেত্রে রেজিঃ নং গ্রহণকালে প্রদেয় মোট (টাকা)	বিকল্পিত মোটরযানের ক্ষেত্রে রেজিঃ নং গ্রহণকালে প্রদেয় মোট (টাকা)	মন্তব্য
০১	২	৩	৪	৫	৬	৭	৮	
(১) ইঞ্জিন ক্যাপাসিটি ৬০০ সিসি পর্যন্ত	৫,৩০০/-	৫,০৪৫/- (চালকসহ ৫ আসনের জন্য)	৬৪৫/-	১,৯৬৭/-	১০,৯৯০/-	১২,৬৫৭/-		
(২) ইঞ্জিন ক্যাপাসিটি ৬০১ থেকে ১০০০ সিসি পর্যন্ত	১০,৩০০/-	৫,০৪৫/- (চালকসহ ৫ আসনের জন্য)	৬৪৫/-	৩,৬৩৮/-	১৫,৯৯০/-	১৯,৩২৮/-		
(৩) ইঞ্জিন ক্যাপাসিটি ১০০১ থেকে ১৪০০ সিসি পর্যন্ত	১৫,৩০০/-	৫,০৪৫/- (চালকসহ ৫ আসনের জন্য)	৬৪৫/-	৫,৩০০/-	২০,৯৯০/-	২৫,৯৯০/-		
(৪) ইঞ্জিন ক্যাপাসিটি ১৪০১ থেকে ২০০০ সিসি পর্যন্ত	৩০,৩০০/-	৫,০৪৫/- (চালকসহ ৫ আসনের জন্য)	৬৪৫/-	১১,৯৬৭/-	৪০,৯৯০/-	৫২,৬৫৭/-		
(৫) ইঞ্জিন ক্যাপাসিটি ২০০০ সিসি'র উর্ধে								
(ক) মাইক্রো ভাড়া (চালিত নহে)	৪০,৩০০/-	৭,০৪৫/- (চালকসহ ৯ আসনের জন্য)	৬৪৫/-	১৩,৬৩৮/-	৪৭,৫৯০/-	৬১,৩২৮/-		
(খ) মিনিবাস (ভাড়ায় চালিত নহে)	৪৫,৩০০/-	১৮,০৪৫/- (চালকসহ ৩১ আসনের জন্য)	৬৪৫/- (ভারী মোটরযান ব্যতিরেক)	১৫,৩০০/-	৬০,৮৯০/-	৭৮,৯৯০/-		
(গ) বাস (ভাড়ায় চালিত নহে)	৫০,৩০০/-	২৮,০৪৫/- (চালকসহ ১১ আসনের জন						