



Bomang Raja U Cha Prue, along with special guests, speaking at the book launch and photography exhibition event in Bandarban

Plight of a tiny community

Photography exhibition and book launch on Chaks of Bandarban

ZIA NAZMUL ISLAM

One of the tiniest minorities in Bangladesh, the Chak of Bandarban became the focal point of interest on 15th of June, 2013. A weeklong photography exhibition and a book launch event took place at Shishu Academy in Bandarban town. Naming it “Ambushed by Greed: the Chak Story” the event started at 2:30 pm and ended at 5:00 pm.

The event is organized by Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD). The displayed photographs are taken by Philip Gain, director of SEHD. Since 2005, he has been researching on Chak communities in Bangladesh.

The photographs are focused on Chak tradition and culture. Many of the photographs on display portray the desperate plight this small community is going through.

A book called “The Chaks: Life on the Fringe” was distributed for free to the audience. The book contains statistics and history the community. It features articles and research reports conducted by researchers Khadiza Khanam, Partha Shankar Saba, Lucille Sircar and Philip Gain.

Bomang Raja of Bandarban Bomang Circle, U Cha Prue was the chief guest. Special guests were; Mong Mong Chak, ex-officer Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, ZuamLian Amlai, Chairperson of the Movement for the Protection of Forest and Land Rights and Professor Osman Gani, President of Bandarban Press Club. A primary school teacher of Baishiri Chakpara Dhung Cha Ong Chak and Bandarban based young computer teacher Ong Jai Wei Chak also spoke on the event.

After the formal inauguration of photography exhibition and book launch, a discussion panel delivered speeches. The discussion was

moderated by Philip Gain. Later, the floor was open to the audience for QA session.

Bandarban Shishu Academy was full well before time of inauguration. Among the audience, many were from the Chak community who live across Bandarban district.

The Chaks from Badurjhiri village who have recently been forced to leave their ancestral homeland in fear of bandits and have taken shelter at Baishiri Chakparas were the center of interest. Around 20 of them joined the event to voice their grievances.

Before the event, in a short interview Bomang Raja U Cha Prue thanked the organizers for the event. He added that the displayed photographs are lively and gave his blessing. He believes that the event will create an impact on various communities in Bandarban.

Ex-officer of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, Mong Mong Chak said, “Such event is immensely important – a tiny community like the Chak must be introduced to the rest of the country. Often by greed, small minorities become target of land grabbers. Such unwarranted acts must come into the light”.

Professor Osman Gani, President of Bandarban Press Club said, “Bandarban is a district of brotherly harmony. People are united and any community facing difficulty will be helped by all other communities in the district”.

After the event young computer teacher of Chak community Ong Jai Wei Chak said, “Building awareness to help the Chak community is essential and such event is just the first step. Before, no steps were taken to save the lands of the Chaks”. He also added that more peaceful protests methods can be utilized. He mentioned that a human-chain in front DC office could be arranged.

A volunteer of the event, Sharon, studying at Bandarban Govt. College mentioned that Bandarban is a prime example of ethnic social cohesion. A young determined young woman Sharon feels that the Chaks will overcome the recent difficulties and survive as a proud community.

Philip Gain, the organizer of the event and Director of SEHD was satisfied with the success of the event. He said that the event impacts greatly on the locals. All communities living in Bandarban will be aware of the unfortunate events that are affecting the Chaks. He added that a similar event had held in Dhaka 2011, which also was a success.

It must be mentioned that there is not more than 3,000 Chaks in Bangladesh. The expansions of rubber and tobacco plantation have already caused eviction two Chak villages. The Chaks depend on Jhum cultivation and uncultivated vegetation for food. Since the introduction of rubber and tobacco, their land is becoming a prime target. Rubber and tobacco farming not only forcing the Chaks to abandon their lands but also creates imbalance in the ecosystem, thus disables the land for any other cultivation.

In 2008 villagers of Longodujhiri (Khal) Chakpara, a remote Chak village had to flee in fear of bandits and intimidation. Now, again in Badurjhiri village, in the face of attack of bandits, the Chaks are in the process of eviction. They have taken shelter in Baishiri Chakparas – they are now living in appalling conditions. All who participated in the event hopes that local administration and law enforcement agencies will take appropriate measures to enable the evicted Chaks to return to their homeland.

The Photo exhibition is open for all to enjoy every day from 15 to 21 July between 3:00pm and 8:00pm.

Ishwardi's litchi legacy

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU , Pabna

Riaz Sardar of Diar Shahpur village in Ishwardi Upazila earned at least Tk. 50 lakh from his litchi orchard in the last two years. He started his orchard with only 16 litchi trees 15 years ago. There are over 500 farmers, mostly marginal, who have turned into merchant farmers in litchi business in the Ishwardi upazila of Pabna.

Lichi, one of Bangladesh's most popular sweet and succulent summer fruits grows abundantly in many northern districts. Farmers of Ishwardi Upazila of Pabna beside river Padma have brought remarkable revolution in litchi within 20 years.

Farmers of Ishwardi Upazila claimed that they will earn Tk. 500 crore from Litchi orchards in the Ishwardi upazila this year, which will be the second highest Litchi production in the country.

“Last year, farmers of Ishwardi produced litchi worth Tk. 300 crore. This year, farmers are expecting to produce litchi of Tk 500 crore,” said Kitab Ali Mondol, a merchant litchi producer and the founder secretary of Farmers Association of Ishwardi. “The production is increasing gradually”, he added.

He claimed that Ishwardi upazila has now reached the top position in litchi cultivation, although according to Agriculture Department, Dinajpur is the highest litchi producing district in the country.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), Pabna, a total of 3,160 hector of land is brought under litchi cultivation in the district. “Of the total land, thousands of orchards in 1,500 hector land are filled with litchi trees expecting to produce at least 24 thousand metric tons of fruit”, said ABM Mostafizur Rahman,

deputy director of DAE. This is the second highest litchi producing zone across the country, he claimed.

At least 20 to 30 villages of Silimpur and Shahapur union of Ishwardi upazila are renowned for litchi cultivation. Farmers in Pakshey, Shahapur, Solimpur, Joynagar, Maniknagar, Rooppur, Awtapara and few other villages of the upazila are now busy with their orchards to process litchis for selling. Bumper production and the handsome price inspire the farmers to increase litchi cultivation every year.

Ishwardi litchi producers organized traditional 'Litchi fair' at Mirkamari field of the Ishwardi upazila on May, 25. Litchi producers of Ishwardi upazila and the 'Price Commission for Agricultural products' jointly organized the fair to introduce the variety of the juicy summer fruit.

Information minister, Hasanul Haque Inu, inaugurated the 'Litchi fair'. President of price commission, Md. Saidul Haque who is also the administrator of Pabna Zila Parishad, chaired the program while the local elites and the litchi producers spoke on the occasion.

Over 3 hundred litchi producers across the country joined the festival. There were 50 varieties of litchis displayed in the fair.

Siddikur Rahman Moyez, president of Farmers Association, claimed there are over five hundred litchi producers in Ishwardi who started their litchi orchards with a small budget 15 to 20 years ago, but now own large litchi orchards.

Farmers prefer litchi cultivation, as they sometimes face huge loss in paddy and other crops. Therefore, litchi cultivating areas are increasing every year Moyez added that the weather and soil are suitable here in Ishwardi upazila for litchi cultivation too.



PHOTO: STAR

Various kinds litchis are on display at a litchi fair at Ishwardi in Pabna

Potters having bad time, many leaving profession

Their produces no longer in demand

RABIUL HASAN, Chapainawabganj

Hundreds of potters in the district are struggling for survival as their traditional products, serving especially the rural people for centuries, are no longer in demand.

Lack of marketing facilities and price hike of raw materials add to the situation.

Amid serious hardship, potter Saptomi Paul, 43, of Natun Bazar has recently sold out her house and started living on a roadside *khas* land in the area.

"Presently I earn only Tk 90 to 100 a day which is much less than the earning of a day labour," she said.

"Earlier we could earn a decent living by selling our products in the area as well as other districts. But gone are the days," said Meneka Rani Paul, 45, of Chunaripara village of Baroghoria union in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila.

Her five sons and two daughters are also engaged in the traditional business at Chunaripara village of Baroghoria union in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila.

The potters usually make different domestic utensils like plates, bowls, cooking pots. But these traditional earthen items have greatly lost their attraction, both in urban and rural areas, as utensils made of plastic, steel or melamine have come into popular use.

Many people belonging to over 150 potter families in Natun Bazar, Chunaripara, Bazarpara and Puraton Bazar of Baroghoria union of Chapainawabganj Sadar



PHOTO: STAR

Two potters giving final touches to their items at Baroghoria Chunaripara village in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila. However, uncertainty has gripped the traditional cottage industry due to falling demand of earthenware.

upazila have left their traditional profession as their product have hardly any place in the local markets, said potter Godadhar Paul of Chunaripara village.

Often potters find it hard to recover even their production cost as the prices of raw materials like earth, firewood, and colour have gone up but prices of pottery items cannot be raised due to its low demand, he added.

"Now a potter can hardly earn Tk 80 to 100 a day which

is too inadequate to maintain a family. And so, the traditional artists are leaving the profession and becoming rickshaw pullers or day labourers to earn a living," said potter Khagen Chandra Paul of Natun Bazar.

Potters have urged the government and non-government organisations to take steps to save the traditional cottage industry as well as the livelihood of hundreds of the potters in Chapainawabganj district.

AL leader killed over land dispute

A CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A local Awami League leader was stabbed to death over a piece of disputed land at Odankathi village in Sadar upazila on Sunday night.

The deceased was identified as Matiur Rahman Khan, 55, organising secretary of 5 no Tona union unit AL.

Family sources said, one Hasina Begum of the area leased the land from Matiur for Tk 19 thousand 13 years ago.

Matiur returned the money a few days ago. But Hasina's brothers declined to return the land, claiming that Matiur had already sold the land.

Following this, one Yasuf Sarder called Matiur out of his home and took him to nearby police lines area on Sunday evening.

A gang of 14/15 attacked Matiur with sharp weapons at Royerkathi, leaving him dead on the spot at about 8:45pm.

Yasuf and another Nurul Islam were arrested in connection with the incident, said Md Abdur Razzak, officer in-charge of Pirojpur police station.

PS besieged demanding arrest of drug peddlers

UNB, Sathkira

Residents in Garekanda area of the district town besige Sadar police station yesterday morning demanding an end to illegal drug trading and arrest of drug peddlers.

They formed a human chain in front of local Press club in the town at about 10am, demanding the arrest of drug peddlers and exemplary punishment of them.

They left the police station when officer in-charge M. Amanullah assured them of meeting their demands.

A gang attacked local people and stabbed one Sirajul Islam as they protested against their drug bushiness on June 13.

Arum shoot farming costs little, brings high profit

DAE encouraging cultivation of the nutritious vegetable in more areas of Lalmonirhat, Bogra

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Farmers of Lalmonirhat and Bogra districts are cultivating arum for shoots, locally known as *kachur lati*, on more areas of land as the nutritious vegetable brings high profit.

Latiraj variety of arum sees successful cultivation in Lalmonirhat district due to suitability of the soil and necessary help from the agriculture department, reports our correspondent.

The initiative, relatively new in the district, brings high profit to the farmers and bears bright prospect of replacing large-scale cultivation of tobacco in this region, agriculture officials said.

Five hundred acres of land have been brought under arum cultivation this year in five upazilas of the district against only 12 acres last year, said sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Lalmonirhat.

"The DAE office has arranged training programmes for arum cultivation and carried out campaign for popularising it. We hope arum cultivation will help to uproot tobacco cultivation in the district," said M o h a m m a d Nuruzzaman, Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila agriculture officer.

"Latiraj variety of arum is plated early January. The harvest starts in mid-April and the yield continues for eight months till mid-December. A farmer gets 3 to 5 maunds of yield from each decimal of land," said Nurul Haque, arum grower at Baninagar village of Kaliganj upazila.



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer holds arum shoots, locally called *kachur lati*, at his field at Karnopur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila that sees increasing cultivation of the nutritious vegetable due to its high demand and low farming cost.

"Arum cultivation involves very little cost as it requires only some organic fertiliser and no insecticide. Cattle do not eat it and labour cost is saved as this vegetable grows normally," said Shahjahan Miah of Karnopur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

Bivu Chandro Sen of Barobari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar said, "I have cultivated arum, four bighas of land spending Tk 18 thousand this year. I have already earned over Tk 30 thousand and hope to earn at least Tk 3 lakh after meeting up family requirement till December.

Now one kg of arum lati is selling for Tk 18 to 20 per kg in the local market and the price will see a good rise after two or three months, locals said.

Our Bogra Correspondent reports: Farmers in the district are expecting huge production of arum in the current season.

Around 5,500 hectares of land have been brought under arum cultivation as the farmers of Sadar, Shajahanpur, Gabtoli, Dupchanchia, Adamdighi and Shibganj upazilas of the district have cultivated the vegetable on larger than usual areas of land this year, said sources at Bogra DAE office.

Authorities arrange trainings and provide necessary agro-inputs and easy-term agriculture loans to the farmers for cultivation of arum and other vegetables, they said.

Farid Uddin of Joybangla More under Rajapur union of Sadar upazila said he cultivated arum on 1.2 bighas of land spending Tk 4,000 and expecting Tk 12,000 as profit from there.

Alamgir Hossain of Sujabad area under Madla union said this year he cultivated arum on four bighas of land spending Tk around 18,000 and expecting profit of Tk around 30,000.