



PHOTO: STAR

Traders and workers busy putting into sacks huge quantities of dried chilli at Fulchhari Haat in Gaibandha district. Jamuna basin areas in Fulchhari upazila saw bumper production of chilli this season.

# Bumper chilli changes lot of char farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Bumper production of chilli has brought smile on the faces of farmers in char areas of Fulchhari upazila.

The poverty-stricken people living in the charlands along Jamuna basin said they were earning huge profit this year.

According to upazila agriculture office sources, encouraged by profits the farmers cultivated the item on 1200 hectares of land this

year in place of 300 hectares last year.

Every Saturday and Tuesday, wholesalers and agents of different wholesalers and companies from Dhaka and others places throng Fulchhari market to buy red chilli, said local growers.

Around 250 to 300 maunds of red chilli worth over Tk 10 lakh to 12 lakh is being sold on weekly haat (village market) day, said Farhad Rabbi, leaseholder of the market.

"April is the month of

harvesting red chilli and we are very happy due to bumper production of the vegetable in the areas," said farmer Amir Hossain of Harichandi village.

Amir said, he cultivated chilli on four bighas of land this season, spending Tk 80 thousand and earned over Tk one lakh from the sales of 45 maunds of dried red chilli.

"At present a maund of quality red chilli is being sold at Tk 4,200 in the market", he added.

However, a number of

growers, who borrowed money from banks or their relatives, sold green chilli earlier to repay the loan money, said another farmer, Rafiqul Mia.

"Cultivation of chilli is gaining popularity here as it is becoming more profitable than paddy, maize or other crops", he added.

The farmers are expecting to harvest about 12,500 maunds of red chilli this year due to high yield of the vegetable, said the upazila agriculture officer Yousuf Rana Mandol.

# Becoming self-reliant thru' own efforts

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Starvation was common for Shadhona just a few years ago. She could not visit a doctor or buy medicine when her family members fell sick.

But things have changed now. She no longer faces crisis of food or seeks just God's help for recovery from illness.

Shadhona Rani Roy of Madhobpur married Gouralal Proshad Roy of the same village in Sadar upazila 25 years ago while she was only 15 years old. A student of class-X, her education also ended with the marriage.

At the beginning of their marital life, her husband was involved with construction work while doing farm jobs. She involved herself with homestead gardening. But that was not enough to bear the expenses of their family.

A few years after her marriage, Shadhona started to work as an agri-labourer as their economic condition started to worsen gradually. Several more years passed silently while poverty remained her companion.

Seven years ago, Shadhona Rani joined Madhobpur MBS Women Group, a micro finance unit of RDRS Bangladesh. After a few months, she took Tk 10 thousand from the unit and started rearing chickens.

At the very start of the project, she made a profit of Tk 8000, which inspired her to invest more.

Now she has three poultry sheds involving Tk 6 lakh. Each shed has a

capacity to keep a thousand chicks that need feeds worth Tk 12,000 a day.

Last month she made a profit of Tk 80,000 from the sales of around two thousand birds at a price of Tk 135 per kg.

Today the couple have two sons and two daughters. Their elder son assists Shadhona in rearing birds. The two daughters are students of class-X while the son reads in class-VII.

By farming poultry in the last three years, she has bought 2.7 bighas of crop land worth Tk 5.5 lakh. She also helped her husband set up a tailoring shop at Dholharat Bazar near their home.

She still remembers the technical support extended by the district livestock officials. They regularly visited her project to give advice for free.

Today Shadhona has become a model of development activities among the rural women. Many people from far away places visit her house to see the poultry rearing process.

She has also become the chairman of Akhanagar Shamaaj Unnayan Shangstha, a sister organisation of RDRS Federation.

With the changes of time, she is now much aware about various social issues like gender equity, women

rights, bad effect of child marriage, dowry, human trafficking, health care and sanitation.

"We rush to the places with other group members to assist the victims. Let it be a case of women repression, child marriage or dowry", she told this correspondent.

"We also observe International Women's Day every year under the banner of Akhanagar Shamaaj Unnayan Shangstha," she said.

"Today I can contribute to women development besides helping my family as I have obtained financial solvency through struggle", she said.



PHOTO: STAR

Sadhona Rani takes care of the chickens at her poultry farm at Madhobpur village of Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

# Sand lifting poses threat to two Thakurgaon bridges

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

Contractors of Water Development Board have continued extracting sand from the Tangon River within 50 metres of two important bridges over the river in Thakurgaon despite objection from Roads and Highways Department (RHD).

Vacuum in the river bed, caused by the sand lifting, poses threat to the concrete bridge that serves as link between the district headquarters with four upazilas, said experts and local people.

A century-old iron bridge near Thakurgaon Shilpakala Academy Auditorium in the town

is also affected due to the callous act, RHD officials said.

During a visit on Monday morning, this correspondent saw sand lifting was going on from the Tangon River, within 50 metres from the middle of the concrete bridge, with two local made dredgers to fill up a big pond beside the river.

Water Development Board is dredging 1150 metres of the river under 'Thakurgaon Town Protection Project' involving Tk 80-lakh and the sand extraction near the river is being done as part of the project.

Deputy Commissioner of Thakurgaon Muhammad Shahiduzzaman inaugu-

rated the dredging work as chief guest on April 19.

Asked about sand lifting from within 50 metres of the bridge, contractor Md Hasan said, "We are extracting sand from the river with a light dredger with the consent of the Water Development Board officials. It will not harm the bridge as we dug only six feet deep."

When contacted, Divisional Engineer of Roads and Highways Department Jahid Hossain told this correspondent, "We sent a letter to the executive engineer of FWDB on April 23, asking him to stop the dredging within 50 metres of the structure as sand lifting poses seri-

ous threat to it. We have also informed the higher authorities of the matter for taking proper initiative."

"The pillars of the concrete bridge might be affected if sand lifting creates a hole near the bridge. It may also affect embankments on the river," he said.

When contacted, WDB Executive Engineer Naimul Haque said, "We ask contractors to lift sand up to eight-foot depth. It will not be harmful for the bridge."

Replying to a query, he said, "We are yet to get the design of the bridge. We have written to RHD authorities for it."



PHOTO: STAR

Contractors of Water Development Board extract sand just beside this important bridge over Tangon River in Thakurgaon town, ignoring objections from the Roads and Highways Department authorities.

CHEATING BY INSURANCE CO OFFICIAL

# Depositors besiege office

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Hundreds of depositors besieged the regional office of Sandhani Life Insurance Company at Aampatti in the district town yesterday afternoon in protest against alleged cheating by an official of the company.

The agitators, from Madhya Barera and Barera areas in Mymensingh Sadar upazila, said an official of the insurance company cheated some 2000 depositors, mostly poor, with false receipts in last couple of months.

They also blocked the road and chanted slogans demanding punishment of the officials involved in the cheating.

Police rushed to the spot and persuaded them to clear the road to ease traffic movement. Later the demonstrators went to Kotwali police station with a procession.

The victims said that Harun-or-Rashid, a resident of Barera, who has a DPS with Tk 700 per month, came to the insurance company office on Monday to know about his DPS. But to his utter surprise, he learnt that many of his instalments in last several months were not deposited with the office.

As the news of the 'wrongdoing in the company' reached Madhya Barera and Barera areas, the depositors confined Dolly Akhtar, a field worker of the insurance company, to her house at Madhya Barera on Tuesday morning. Being informed, Masud Rana, project director of the insurance company, went to the spot at noon to rescue Dolly but the agitated depositors confined him too.

Informed, police rushed to the spot and rescued Masud Rana and asked the depositors to come to the

office with their complaints, said the victims. Masud Rana was taken to Kotwali police station early yesterday.

"We have been cheated by the insurance company but we were not even allowed to talk with the authorities yesterday," said Meherun Nessa, an elderly woman of Madhya Barera, who has three deposits with the insurance company.

Moyna, 25, wife of a rickshaw-van puller, said, "I have a 10-year term DPS with monthly instalment of Tk 100 and four years of the term has passed. Despite utter poverty, I have been depositing the money for the

welfare of my family but now I am worried due to cheating by the insurance company."

Like them, many other depositors have urged the authorities to take proper steps so that they can get back their deposited money.

Contacted, Mala Acharya, officer-1 (Accounts) of the company, said, "After receiving the allegation on Monday, we investigated the matter and found that Masud Rana took instalments from many depositors by using false receipts for around last nine months. Masud Rana is wholly responsible for the crime and he must give back the

money of the depositors." Mala informed that there are some 20,000 depositors with the insurance company in Mymensingh Sadar upazila, 500 to 600 of them could have fallen victim to cheating by Masud Rana and the amount of cheated money would be Tk 5 to 6 lakh.

Several victims, on the other hand, claimed that more than 2000 depositors were cheated.

Mrinal Kanti Acharya, executive director of Sandhani Life Insurance Company, said, "Maud Rana is under police custody. A departmental case will be lodged against him."

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