

Palm growers at a loss

In eight districts of Rangpur division, they can neither sell fruits, nor extract oil from them after 3 years of yield

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A large number of palm growers in eight districts under Rangpur division are now at a loss as they can neither sell the fruits nor extract oil from them when many of the trees have started yielding after nurture for over three years.

Authorities during the then caretaker government in 2008 encouraged farmers to make palm gardens while many NGOs, who imported palm seeds from Malaysia to produce saplings, launched campaign to popularise it in the northern region, said sources at the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

A good number of farmers engaged in palm cultivation with hope to earn high profit as edible palm oil is produced from the nuts.

NGOs like Green Bangladesh, Swanirvar Shyamol Bangla, Bokhtiar Agro Products and several local nurseries sold about one million palm saplings to farmers for Tk 500-Tk 300 each to make about 400 palm gardens in the region.

Around 3000 individuals also planted about one lakh palm saplings at their house premises, said sources.

After nurture for three to four years, palm saplings grew into mature trees and around half of the trees have borne palm nuts in bunches, much to the delight of the farmers.

But the delight soon turned into disappointment.



PHOTO: STAR

A grower takes care of palm trees at his garden at Mekor Tari village in Nilphamari. Hundreds like him in eight districts of Rangpur division now count loss because of government inaction although they had hoped to earn a good profit after the yield of fruits (inset).



"My trees are now yielding palm nuts but I cannot sell them for want of buyers and I do not know how to extract palm oil from the nuts," said Abdul Halim, 40, of Mekor Tari village in Sadar upazila, who made a palm garden on one bigha (30 decimal) of land after collecting saplings from a nursery four years ago.

Fulen Barman, 45, a farmer at Bhatgaon village of Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, who made a palm garden on his 1.5 acres of

land three years ago, said, "I nursed the palm trees with great care and now they are producing good quantity of palm nuts. But there is no palm oil extracting machine in the area and we do not know any way to utilise the nuts."

"Officials of an NGO named Green Bangladesh persuaded me to make a palm garden at my homestead, saying that I would become rich within a short time as they would purchase nuts for high prices.

But the NGO officials are yet to make any contact although my palm trees are yielding nuts," said Abdul Gaffar of Collegepara village in Jaldhaka upazila.

Hundreds of farmers in Mekor Tari, Koimari, Sholmari, Putimari and Bherbheri villages of Nilphamari district, Baura, Patgram, Kaliganj of Lalmonirhat district, and Islampur, Horinarayanpur, Molani, Baliadangi, Jagannathpur and Horihorpur villages of

Thakurgaon district have similar tales to tell.

Contacted, Shafiur Rahman, divisional manager of Green Bangladesh, said, "Our NGO distributed about five lakh saplings to make palm gardens in Rangpur division. A few other NGOs also distributed large amount of saplings as this project aiming at producing palm oil and a number of other commodities bears bright prospect.

"Wastage of some fruits, especially at the initial stage of yield, is not uncommon in case of palm nuts. At this stage, we are suggesting farmers to extract oil from the nuts through squeezing.

"We will observe the situation till 2015. We have to see whether the palm nuts contain sufficient oil. If the quality, quantity and size of the palm nuts are up to the mark and they do not drop down before maturity, all preparations are ready to set up two big palm oil extracting plants in Chittagong and Dinajpur," he added.

Deputy director of DAE in Rangpur regional office said they are aware of the situation and have contacted with the head office in Dhaka seeking direction in this regard.

He suggested farmers a local method to extract palm oil by boiling the palm nuts and then pressing or rubbing the boiled nuts with hands to get oil as a way to reduce the present wastage of palm nuts.



PHOTO: BANGLA CHOKH

Although this Baherchar-Gohinkhali bridge in Rangabali upazila of Patuakhali was declared 'risky' two years ago, no steps have so far been taken to repair or renovate it due to indifference of the authorities concerned.

3 workers killed at stone quarry

Another dies after falling off mobile phone tower

UNB, Sylhet

Three workers were killed while extracting stone at Shah Arefin quarry in Companiganj upazila yesterday.

Two of the deceased were identified as Abdul Quader, 35, of Companiganj upazila and Alal Hossain, 50, of Kishoreganj district. Ident-

ity of another person could not be known. Witnesses said, when the three workers were climbing a ladder with stones, the ladder collapsed, leaving the trio dead on the spot.

Officer in-charge of Companiganj PS Nandan Kanticonfirmed the incident.

In Jessore, a construction worker died as he fell

off a mobile phone tower at Ghopsana village in Keshabpur upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Jahangir, 23, son of Ansar Sardar of the area.

Locals said, Jahangir slipped off the tower while working on it at Ghopsana village in Keshabpur.

Critically injured, Jahangir was rushed to the

local health complex.

He was later shifted to Jessore General Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

The body was sent to morgue for autopsy and a general diary was filed with Kotwali PS.

Police, however, could not tell the name of the company that owned the tower.

Clinker-laden vessel sinks, 2 missing

A CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Two workers went missing as a clinker-laden cargo vessel capsized in Passur River near Mongla port yesterday morning.

The missing workers are -- Murad, 20, and Shahadat, 22, of Alfadanga upazila in Faridpur.

Abul Kashem Master, joint general secretary of Bangladesh Shipping Workers Federation said, the cargo, Moksedpur-2, sank at Harbaria point while it was unloading clinker from a mother vessel around 6.00am.

Following a huge bang, the vessel sank in the river

within a short time, leaving its two crew missing, Kashem said. Eight others, however, managed to swim ashore.

It happened after a crack suddenly developed at the lower portion of the vessel, he added.

Enamul Haq, Harbor Master Commander of

Mongla Port authority said a joint team of Bangladesh Navy, Coastguards and Port authority have launched drives to rescue the missing workers and salvage the sunken vessel.

A probe body has also been formed to investigate the reason behind the accident.

Young girl, 2 housewives 'commit suicide'

STAR NATIONAL DESK

A young girl and two housewives allegedly committed suicide in Jessore, Jhenidah and Bogra districts yesterday and the day before.

The deceased were identified as Laboni, 18, daughter of Akram of Muradgarh village in Sadar upazila of Jessore, Popy, 20, wife of Al-Amin of Farashpur village in Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah and Kajoli, 21, wife of Zahidul Islam in Adamdighi upazila of Bogra.

Locals said, Laboni Akhter committed suicide by taking poison following a family feud on Friday evening.

Popy took poison on Friday morning after a quarrel with her husband over a family matter.

In an unconscious state, she was admitted to Jessore General Hospital where she died after sometime.

Housewife Kajoli Begum allegedly committed suicide at Dakkhin Gonipur village under Adamdighi upazila of Bogra yesterday noon.

Police quoting the deceased's family members said that a feud over dowry demand might be the reason behind the suicide.

Inspector (Investigation) of Adamdighi PS Abdul Mottaleb said the body was sent to morgue for autopsy.

Unnatural death (UD) cases were lodged in connection with all the three incidents.

PROTESTS ON AGAINST FRIDAY'S ANARCHY



PHOTO: STAR

Protest against Friday's attacks on newsmen and Shaheed Minars and their sympathisers continued across the country yesterday. From top: 1) People bring out a procession from Gonojagoron Mancha in Magura town, 2) similar procession in Dinajpur town, 3) torch procession on the main road of Patuakhali town, 4) the members of Panchagarh Press Club hold a silent procession, 5) journalists form a human chain in front of Munshiganj Press Club, and 6) pro hartal activists torch a microbus, carrying newspaper, in Joypurhat.