

Struggle of two widowsLemon farmers enjoys profit

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Projpur

Fifty-four years old widow Nilima Khan who lost her husband after three years of marriage, is strolling with life for about 36 years.

Another thirty years old widow Bibha Halder has just started her struggle like Nilima with two children after the death of her husband.

Nilima's daughter from Jonardhon Mondol of Babla village under Sriramakathi union in Nazirpur upazila married Shukumer Chandro Khan at the age of 14 just three years after Bangladesh became free from Pakistan. Unfortunately she lost her life partner who was suffering from an unidentified disease; three years after their marriage, when she was 17 years old.

Nilima's husband left her with their only son Borun Chandro who has nine months old at the time of his father's demise. Nilima never dreamt of settling down with another man, even though she was an adolescent during her husband's death.

As Nilima's husband left no land, she had to support her life by working at others people's houses as a domestic help. Sometimes she worked as a day laborer to support her family.

"Women are born for marrying only once. So I had never dreamt of building another new family," Nilima made the speech from her deep faith of a women's feeling when asked as to why she had not remarried.

She also said, "I had to work hard to lead my life and take care of my child."

Though Nilima's son is an aged youth who works in a melamine factory in Dhaka as a worker, he cannot give any monetary support to his mother's family.



PHOTO : STAR

Nilima Khan; along with her daughter in law Anita Rani Khan and her grandchild. Inset: Bibha Halder a widow; making Pati which is a source of her livelihood.

various diseases. He has to support himself through difficulty. So he cannot bear my family expense and I don't force him," said Nilima.

Now Nilima has to bear the expense of four members; her daughter in law Anita Rani Khan who helps her out with household chores, her two grandchildren Bondhon a class two student and Annona aged 3 and herself.

Currently, she supports her life as well as her families by producing puffed rice.

A project named Resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, Leadership and Learning (RE-CALL) Project by Dak Diye Jai funded by UK Aid and Stimulating Household Improvements Resulting in Economic Empowerment (SHIREE) has given her some relief from her pain, as they have given her some

monetary help last year for buying paddy.

"Last year I was given 8.5 maunds (measurement of weight) of paddy for making puffed rice also three goats. After selling them, I made a decent profit. Now I am the owner of 20 maunds of paddy and also the owner of three goats," said Nilima proudly.

"In the past, I had led a very hardened life. In spite of being a woman, I had to work in the roads." "I would not have faced such troubles if I could get help beforehand," she demanded.

Like Nilima, late Nirmol Halder's wife Bibha Halder of Sakharikathi village has started her struggle with her two children.

"All the land my husband owned has been sold to pay for his treatments, I am struggling to run my three member family" said Bibha.

"Though I do not think for myself, I am anxious about my children's educa-

tion," she said.

She received help of TK 10,000 for making Pati from the project. But it is not enough for her. She need more help. "I earn TK 30-40 selling per pati. It is not enough at the moment," she demanded.

All the beneficiaries of the project receives TK 2,800 after working 16 days under a program named Cash for Work. Through this program village mud roads, school fields, ponds and some houses were developed.

"We do not receive enough funds to meet our demands. After starting the project in our area, our deprived people had some monetary help from them and they also repaired some roads in our locality," said Sheikh Aktheruzzaman Gaus chairman of Shakharikathi union parisdad in Nazirpur upazila. "I personally greet them for their noble work," he praised.

SHYKH SERAJ

I visited Raghunathpur back in 2004 and was introduced to a Lemon farmer named Ibrahim Sarkar. An ambitious elderly man, he pioneered profitable lemon farming in this region and thus opened the door for a lot of local farmers to be self-sufficient. He passed away a few years back but his endeavors didn't stop. We visited Raghunathpur again recently to find out the consequences of the quest that Ibrahim Sarkar had once started.

I met Mainuddin, a thriving lemon farmer and spoke to him. He has a fourteen katha (measurement of land) worth lemon orchard that contains about 1,500 trees. I visited his orchard. The lemons are healthy and luscious and it is Mainuddin's key profitable crop. He added that he is highly regarded as a people of the area because of his success as a lemon farmer. He purchased new lands, got his four daughters married and runs his household smoothly.

The locals are getting more inclined to producing lemon alongside vegetables and fish farming than paddy and other key crops because lemon farming according is more profitable. He pointed out some drawbacks the attack of a certain disease or bacteria to be precise, because of which the lemon loses its natural colour and the farmers subsequently do not get fair price. When asked about the local Agricultural Department's intervention, he said that they have been reluctant about providing them (farmers) proper solutions.

It's amazing how a farming method expands through a handful of people, starting with Ibrahim Sarkar and Mainuddin and reaching other farmers. Chan Miah is one of them. After retiring from his job, he felt like contribution

rather than passing time with trifle activities and hence got involved in producing lemon. The size of his orchard is twelve Katha. His yearly income from the orchard has now peaked to Tk. 1 to 1.5 lakh although according to him, he has earned Tk. 2 lakh in his first year of farming because the demand for lemon was greater back then. But he still manages to earn around Tk. 3 to Tk. 3.5 lakh every year as he produces more lemons than ever.

Like Mainuddin, Chan Miah too, described the attack of certain bacteria and insects as the key issues in producing lemons. To prevent this, they require timely and proper irrigation and pesticides. They usually use machines for irrigation but these machines becomes unavailable during the IRRI seasons as the rice fields all around requires irrigation at that time, and they get deprived.

Profitable Lemon farming has become a booming field through the whole region and it's benefitting the farmers more than ever before. I meet with retired Army Sergeant Harun Ur Rashid who took up farming as a profession. He started off with a Lemon orchard and earned quite well from it in eight years time.

Starting with key cash crops like rice and jute on the lands he owns, he, however, finally landed on lemon farming as it is more profitable than the aforementioned crops. He added that the cost of producing a maund of rice is Tk. 800 to Tk. 850 taka and they sell for 500 taka. So, there was an obvious loss of Tk. three hundred per maund. This is why he and fellow farmers shifted to Lemon farming. He's been producing lemons for the last four years on his five katha worth orchard. He started off with around Tk. five to seven thousand included planting and main-

tenance cost. The lemon came out and matured after a year and he earned Tk. fifty thousand. His overall income so far from the orchard sums up to Tk. two lakh that includes Tk. twenty five thousand in the current year alone. He added that there are more lemons in the orchard that are yet to be picked from the trees and his estimated profit from the remaining lemons are more than twenty thousand and according to him, the overall benefit from this year would be Tk. Seventy to Tk. Seventy Five thousand.

Lemon in this region is of a high value crop. Farmers are inclined towards such crops out of profitable significance. And the more they are switching, the scope of rice and other crops are declining. Although the downward rate hasn't reached to an alarming stage yet, the way farmers are shifting to other crops, it will be soon. The question is why the farmers are losing interest in rice farming? We asked Mr. Harun Ur Rashid. He said that he's aware of this matter but the preference in choosing lemon was

highly effective for his and others' survival as farmers. He also added that if producing rice was more profitable, they would certainly choose that.

We know that Sylhet and Moulavibazar are the main regions for Lemon farming. Other than that, Narsingdi is well known for producing a variety of Lemon called Colombo that is exported to foreign countries. Lemon farming in Mymensingh once originated through the hands of Ibrahim Sarkar and it has now expanded mile further. But in recent times it has been difficult for the farmers due to different diseases of Lemon and other issues. According to the farmers, the Agriculture Extension Department has been reluctant and are failing to keep up with farmers' enthusiasm of adopting new crop farming and techniques and hence the problem remains. We hope that the relevant bodies will take proper measurement to ensure the flourishing lemon farmers are kept interested and to help make Ibrahim Sarkar's dreams come true.



PHOTO: STAR

The luscious big lemons of Raghunathpur.



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PHOTO: STAR

A new type of fungal infection wreaks havoc on aman field at Nashipur village in Dinajpur Sadar upazila.

Fungal infection in aman plants worries farmers

100 hectares of land in 4 upazilas of Dinajpur affected by the disease

KONGKON KARMAKER,
Dinajpur

A new type of fungal infection in just matured aman plants worries the farmers ahead of the paddy harvest in different areas of the district.

The infection, noticed first only a couple of days ago, has already been reported in Parbatipur, Chirirbandar, Khansama and Dinajpur Sadar upazilas, said farmers and the sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) of Dinajpur.

"Aman plants on around five bighas of my land have been affected with the fungal infection that turns the mature grains yellow,

then black, followed by rapid disappearance of the grains," said Md Jahrul Islam of Manmathapur village under Parbatipur upazila.

Biplob Kumar Mohanta, Chirirbandar upazila officer of DAE, said at least 25 hectares of aman land there is already affected with fungal disease. They have advised the farmers to use anti-fungal medicine.

Contacted, Md Anwarul Alam, deputy director of DAE of Dinajpur, said the fungal disease identified as Falls Smart, termed by local farmers as laxmi gu, has already affected the BRR1-49 variety on around 100 hectares of land.

"We are advising the farmers to use prescribed anti-fungal doses. The situation is under control," he said.

"Such fungal infection, usually rare in Bangladesh, can damage huge paddy plants rapidly. It is more common in China," said Prof Dr Hasan Fuad El Taz of the Department of Entomology of Hajee Danesh Science and Technology University in Dinajpur.

According to the Dinajpur DAE, 2.58 lakh hectares of land in the district has been brought under aman farming with target to produce 9.84 lakh tonnes of paddy this season.

SNIPPETS

Teenage boy murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A teenage boy was stabbed to death following an altercation over playing badminton at Dailpara village in Sadar upazila early yesterday. The dead is Absar Zaman, 18, son of Abdur Rahim of the village. Police in separate drives arrested three youths-- Soheli, Rubel and Rashed-- in this connection. Police and family sources said Zaman engaged in an altercation with a group of youths over playing badminton in the area on Monday night. At one stage of altercation, the youths attacked Zaman with sharp weapons, leaving him critically injured. He was rushed to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital where doctors declared him dead around 5:00am.

Indian clothes seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Jessore

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized Indian clothes and other goods worth Tk 50 lakh from Sadipur frontier in the district on Monday night. Major AKM Raihan, operation officer of 26 BGB Battalion, said on secret information, a team raided the bordering area and seized Indian three-pieces, blouses, imitation gold ornaments, green leaves and medicines. However, the smugglers fled the scene, sensing the presence of the border guards.

Two held with bombs

UNB, Benapole, Jessore

Police in a drive arrested two men along with three crude bombs in Garikhana Road area of the town on Monday night. The arrestees are Rana, son of Jamal, and Ibrahim alias Rudra, son of Ismail of the area. Police said on secret information, a team raided the area and arrested the duo along with the bombs. A case was filed in this connection under the Explosive Substances Act.

Schoolgirl drowns in river

UNB, Sunamganj

A schoolgirl drowned as a boat capsized in the River Jadukatha near Chanpur in Jamalganj upazila on Monday. The deceased was identified as Kripa Rani Kar, daughter of Lobcharan Kar of Chanpur. Police and locals said the engine-run boat carrying passengers sank in the river while stopping at a jetty around 11:00 am, leaving Kripa dead.

BCL man stabbed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A local Chhatra League leader was stabbed by criminals in BDR Hat area of the town yesterday afternoon. The injured is Mithun Islam, 24, son of Wares Ali of the area and he joint secretary of town BCL. He was admitted to a local clinic. Locals said a gang attacked Mithun with sharp weapons when he was going to home. The reason behind the attack could not be known immediately, said General Secretary of Lalmonirhat Sadar unit AL Zahurul Haque Mamun.

She's yet to get benefit under social safety net

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Jamalpur

A septuagenarian indigent widow of Kampopur village under ward No 2 of Jamalpur municipality is yet to get any benefit under the government's social safety net like allowances for the elderly or widows.

"My husband Taser Ali, a farm labourer of the village, died before the Liberation War, leaving me helpless with two sons and a female baby," said Begum, the hapless woman.

"Then I started working in other people's houses in the town as a domestic help for a little money and some food. My condition improved a bit when my sons Billal and Kashem grew up and started earning as farm labourers. After a few years they married off my daughter Laily with a man of the same village.

"But at one stage, Billal got paralysed and became unable to work. Meanwhile Laily's husband, who was also a farm labourer, died a few years ago, leaving behind her and five children.

Another son Kashem



PHOTO: STAR

Septuagenarian Begum now begs for living.

along with wife and children left me and settled at Jhinaigati village in Sherpur district.

"At the age of 60, I started begging just to survive," said the woman while narrating her pathetic story to this correspondent at Jamalpur High School intersection a few days ago.

Now 70, Begum does not know what programmes like vulnerable group

feeding or allowance for the elderly are.

"I need help as I am too old and weak to work for earning," she said.

Contacted, her daughter Laily said, "After my husband's death I also started struggling to feed my children. I am too poor to provide enough for my mother. So she needs other people's help for survival."

আপনি জানেন কি?

পণ্যে পাটজাত মোড়কের বাধ্যতামূলক ব্যবহার আইন, ২০১০ অনুযায়ী সরকারী, বেসরকারী ও ব্যক্তিমালিকানাধীন সকল প্রতিষ্ঠান, রাইস মিল/চাটাল মালিক ও চালের দোকানদারগণ ব্যবসার উদ্দেশ্যে বাজারজাতকরণের ক্ষেত্রে ১০০ ভাগ পাটের বস্তা ব্যবহার করবেন। এছাড়া তফসীলভুক্ত পণ্য ভূঁয়ী মোড়কীকরণে ১০০ ভাগ পাটজাত বস্তা ব্যবহার অব্যাহত থাকবে।

ডিসেম্বর ২০১৩ এর পরে পণ্যের মোড়কীকরণে কোন প্রকার পিপি ব্যাগ ব্যবহার করা যাবে না।

সুতরাং পাটজাত পণ্য ব্যবহার করে দেশ ও জাতির জন্য নিরাপদ পরিবেশ পড়ে তুলুন

বাংলাদেশ পাটকল করপোরেশন (বিজেএমসি)