

DISTRIBUTION OF FERTILISERS AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL

Selection of retailers misses another deadline for politicisation, bribery

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Recruitment of retailers for distribution of fertilisers at grassroots level is yet to be completed in most unions of 16 northern districts although the government's extended deadline for it expired on October 15.

The government is recruiting some 10,629 retailers under 1,600 fertiliser dealers appointed by Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) in 85 municipalities and 1,096 unions of northern districts, sources said.

Allegations of politicisation and bribery in case of selection of retailers are creating dissatisfaction among the genuine fertiliser traders and delaying the recruitment process, say reports from different districts.

As the recruitment could not be completed within earlier deadline of September 30, the government extended the time for recruiting retailers to distribute fertilisers in northern region by two weeks.

Recruitment of retailers was not possible within the time limit due to differences of opinion among the members of union committees over selecting names, reports our staff correspondent from Rajshahi.

Out of total 774 retailers to be appointed in nine upazilas of Rajshahi, only 45 retailers in Mohonpur and 36 in Bagha upazila have been recruited within October 15, said AED official Dipendra Mohon, who is monitoring the recruitment in the district.

Amid allegations of taking Tk 20,000 as bribe from each retailer in Godagari and Tanore upazilas, lawmaker Omar Faruk Chowdhury called a meeting of all UP chairmen in Rajshahi on Thursday and warned them of stern action if irregularities are found.

Agricultural Extension Department (AED) officials in Natore, Bogra and Naogaon said that they would need two or three days more to complete the recruitment.

Asked about the allegation of bri-

bery against the MP's men in Mohonpur, local lawmaker M Meraj Uddin Mollah said, "I am not aware of what is happening over recruitment. I am staying in Dhaka. I do not know whether anyone is collecting money using my name."

Most of the union committees in nine upazilas of Pabna district have failed to complete recruitment process of the retailers within the scheduled timeframe, reports our correspondent.

Official sources said a total of 738 retailers are to be recruited for 73 unions and nine municipalities in nine upazilas of the district for distributing fertilisers at grassroots level. Each union or municipality will have nine retailers.

While visiting different areas in the district, The Daily Star correspondent found that union committees are struggling to select the names of genuine traders as a large number of ruling party men have applied for it.

Sources said most of the union

selection committees under Vangura, Faridpur and Aghorai upazilas could not finalise the names of retailers yet.

Meanwhile, the local selection committees have submitted the names of retailers to the upazila committees in Sujanagar, Ishwardi, Bera and Santhia upazilas.

When contacted, Deputy Director of Pabna Agriculture Extension Department Md Samaullah Miah told The Daily Star that they will select the traders as per rule and the process will complete soon.

Our Manikganj correspondent adds: Local people brought out a procession and held a rally at Singair in Manikganj demanding removal of Singair Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Nazrul Islam for his alleged irregularities in appointing retailers.

Around 2,000 people joined the procession on Singair Pilot High School premises. They later sat a meeting with the UNO and gave him seven days ultimatum for cancelling the recruitment.

SNIPPETS

BSF returns body

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) Monday night returned body of a Bangladeshi youth after a company commander level flag meeting with Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at Sonamasjid. Victim Rafiqul Islam, 38, was son of Kayes Mia of Namo Chawkpara village. He was killed by mob at Sultanpur village at Maldah, 300 yards inside the Indian territory at around 5am on Monday. Rafiqul had mistakenly entered the Indian territory through Chawkpara border near pillar number 183 when he was on duty as a guard of crop fields at Chawkpara village.

Admission seekers agitate

A RU, Correspondent

Admission seekers at Rajshahi University (RU) Monday night put up a barricade on Dhaka-Rajshahi highway adjacent to Binodpur gate of the university for three hours and vandalised buses of Hanif Enterprise as the bus authorities could not give them bus for Dhaka on scheduled time. Sources said, the admission seekers waited at the counter near Binodpur gate for the Dhaka bound bus but it did not turn up till 12:30am. Failing to get the bus, the agitating students put up barricade on the highway for three hours from 12:30am and damaged a number of vehicles.

Prisoner dies in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

An inmate of Sirajganj prison died allegedly due to cardiac arrest at Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) early yesterday. The deceased, Shyamol Kumar, 35, was son of Ratan Kumar of Natun Chandpur village in Ullapara upazila. He was sentenced to four years imprisonment in a drug related case. According to jail sources, Shyamol was earlier taken to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital on October 13, when he fell sick due to cardiac problem. As his condition deteriorated, he was shifted to RMCH on October 14. He died there early yesterday, hospital sources said.

Jewellery shop looted

UNB, Gazipur

Robbers looted a jewellery shop at Awrakhali Bazar in Kaliganj upazila early Monday. Police said a gang of about eight robbers attacked three night guards of the market at about 3:30am and tied up their hands, legs and mouths. Later, they stormed into "Chandan Jewellers" and looted 20 tolas of gold ornament, 30 tolas of silver ornament and other valuables. Police earlier arrested three people from the bazar two weeks ago on charge of planning to commit robbery.

Touchstone statues seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Monday night recovered two touchstone statues of "Lord Vishnu" and "Shiva" from Basudevpur village in Palashbari upazila. Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-1 from Dhaka raided the village and recovered the 120-kg Shiva Lingam from the house of one Shamsul Alam and the Vishnu statue weighing around 14 kg from the house of Al Amin. The team arrested Shamsul Alam, Al Amin, Abdul Mannan and Angur for possessing the statues and handed them over to Palashbari police. The arrestees told police that a smuggler of Bogra district brought the statues to the village about a month ago. The price of the statues was estimated at Tk 6.5 crore.

Three get life for rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Three people including an indigenous man of Parbatipur upazila were sentenced yesterday to life term and fined Tk 10,000 each, in default, to suffer more two years for raping a girl in 2007. Convicts are Rama Ker Kata, 29, son of Chanda Ker Kata of village Pachpukuria and two others. Md Shamsul Huda, judge of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal pronounced the verdict in a crowded courtroom. According to the prosecution story, the three raped a girl on February 06, 2007. The next day, the victim's elder sister Jyosna Ker Kata filed a case. Court sources said, two other convicts Bijute and Milon went into hiding after the incident.

17 arrested in Bogra

UNB, Bogra

Seventeen people were arrested on Monday following death of four people by drinking rectified spirit in Mahasthangarh area of Shubganj upazila Sunday. Police said they conducted a special drive in the area and arrested them for their suspected involvement in the incident. The arrestees are Anwar, Arif, Faruk, Faizul, Raihan, Sayed, Al Amin, Dulal, Badsha, Latif, Shahidul, Belal, Hafizur, Shahjahan, Khudu, Zahidul, and Mukul. Earlier on Sunday night, four people died and six others fell sick after drinking rectified spirit in the area. The dead were Babu member, Azizur Rahman and Lalu of Mahasthangarh village and Shahjamal Madhu of Dighalkandi in Sadar upazila.



Dewdrops on paddy plants indicate that the winter is not too far away. The photo was taken from Stadium area in Chittagong city yesterday.

Fire damages power car of Sylhet-bound Surma Mail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Fire damaged the power car of Sylhet-bound Surma Mail and its guard's compartment in Akhaura-Sylhet section on Monday morning.

Railway sources said the fire originated in the power car of the running train at a place between Satgaon and Rashidpur rail stations at around 5:45am and soon engulfed the adjacent guard's compartment, leaving guard Akhter Hossain injured.

Driver stopped the train at Satgaon station where passengers and railway men through their frantic efforts extinguished the blaze. Later the Surma Mail left Satgaon and reached Srimongal station at 9:05am.

After replacing the power car, which was completely damaged by the fire, the train left Srimongal station for Sylhet at 10:10am. Train services on Sylhet--Dhaka and Sylhet-Chittagong routes remained suspended for 45 minutes due to the incident.

Mohammad Al Mamun, sub-assistant engineer (power) of the railways' Akhaura office, said the fire originated from an electric short circuit in power car. High railway officials have inspected the damaged power car at Srimongal station.

Railway source said a four-member committee headed by Traffic Inspector Ataur Rahman has been formed to investigate the incident.



The charred power car of Sylhet-bound Surma Mail that caught fire on Monday morning lies at Srimongal station.



PHOTO: STAR
Farmers harvesting advanced variety BRRI Dhan-33 in a field in Nilphamari district. Introduction of the HYV rice bears bright prospect of poverty alleviation in the monga-prone area.

BRRI DHAN-33, BINA DHAN-7

A ray of hope for five monga-prone dists

E A M ASADUZZAMAN,
Nilphamari

Marginal farmers and farm workers of five northern districts are now not frightened of monga-- a near famine situation with wholesale unemployment-- during September-November as they remain busy with harvesting the newly developed early harvestable rice varieties this time.

Sources said harvest of new rice varieties of BRRI Dhan-33 and BINA Dhan-7 has already begun now during the peak monga period while harvest of aman paddy will start after two months.

On completion of aman paddy plantation in mid September, farm workers of five monga-prone northern districts of Rangpur, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Gaibandha usually sit idle as they do not have any job during mid September to mid November (Bengali Ashwin and Kartik months). Monga also forces a large number of local farm workers to leave for other districts in search of employment.

Marginal farmers also do not have stock of paddy for family consumption, forcing them to starve or to sell land for buying food.

Sources at Rangpur regional office of the Agriculture Extension Department (AED) said aman was cultivated on six lakh

hectares of land in five northern districts this year while newly developed early varieties of BRRI Dhan-33 and BINA Dhan-7, meant for combating monga, were cultivated on 44,000 hectares of land.

Farmers said they are now inclined to cultivate two new varieties of paddy as it can be harvested during crisis period, around two months before aman harvest. The new rice varieties can be planted in early Ashar (mid June). It takes only 110-115 days to ripe, producing an average yield of 2.4-2.5 metric tonnes per hectare of land.

After harvesting the new varieties, farmers can cultivate potato and afterwards boro paddy timely. It is usually late to cultivate potato and boro after harvest of aman, AED sources said.

While visiting Austomic Char and Datbhanga villages in Kurigram, Guddimari and Bhotmari villages in Lalmonirhat and Putimari and Gayabari villages in Nilphamari, farmers were seen busy with harvesting the new varieties of paddy. Both marginal and rich farmers hired huge number of farm workers for cutting, carrying and thrashing paddy. Once quiet and lifeless monga-prone villages are now buzzing with agricultural activities.

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Tayeb Ali, a marginal

farmer of Monthona village in Nilphamari, told this correspondent that he had harvested BINA Dhan-2 from his two bighas or 60 decimals of land and got 32 maunds of paddy. "Its production is a little bit less than usual variety of aman. But I'm happy, as I have got it in a very critical period," he added.

Abul Kasem, another farmer of Parulia village in Lalmonirhat, cultivated BRRI Dhan-33 and BINA Dhan-7 on his 10 bighas of land. He is now getting higher prices, as supply of paddy is generally low in the market. "I can cultivate potato and then 'boro' paddy in proper time", he added.

Farm workers Ramzan Ali, Anil Chandra, Bishadu, Keramat and Naimuddin of Nohali village in Rangpur said that monga was a past event to them. They are now working in paddy fields and earn Tk 100-140 per day. It was not possible only a couple of years ago, they said.

The deputy director of AED in Nilphamari, Yunus Ali, told this correspondent that people have accepted the new varieties of paddy. Both marginal and rich farmers hired huge number of farm workers for cutting, carrying and thrashing paddy. Once quiet and lifeless monga-prone villages are now buzzing with agricultural activities.

Tayeb Ali, a marginal

Suspected JMB man arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Matiranga police yesterday arrested a suspected member of militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) from Shantipur area.

Police said, Mohammad Shamsul Mia, 52, son of late Abdur Razzak of Shantipur area was held for his alleged involvement in militant activities.

Officer in-charge (OC) of Matiranga police station Mohammad Mizanur Rahman said they arrested the man at 11 in the morning following confessional statement of three JMB men who were arrested by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on September 25 in the same area.

Court sources said, police brought the suspected militant to the court at 4:30pm and Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Md Saifuzzaman Hiro sent him to jail.

Witnesses said, masked robbers numbering about 40

Robbers loot 7 shops, house in Rajbari

UNB, Rajbari

Robbers on Monday night looted seven shops and decamped with booties worth Tk 10 lakh at Dadoshi Bazar in Sadar upazila.

However, a case was filed with Rajbari police station.

In the other incident, robbers broke into the house of a female Union Parishad (UP) member of the same upazila.

Witnesses said, masked robbers numbering about 40 attacked the 11 night guards of the bazar at about 3 am and tied their hands and feet.

They broke the locks of seven shops, got in and looted valuables, including 10 tolas of gold ornaments, 50 tolas of silver ornaments and Tk 1.80

lakh in cash. The gang got away with the booty safely. None was arrested till filing of this report yesterday.

On information, police rushed to the spot but could not arrest anyone.

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