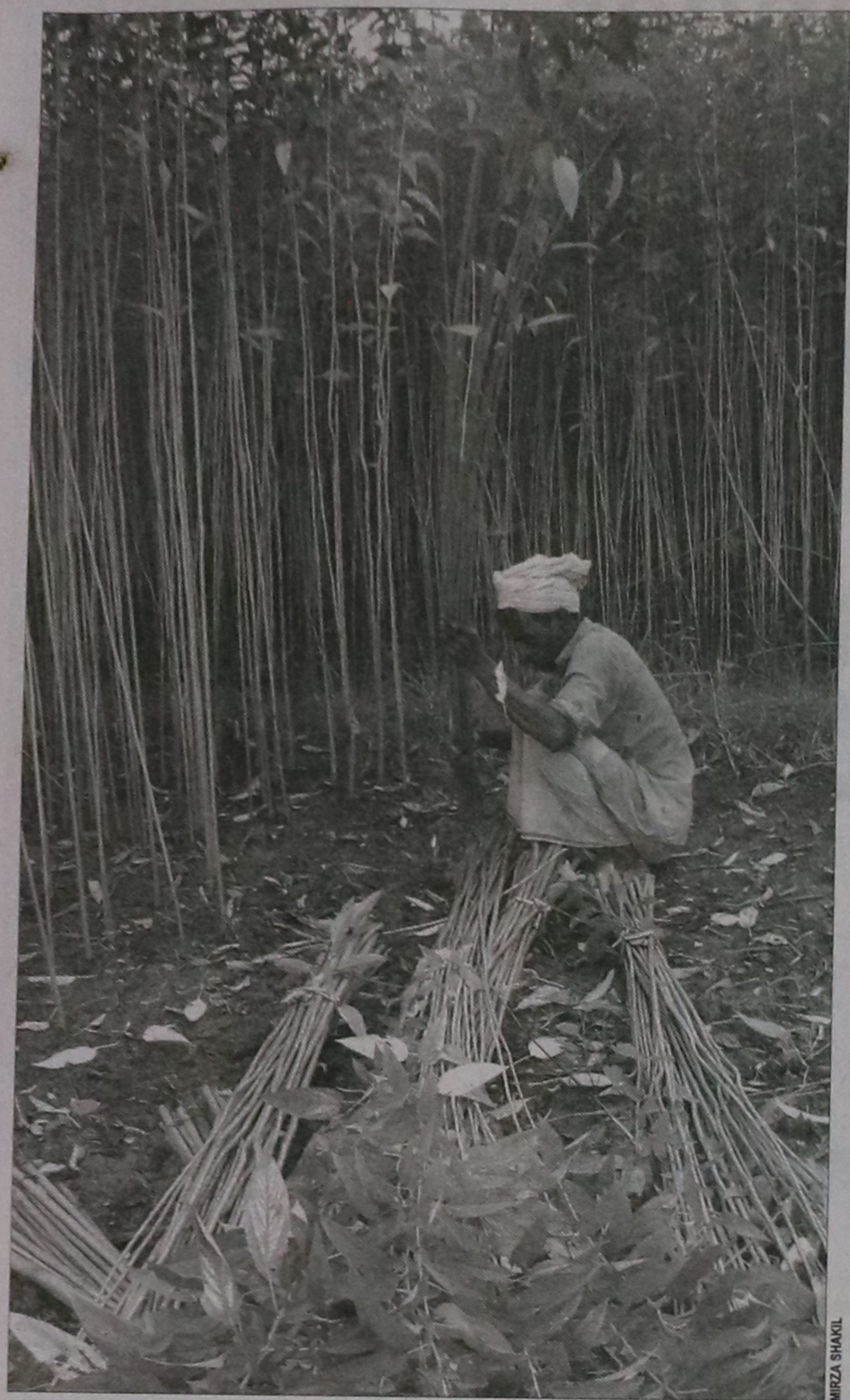


Jute hope brightens in Khulna



AMANUR AMAN, from Kushtia

Jute cultivation expanded to 10 districts in the southwestern region this year compared to previous years.

Farmers who showed reluctance to cultivate the product due to low price have now started growing the crop in large-scale as it has been fetching good profit for the last several years.

According to officials at different Agricultural Extension Departments (AED) in Khulna division, the farmers cultivated jute at 115,938 hectares of land against the AED target of 124,900 hectares in 10 districts in the region this year.

The average yield of the crop and market atmosphere were also better in the region in the last few years that helped the farmers get benefitted, the AED officials, farmers and market analysts said.

Kushtia district was on top in cultivating 24,352 hectares of land this year, while Jessore cultivated 13,733 hectares, Jhenidah 11,193 hectares, Magura 20,280 hectares, Narail 9,000 hectares, Chuadanga 15,950 hectares, Meherpur 16,180 hectares, Satkhira 4,200 hectares, Bagerhat 200 hectares and Khulna district 850 hectares.

The cultivation was in 90,000 hectares last year and 84,280 hectares in 2007.

Several varieties of jute are being cultivated in the region. Of those, farmers mostly cultivate Deshi (Chorchorous) and Tossa (Chorchorous Olitorius) due to low price of their seeds and good yield. Tossa, which is the most popular, was cultivated in at least 85,236 hectares of land, while others, including Deshi, in the rest of the land.

The crop has started coming to different markets in the region and the farmers are also getting good price.

According to the farmers, the production cost for per bigha land was about Tk 7,000. Ten to twelve maunds were produced in a one-bigha land, and the product was selling at around Tk 1,200 to Tk 1,400 per maund.

"I made profit by cultivating jute as the price is still better," said Abdul Baki, a farmer of Sailkupa in Jhenidah district. He cultivated jute in two bighas of land.

Farmers said they will be benefitted if the present price continues.

There were some problems the farmers faced in jute cultivation this season. Scarcity of seeds was one of those.

They said sowing was hampered due to seed crisis during the sowing season. A large number of farmers failed to sow seeds in due time.

According to officials at Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and AED, 704,280 kilogrammes of seeds of both Tossa and Deshi varieties were needed for Khulna division. But the government supplied only 42,478 kilogrammes this season.

This forced the farmers to collect seeds from market and they had to pay higher prices.

A high official of BADC in the region said the government failed to procure seeds from the farmers last year. This resulted in scarcity and high price.

A number of farmers were also cheated by buying low quality Indian seeds, the farmers said.

F-Secure teams up with Akceycom

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

F-Secure Corporation, a leading provider of security service through mobile and internet operators, plans to expand its solutions in Bangladesh by partnering with Akceycom Limited.

F-Secure said it would be an authorised security service partner to introduce an F-Secure service platform targeting small businesses and consumers in Bangladesh, according to a press release.

The company usually provides real-time protection that works "quietly and smoothly" in the background, so computer and smartphone users can enjoy the "benefits of connected life to the full".

Akceycom Limited is a joint venture between AK Khan & Co Ltd of Bangladesh and Ceylinc Consolidated of Sri Lanka.

As a leading application service provider, Akceycom plans to garner 20 percent of the market share.

"Brand building today is different from what it used to be. We believe partnering with a strong innovative market leader such as Akceycom Limited will be a vital key for our success to significantly expand our business here in this region," says Venu Palakirti, F-Secure's sales director for South Asia.

"With the partnership with F-Secure, Akceycom Limited will be expanding and offering new business opportunities to other service providers in Bangladesh. This is a unique opportunity targeting a value-added security service for all internet service providers in Bangladesh," said Dinesh Dissanayake, chief operating officer of Akceycom.

News in Brief



Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan Saleem Raza presents the first quarterly monetary report in Karachi yesterday. The central bank lowered the discount interest rate by one percentage point, acknowledging that its economy is showing resilience.

US consumer inflation in steepest annual drop since 50s

AFP, Washington

US consumer prices held unchanged in July, leaving a year-over-year drop that was the steepest since 1950, government data showed Friday.

The Labour Department said its consumer price index (CPI) was flat in the month of July as small declines in food and energy prices offset a small increase in all other components.

Most analysts had forecast that the seasonally adjusted CPI would be flat as the world's largest economy struggles in its worst recession since the Great Depression.

"The overriding message in the report is that inflation is not a problem at this point," Briefing.com analysts said in a client note.

On a 12-month basis, consumer prices fell 2.1 percent from July 2008, the sharpest plunge since 1950.

However, a year ago inflation was high due to surging food and energy prices. After the collapse of Wall Street investment bank Lehman Brothers in September triggered a global financial meltdown and worldwide recession, consumer prices have fallen in the face of weak demand.

Record fall in eurozone consumer prices

AFP, Brussels

Consumer prices in the 16 euro countries fell a record 0.7 percent in July over 12 months, deepening the bloc's first ever dip into deflationary territory, EU data showed on Friday.

The figures poured some economic cold water on data released Thursday that showed Germany and France had emerged from recession in the second quarter, underlining the obstacles ahead towards a recovery.

The 0.7 percent eurozone price drop and the 0.1 percent fall seen in June mark the first-ever foray into negative inflation since the euro bloc was formed in 1999 and a remarkable U-turn for Europe's economy.

The news partly accounted for a weakening of the euro against the dollar and a general fall in European stock prices, traders said.

After hitting a record high of 4.0 percent in June and July 2008, eurozone inflation has fallen sharply as oil and other commodity prices have collapsed in the face of the global economic downturn.

The negative figures published on Friday are mainly due to the high energy and food prices seen last July, a European Commission spokesman said.

Indian market eyes global markets, monsoon activity

AFP, Mumbai

India's stock market could edge upwards next week, tracking global market trends bolstered by a positive outlook from the US Federal Reserve on recovery from recession, analysts said.

Gains, however, could be capped by domestic concern over a below-normal monsoon and a slowdown in agriculture growth and rural spending in India.

Global sentiment improved after the US Federal Reserve concluded a meeting Wednesday at which it said US economic activity is "levelling out" and indicated it would start rolling back a portion of its massive stimulus.

Sentiment domestically has improved after India's industrial output rose at its fastest pace in nearly a year-and-a-half in June, official data showed this week, in a sign that Asia's third-biggest economy is emerging from a downturn.

Laos eases import procedure

ANN/VIENTIANE TIMES

Business people will find it simpler to import goods to Laos if a new prime ministerial decree on import procedures is enforced.

The new legal document, which Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh signed in July, also aims to move Lao import procedures closer to the rules and regulations of the World Trade Organisation.

The reforms form part of the main conditions for the country to become a member of the global trade group.

The ministry of industry and commerce is now drafting a list of the goods which business people will be required to seek permission from authorities to import.

This is seen as part of efforts to improve clarity for those importing goods and raw materials to production bases in Laos.

NBR launches fresh tax survey today

UNB, Dhaka

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) is going to launch a fresh tax survey today to net at least 400,000 more taxpayers within the next year in a desperate bid to boost revenue collection.

"Initially, the tax survey will be conducted in 15 areas across the country as a pilot programme and then it'll be done in other areas," an NBR high official told the news agency.

The 15 areas selected for the initial tax survey are Uttara, Nikunja, Banosri, Basundhara-Baridhara Project Area, Savar, Dohar, Nawabganj, Keraniganj in Dhaka, Louhajang in Munshiganj, Patiya, Satkania, Hathajari, Sitakunda, and Mirsarai in Chittagong, and Bianibazar in Sylhet.

Finance Minister AMA Muhih will inaugurate the survey at Uttara.

The survey will continue till September. A total of 100 inspectors will conduct the survey in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet.

Of them, 65 will conduct the survey in Dhaka, 29 in Chittagong and 6 in Sylhet.

"After analysing the findings of the pilot programme, the NBR will go for a countrywide tax survey," the NBR official said.

The government is desperate to enhance the revenue collection as its sources are shrinking, while public spending is increasing.

The NBR official said they had already communicated with REHAB and Dhaka City Corporation to have lists of houses, flats, plots and landowners to have a good result from the survey.

He also mentioned that the NBR would gradually seek lists from other city corporations of the country to identify the eligible taxpayers.

Finance Minister AMA Muhih during his recent visit to the NBR said the number of tax evaders is huge in Bangladesh. "It's a shame for us as a huge number of people eligible to pay taxes are still out of the tax net. We'll have to come out of this culture."

The NBR conducted a tax survey in Dhaka city from March 2007 to August 2008. Later, the survey was conducted in Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Rajshahi and Barisal divisional cities and Rangpur municipality, netting 65,000 new taxpayers.

A total of 48 teams were engaged in the tax survey covering businesspeople and professionals. Of them, 20 teams conducted the survey in capital Dhaka netting 57 percent new

taxpayers in the city's posh areas and old Dhaka.

Currently, only around 800,000 people are paying taxes, although the number of holders of taxpayer's identification number (TIN) is about 2.3 million.

The finance minister, from the very beginning of assuming office as the custodian of the exchequer, has been emphasising the need for increasing the number of taxpayers.

The government's apprehension about less revenue from import duty in the coming days has prompted the NBR to launch the drive to bring more sectors under the direct tax net.

The revenue generation from imports will suffer more as the World Trade Organization (WTO) is heading towards a duty-free world, levelling the frontiers on the economic globe.

The finance minister, during his visit to the NBR, had emphasised improving the revenue collection from direct tax. He also directed the NBR to find out more pockets from where the government could earn revenue.

The government has set a target to collect Tk 165.60 billion in income tax, which is 27 percent of total revenue target.



Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister GM Quader leads a rally to promote favourite tourist spots in Bangladesh through internet and SMS (short message service) voting, organised by 'chokkhkhuleybangladesh.com' in Dhaka recently.

IDCOL to introduce solar irrigation plants

UNB, Dhaka

Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL), a partner organisation of the government, is planning to set up multipurpose Solar Irrigation System (SIS) in off-grid areas of the country which is expected to help save some 750 mw of electricity.

"We're working to introduce mini-power plants within a year. It'll be a large-scale investment and its benefit in rural areas will be comprehensive. It's like solar home systems (SHS) programme IDCOL introduced earlier," IDCOL Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Islam Sharif told the news agency yesterday.

IDCOL, a non-bank financial institution, promotes solar home systems (SHS) in rural areas under a programme jointly being financed by IDA, Global Environment Facility (GEF) and KfW & GTZ. More than 300,000 SHS have already been installed.

Sharif said they are negotiating with four foreign companies to implement the project and trying to finalise its

technical aspects too.

He said there are some 2,00,000 irrigation pumps across the country which consume about 750 megawatts of electricity everyday. "We'll install solar panels for all the irrigation pumps that'll help save some 750 mw of electricity."

Asked whether the solar panels would be used for only pumping out water, the IDCOL CEO said it would not be financially viable for the villagers if they use it only for irrigation. "To make it financially viable, they need to set up in a location close to their cluster villages."

About cost, the CEO said each project will cost about Tk 18-20 lakh which will be primarily funded by IDCOL but funds from the government and donors will be needed to complete the total process. "We didn't select our locations for the plants yet, but those will be set up in remote areas," he added.

Sharif said they will try to get local power thespians involved in the renewable energy sector to make it profitable.

He urged the government to modify the existing act to attract power entrepreneurs and create a viability gap

fund (VGF) in order to achieve 5 percent goal by 2020 to meet the renewable energy goal.

Sharif also urged the government to introduce a "feed-in tariff system." "Such initiatives will be profitable for the renewable entrepreneurs."

The IDCOL chief said the country needs to enact an energy conservation law and there should be a special authority to ensure coordination between private and public sectors for development of the power sector.

When contacted, Director of Dhaka University Renewable Energy Research Centre Prof Dr Neem Chandra Bhoimik said such irrigation plant project would bring about a massive change in rural Bangladesh.

Bhoimik, who has been appointed Bangladesh Ambassador to Nepal, suggested that the country's northern parts should get priority in implementing such projects.

About its feasibility, he said, "We have enough solar light because of our geographical location. So, such project will be viable financially for the rural poor farmers."

Singer's campaign starts today

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Singer Bangladesh Ltd launches a special sales campaign styled "Koti Takar Eid" today at all Singer plus shops across the country.

Under the campaign, customers will receive cash discounts up to Tk20,000 on purchase of selected products from Singer. They will also be entitled to a jackpot cash gift through lucky coupons, says a press release.

Customers can also avail of the interest-free 90 days payback offer and other free services from the company. The campaign ends on September 30.

