

Profit gets priority over safety

Harmful chemicals used in jackfruits

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Tangail

Harmful chemicals are widely used in Tangail district to quicken the ripening of jackfruits to make wind-fall profits from early sales.

Jackfruit, the country's national fruit, is produced in huge quantities every year in four hilly upazilas of the district -- Madhupur, Ghatail, Sakhipur and Mirzapur. Traders send much of the produce to other districts, including the capital, during the season.

Wholesalers said that to ripen a jackfruit early, they pierce a hole in it with an iron rod and inject chemicals -- calcium carbide, ethrel, copper sulfide, ripen etc -- into the hole. The fruits are then piled up and kept covered by polythene sheets until they ripen, which usually takes less than 24 hours.

Some traders spray chemicals on jackfruits to ripen them.

Not only jackfruits, traders use chemicals on all seasonal fruits that grow abundantly in the district, such as pineapples, bananas and mangoes, though they are well aware of the hazardous impacts on health.

Consumers of such fruits become vulnerable to various diseases, including cancer, liver and kidney disorders, asthma and dysentery, said Nazrul Islam, civil surgeon of Tangail.

Jackfruits bring handsome profits to growers and are often seen as an alternative to rice among the poor for several months during the rainy season, local people and traders say. But the taste declines due to their premature ripening.

There are at least 273 government-approved chemical shops in Madhupur upazila alone. Besides, plenty more unauthorised chemical shops have sprouted in all the upazilas of the district.



Toxic chemicals are being applied to jackfruits in Ghatail of Tangail so that they ripe faster.

PHOTO: STAR

Eyeball

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Sichuan saying, cleaning the eyes makes the beauty of life more visible, and some people are prepared to go under the knife to make sure they don't miss a thing. Nicknamed "knife-blade eye cleaning", the practice of scraping a person's eyeballs and eyelids with sharp utensils has been a part of Chinese culture ever since ancient times.

The craft was supposedly popularized by brothers Zhou Chengfu and Zhou Chengyin, who followed their father's footsteps and excelled in the technique of servicing the eyeballs, ears and necks of clients, but in recent years it has almost died out. Still, if you look hard enough, you can still find eye-cleaning stands even in modern cities like Sichuan's capital, Chengdu.

53-year-old Liu Deyuan has been successfully running his small eye-cleaning business for 7 years, offering a head shave and an eye scrape for just RMB5. With many long-term clients lining up to get their eyes cleaned every month, the skilled barber says business is still pretty good.

3 leaders jailed

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It also fined him Tk 1,000.

He had apologised to the court for the provocative and derogatory comments he had made about the court.

The Jamaat leaders have to pay the fine within seven days from yesterday or else serve two more weeks in jail. The sentence of Rafiqul and Azad will begin from the date of their arrest or from the date of their surrender before the tribunal.

It all began on February 4, a day before the tribunal delivered the verdict against Jamaat leader Quader Mollah. Jamaat leaders Selim and Azad at a Jamaat rally in Motijheel made derogatory and provocative comments about the tribunals and ongoing trials there.

Later in the day, Rafiqul

joined in and issued a press release with similar comments about the tribunal and its cases.

On February 7, the tribunal asked the trio to explain as to why contempt of court proceedings should not be initiated against them for their comments.

The court had issued the notice on its own following reports published in The Daily Star and Bangla daily Prothom Alo on February 5.

On February 5, the Prothom Alo quoted Selim as saying, "There is no scope for the controversial tribunal to deliver any verdict if the country is to be saved from a civil war."

The daily quoted Azad as saying at the same programme, "This tribunal cannot exist any more."

The Daily Star, in a report headlined, "Jamaat warns of civil war", quoted Rafiqul as saying, "Don't push the country into a civil war by delivering one-sided verdicts against our leaders. If anything happens to Quader Mollah, every house will be on fire."

On March 6, the court ordered the police to arrest the Jamaat leaders and produce them before the court for "deliberately avoiding" appearance before the tribunal in connection with the contempt of court ruling.

Selim was arrested but the police claimed that Rafiqul and Azad were on the run.

On June 2, Selim apologised unconditionally before the tribunal.

About Selim, the tribunal in its order yesterday

said, "In the name of freedom of speech, [he] threatened the rule of law and lawful authority of the tribunal ... By such utterances, he clearly intended to attack and disparage the lawful authority of the tribunal. This is seriously contemptuous indeed."

"But since he offered unconditional apology before this tribunal we take a lenient view in punishing him," the court said.

However, Tajul Islam, counsel for Selim, he would file a writ petition before the High Court challenging the judgment against his client since there was no provision for appeal regarding the matter.

About Azad's remark, the court said Azad, as a public representative, has minimum acumen about

the judiciary and the law.

"But his utterance at a public meeting and his subsequent action in not appearing before the tribunal, in spite of taking adjournment to that effect on several occasions, certainly constitute and prove contempt of this tribunal beyond reasonable doubt," it said.

Regarding Rafiqul, the court said, "He has made open threats against the adjudicators of the tribunal in a particular case as well as threatened to wage a civil war, which are tantamount to provoking and inciting anarchy in the country and it certainly constitutes the offence of contempt of this tribunal beyond reasonable doubt."

"The act of flouting and disobedience of order of a court of law itself is con-

temptuous."

The police had failed to arrest Azad and Rafiqul even though they had been leading the lives of high profile political leaders. They duo had been seen in public, the tribunal said yesterday.

Azad even attended a parliament session recently and had delivered a speech at a public meeting in Motijheel in May and law enforcers had provided the meeting with security.

Meanwhile, the Jamaat in a press release claimed that ruling lawmakers and ministers were not asked to show up before the court in connection with contempt. It said its leaders did not show up before the court due to security reasons.

It claimed that the hartal was called to protest the "nationwide mass

arrests and mass torture" of its leaders and to demand the release of its arrested leaders and restoration of the caretaker government system.

It may be mentioned that only Rafiqul and Azad had not apologised to Tribunal-2 after contempt rules were issued. Even ministers like MK Alamgir, Suranjit Sengupta and Matia Chowdhury had sought the tribunal's forgiveness in connection with contempt.

Meanwhile, two criminals riding on a motorbike hurled three handmade bombs at the tribunal building's entrance gate near Shishu Academy last night. "One of the bombs exploded," said Sirajul Islam, OC of Shabbagh Police Station.

ELECTION RULES VIOLATION

Liton, Mansur asked to explain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Rajshahi

Rajshahi election office on Saturday served notices on three persons, including mayoral aspirant AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, for violating the electoral laws while inaugurating the city's gas line.

The other recipients of the notice are Petrobangla Chairman Hossain Mansur and Paschimanchol Gas Company Limited (PGCL) General Manager Rejaul Islam Khan.

Returning Officer Shubhash Chandra Sarker, in the notice, asked them to

explain within 24 hours why they had influenced the upcoming city corporation polls by inaugurating the gas line.

The notice mentioned that lawmaker Fazle Hossain Badsha, also Liton's election committee chief, attended the gas inauguration programme on Friday. The posters and banners were hung around the inauguration venue seeking votes for Liton, it said.

Petrobangla chairman and Liton submitted their replies to the returning officer yesterday afternoon.

Liton, in his reply, argued that the allegation was moti-

vated as inauguration of the gas line was a part of the government's regular development works, but not of the city corporation, said Nawsher Ali, Liton's chief election agent.

He also explained that Badsha had attended the programme as a lawmaker of the constituency, but not as his election committee's chief.

"We will study their replies," said returning officer Sarker.

"We will give our comments, and send those to the Election Commission in Dhaka to get their final decision (in this regard)," he added.

MK Anwar

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setting outside parliament.

The party did not want to participate in any debate over the issue inside parliament, but was interested to hold discussion on it, he said.

"Lawmakers can debate in the House over different issues, but there is no scope for discussion (on any issue inside parliament)," he added.

Anwar, also a standing committee member of BNP, was speaking as the chief guest at a protest rally in the Jatiya Press Club.

He criticised the ruling party leaders for saying that BNP had no right to say anything on the issue as the party withdrew the adjournment notice on it in parliament.

If they [BNP] had kept the notice in the House, the government would have sent it for voice votes and killed the issue forever, Anwar observed.

Money hardly whitens

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Cordial Samela flat is assumed at Tk 6,000 per square feet, the flat would cost more than Tk 75 lakh. So, the sale of the flat generated black money of at least Tk 48 lakh.

The second case involves a flat at Wireless Gate in Mohakhali area. Sanchari Housing sold a 950-square-foot flat for Tk 28.67 lakh at a rate of Tk 3,017 per square feet. But the actual price is no less than Tk 8,000 per square feet. This deal generated black money of nearly Tk 50 lakh.

The third case is about a plot of land developed by Eastern Housing Ltd at Meradia. The sale price of a 2.5-katha (4.12 decimal) plot was shown at Tk 10.50 lakh, whereas its actual price is at least Tk 40 lakh. So, around Tk 30 lakh of illegal money was generated through the deal.

Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh said it has around 20,000 unsold flats right now. If the purchase and sale of a flat generates at least Tk 20 lakh in black or untaxed money, the total amount would be a whopping Tk 4,000 crore.

"Everyone hides the actual price of property during registration to evade tax. Government revenue from land tax

would be 10 times higher if the actual price of property were taken into account," an official of Teigaon Land Office told The Daily Star, asking not to be named.

Though successive governments have given amnesty on black money since the country's liberation, the facility failed to generate substantial revenues. According to National Board of Revenue data, a total of Tk 13,516 crore was whitened between 1971 and April 2013, and the government received only Tk 1,407 crore as tax.

It clearly shows the response had been poor, and the impact was not even marginal considering the presence of an enormous amount of black money -- not less than 40 percent (Tk 415,194 crore) of the country's GDP, according to the finance minister's post budget briefing on Friday.

Black money is usually generated in certain sectors -- real estate, jewellery, financial market, public procurement, non-profit organisations, external trade, international transactions involving tax havens and the informal service sector.

Analysts said amnesty on black money in the real estate sector had not only generated more illegal wealth in the past, but also

pushed up property prices over the years.

A flat, which would cost between Tk 32 lakh and Tk 35 lakh eight years ago, now has a price tag of more than Tk 2 crore, Mubasshar Hussein, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

"The prices of construction materials did not show any significant increase. So, the reasons for the phenomenal rise in flat prices are the skyrocketing prices of land and the injection of black money into the real estate sector," he said.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute, believes the government will not get a substantial amount of tax through the amnesty on black money in the real estate sector. The move will instead generate more black money in the economy.

He suggested introducing capital gains tax to prevent tax evasion and under-pricing of property values.

"Introduction of capital gains tax can stop the under-pricing of property values and accordingly, generation of black money will go down," said Mansur, who is a former top International Monetary Fund official.

Debapriya can speak for CPD

Think-tank reacts to Ashraf's comments

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Centre for Policy Dialogue yesterday reacted to Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam's questioning of Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya's "right to comment" on the budget proposal on behalf of the Dhaka-based think-tank.

Speaking at a discussion on Saturday, the minister said Debapriya had no right to make comment like the one he made under the banner of the CPD.

"Usually, the CPD chief executive makes such remarks after every budget. It's not Debapriya, but Mustafizur Rahman who is the chief executive of the CPD. Debapriya is a former chief executive of the CPD. So, he has no right to make such comments on behalf of the CPD," Ashraf had said.

A press statement issued by CPD Executive Director Mustafizur Rahman yesterday said, "In view of this [Ashraf's comment], the CPD would like to make it clear that it is the prerogative of the CPD management to decide who will present CPD's analysis on behalf of the team."

It added Debapriya was a distinguished fellow of the CPD and his presentation at the media briefing held by CPD on June 7 was based on CPD's assessment of the budget, which was prepared by the team of professionals at the organisation.

Presentation and observations made by Bhattacharya reflected the views of the entire team that also included the executive director of the CPD, the statement said.

Criminal killed in 'gunfight'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged carjacker was killed in a "gunfight" between his cohorts and DB police in the capital's Ramna Park area early yesterday.

The dead is Zakir Hossain Raju, 30, from Barguna district.

Acting on secret information that a white private car was going towards Ramna after violating a police signal from Teigaon industrial area, a team of Detective Branch (DB) of police chased the car from Bailey Road at around 3:00am, said Asaduzzaman, senior assistant commissioner of DB police.

When the car reached near Ramna Chinese Restaurant gate, the carjackers opened fire on them, triggering a "gunfight," he said.

At one stage of the "gunfight", Zakir was caught in the line of fire while the rest managed to flee the scene, claimed Asaduzzaman.

The injured was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Police seized the car and recovered a pistol and three bullets. The car was hijacked from the capital's Dhanmondi area on May 5.

EC prepares

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To ensure a free and fair poll, the EC was conducting training programmes for the candidates and election officials in the city corporation areas.

At Madan Mohan College in Sylhet, the commission ended its two-day training on electoral rules for 2,811 officials.

Yesterday, election officials held a mock voting through electronic voting machines (EVM) at three centres of ward no. 2 in Sylhet city while thousands gathered at ward no. 8 in Rajshahi city as the regional election office held trial voting there using EVMs.

Law enforcement agencies have already set up several checkpoints in the four cities on security grounds.

Candidates who have been conducting door-to-door electoral campaign for more than two weeks were revving up their campaign activities yesterday as the time was running out fast.

Hefajat men cut down 1,255 trees

Ashraf tells Sangsad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefajat-e Islam men chopped down 1,255 trees during its May 5 mayhem in the capital's Bijoynagar, Paltan and Motijheel areas, LGRD Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam told parliament yesterday.

They also destroyed 3,000-metre footpaths, 3,540-metre roads, 2,800-metre curbstones, 1,055-square-metre grills, 2,439-sqm barbed fences, and eight traffic signals during the mayhem, he added.

Replying to the lawmakers' queries, Ashrafur, also general secretary of ruling Awami League, said Dhaka South City Corporation had taken up a project worth Tk 3.33 crore on emergency basis to repair the damage.

Due to the DSCC budget crunch, he said, repair works

would be financed by the money taken from non-development budget.

The minister informed parliament that the Hefajat men had also vandalised electric poles, fittings, lights, switches, batteries, wires and electric pipes and so on during the violence.

Replying to another query, the LGRD minister said the "national taskforce on river and canal recovery" and Dhaka Wasa with the assistance of Dhaka Deputy Commissioner's office had recovered the city's 26 canals.

"Water is flowing freely in those canals now," he said.

Ashrafur also said Dhaka Wasa had already taken two projects to develop 17 canals.

"There will be no scope for grabbing canals illegally once these projects are completed," the minister added.

Tortured, left to die

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But sometime later she regained her consciousness and started crying for help. Hearing her scream, two neighbours -- Nazmul, 40, and Sohrab Ali, 45 -- rescued her.

"Thus I escaped death," Fahima said.

Despite extensive bleeding from her sex organ, which continued for three days in hospital, Fahima's in-laws forcibly took her

back home after Nazmul and Sohrab rescued her.

Concerned over her safety, Nazmul contacted one of Fahima's relatives, Abul Hashem. She was then rescued from her in-law's house around 7:30am and taken to hospital.

Doctors at the Maderganj upazila health complex, where she had been treated until a few days ago, said her condition was not critical

but she would take time to recover and walk again.

Meanwhile, Fahima has filed a case against five members of her in-laws' family, including her husband, under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

The accused went into hiding following the incident, said investigating officer Abdul Gani of Maderganj Police Station.