

Unsold potatoes now burden for growers

15 lakh bags, 80kg each, lie in cold storages in Rangpur due to low prices

MEHEDY HASAN, Rangpur

Around 15 lakh bags of potato, each containing 80 kg, remains unsold in the cold storages of the district as frequent blockades and hartals enforced by BNP-led 18-party alliance during the last couple of months badly hampered trading of the popular winter vegetable.

Unlike other years, the farmer and traders in the district, who deposited the potatoes in 33 cold storages

with a total capacity of 50 lakh bags, did not withdraw the whole amount by December, as market prices remained low amid the hindrance to marketing due to transportation problem.

Now arrival of early variety potato in the market has added to the situation and both the cold storage owners and the traders are facing huge losses.

"I stocked 1,000 bags of Granola variety of potato at Foyezunnesa Cold Storage

at Deuti in Pirgachha upazila. Cost of an 80-kg bag of potato including purchase, storage and transportation stands at Tk 900 but the current market price is only Tk 80 to 100 per bag. If I sell 1000 bags of stored potatoes at the present rate, I will count loss of around Tk 8 lakh," said Nasir Uddin Liton, a big potato farmer of Pirgachha upazila in the district.

Firoz Ahmed, accounts officer of Kishan Cold

Storage Ltd in Rangpur city, said they stored a total of 1,17,000 bags of potato this year but 28,000 bags remained unsold.

"In normal situation buyers from different districts come to our cold storage and we release around 1200-1500 bags of potato daily. But the process was badly disturbed due to political unrest," he added.

Mosaddeque Hossen Bablu, owner of Northern Cold Storage Ltd, said all of their stocks would be cleared within December if the situation was normal.

Talking to this correspondent, a number of potato farmers and traders in the district said they did not lift their stocks from the cold storages due to very low market price.

The potato traders generally withdraw their stocks from the cold storages during September-December every year as the prices remain high that time.

But this year, country-wide political unrest during the last couple of months created an uneasy situation in the market, said Mostafa Azad Chowdhury Babu, member of Bangladesh Cold Storage Association and managing director of Motahar Group of Industries, also former

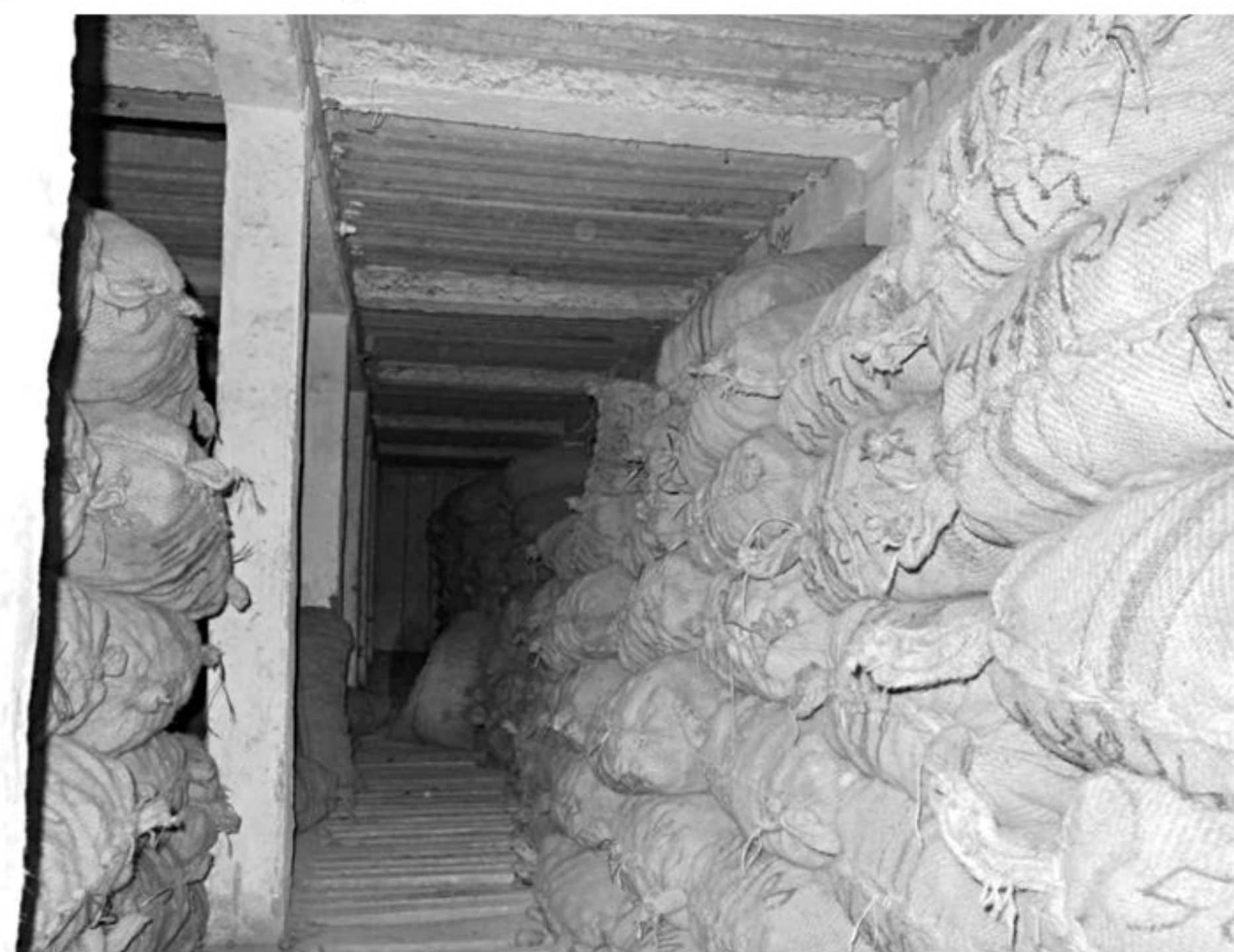


PHOTO: STAR

Huge quantity of potatoes lie stacked at Kishan Cold Storage in Rangpur city as the traders did not withdraw them by the stipulated time last December due to drastic price fall of the popular winter vegetable because of blockades and hartals during the last couple of months.

7 held over Bahubal auto driver killing

UNB, Habiganj

Police arrested seven people from different places of Moulvibazar district town on Wednesday in connection with the killing of an auto-rickshaw driver in Bahubal upazila of Habiganj district.

The arrestees were identified as Sohel, 27, Abdul Kalam, 32, and Abdul Matin, 26, of Lamaru village in Nabiganj upazila; Shahjahan, 22, and Firoz Mia, 22, of Dughar village of Moulvibazar, Ayeaz Mia, 22, of Uttar Moddhyhati village and Tito Ahmed Jewel, 23 of Baraiuri village.

Moulvibazar police, based on information from Bahubal police, conducted a drive in the town and arrested the seven and recovered the auto-rickshaw of the slain driver.

Sub-inspector Mujibur Rahman, investigation officer of the case, said two of the arrestees confessed to police that they had killed auto-rickshaw driver Siraj Miah over previous enmity.

Police recovered the body of Siraj Miah, a resident of Konabari village of Chunarughat upazila, from Daragaon Tea Garden in Bahubal upazila on Monday morning.

Police said, some criminals, in the guise of passengers, hired the three-wheeler of Siraj on Sunday night to go to Sreemangal.

Later, they stabbed Siraj indiscriminately and left the spot with his auto-rickshaw.

Jatka seized from Meghna

UNB, Chandpur

Members of Bangladesh Coast Guard seized two fishing trawlers along with 20 maunds of jatka (hilsa fries) from the Meghna River under Sadar upazila on Wednesday night.

A team of coastguards conducted separate drives from 11:30pm and seized the fishing trawlers along with the hilsa fries worth Tk 2.5 lakh from the river, said Coast Guard sources.

However, no one was arrested in this connection.

LALMONIRHAT TRAIN ROUTE

Ticketless travel goes up during political unrest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

In the wake of recent blockades and hartals, the number of passengers travelling by trains without tickets on Lalmonirhat-Burimari route has increased.

As road links remained snapped in the area due to the programmes, locals were totally dependent on train journey.

Railway officials said, at least 1,000 passengers travel in two local trains on the route every day, but ticket sales dropped after the start of political unrest.

Only 12 tickets were sold from Lalmonirhat Railway Station for Burimari-bound train till noon on January 6. It rose to 152 after Assistant Traffic Superintendent of Lalmonirhat Railway Division Sajjad Hossain conducted a drive for ten minutes on the day.

Train ticket examiners (TTE) said they did not dare to ask the passengers to show tickets, fearing harassment.

"Some of our colleagues were harassed by a good number of passengers as they charged them for traveling without tickets," said ticket examiner Zahurul Islam.

The situation is yet to improve much, he said.

Rozina Khatun, ticket-counter manager at Lalmonirhat Railway Station, said they usually sell around 450 to 500 tickets for each of the two trains running on Lalmonirhat-Burimari route. It had tumbled 90 percent due to frequent hartal and blockade, she added.

Umar Farooque, goods booking assistant at the station, said passengers also carried goods without paying freight charges.

Assistant Traffic

Superintendent Sajjad Hossain, however, said he could not conduct any drive to catch the passengers traveling without tickets since he was engaged in emergency work at the control room.

"If the train ticket examiners (TTE) and train ticket collector (TTC) perform their duties without fear, travelling without tickets must be stopped," he said, adding that he will take necessary steps in this regard soon.

The situation has started to improve as the main opposition decided to go for peaceful programme, he added.

However, a few train passengers told this correspondent at Lalmonirhat Railway Station that they did not collect tickets during the opposition programmes as they were not sure when the train would leave the station.



PHOTO: STAR

A railway staff at Lalmonirhat station asks a passenger, found travelling without ticket on Lalmonirhat-Burimari route, to collect it from the station counter. The photo was taken a few days ago.



PHOTO: STAR

Ignoring the risk of fatal accident anytime, dozens of second hand warm clothes sellers have set up makeshift shops just beside the rail lines at Saidpur station in Nilphamari district, although there is ban on setting up any sales centre within 20 metres from the tracks.

Risky market on rail tracks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

A makeshift market of second-hand warm clothes on and close to the rail tracks at Saidpur railway station in the district poses the risk of a fatal accident anytime.

A section of local traders set up the shops there illegally during the winter but the authorities have turned a blind eye to the matter despite repeated

pleas, said an official of the station.

Sale of warm clothes has marked increase at around 100 makeshift shops on and around the tracks as the cold spell is now sweeping over the northern district, said traders and locals.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found the sellers hurriedly clearing the tracks and removing the bundles of clothes as soon as they saw a train coming.

A number of male and female customers were also seen running helter-skelter for safety along with their kids.

Railway sources said that the intercity and local trains usually cross the point 8-10 times a day.

Requesting anonymity, a few traders alleged that some local Jubo League leaders and some railway police collect illegal toll from them allowing the business at the place.

Contacted, Sekandar Azam, local councillor of Saidpur municipality, said "we are unable to shift the market as it is the duty of the railway authorities".

Alamgir Hossain, assistant master of Saidpur railway station, said they had already informed the higher authorities about the matter.

Officer in-charge of Saidpur railway police station Md Israil Hossain said they are yet to get any

JALALABAD GAS

'Deprived' villagers forcibly stop gas pipe installation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Gas pipeline installation work near Tengritila Bazar in Doarabazar upazila of Sunamganj district came to a halt yesterday in the face of strong protest by locals, who have been demanding gas supply in the area for long.

The 18-km pipeline was being installed by state-run Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution systems to replace the old one for smooth gas supply to Chhatrak Cement Factory.

People of 10 villages gathered at Tengritila Bazar in the morning and forced the staff of Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution Systems to stop pipeline installation work.

They also held a rally at the bazar with Surma Union Parishad Chairman Md Shahjahan in the chair. The speakers at the rally said they won't let Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution systems install

gas pipeline until a separate programme for gas supply at the 10 villages is announced.

Later, the villagers submitted a memorandum to the ministry concerned through the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO).

They stated in the memo that people of Tengritila, Ajobpur, Girishpur, Tilagaon, Mohabbatpur, Islampur, Sharifpur, Bhuigaon, Shantipur and Koiajuri villages had long been deprived of gas facilities although Tengritila gas field is located here. They said the government had taken no step in this regard even on repeated assurances in the past.

The agitating people demanded that the government take immediate steps to ensure gas supply to the villages.

Jashim Uddin Ahmed, deputy general manager of Jalalabad Gas told this correspondent that they had to suspend pipeline installation

College student killed in fire, another found murdered

STAR COUNTRY DESK

A college student was killed in fire in Madaripur and another found dead in Comilla yesterday, report our correspondents.

A college student was burnt alive in a deadly fire at Purba Puali village in Kalkini upazila of Madaripur district early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Rony Hasan, 25, a Class XI student at Abul Hossain University College in the upazila and son of Alam Bepari, a Malaysia expatriate of the village.

Local people said the fire originated from an electric short circuit from a laptop around 4:00am and it soon engulfed the room of the house.

All the members of the house but Rony, who was then asleep, managed to come out.

Later locals doused the flame and recovered the

charred body of Rony.

In Comilla, police recovered the body of a college student at Sandrom village in Barallah union in Burichang upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Jewel Rana, 19, son of Rafiqul Islam of the village in the upazila and a Higher Secondary School Certificate candidate of Comilla Commercial College.

Officer in-charge of Burichang PS Monirul Islam said, Jewel went out of his home at about 7:00pm on Wednesday to meet one of his friends and since remained missing.

Local people saw his body, that bore injury marks around the neck, lying in a paddy field at the village at around 11:30am and informed the police.

The reason behind the killing could not be known immediately.

SNIPPETS

49 Rohingyas pushed back

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday pushed back 49 Rohingyas to Myanmar. Lt Col Khaled Hassan, director of BGB-17 battalion in Cox's Bazar, said the Myanmar nationals including 23 men, 11 women and 15 children were held from different areas of the district in the last two days. They were pushed back through the Naf River in Ghumdhum and Tumburu areas under Naikhangchhari upazila of Bandarban and Sabran and Jaliapara areas of Teknaf upazila.

BSF returns four

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) returned four Bangladeshi women and children to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) at Hili border in Hakimpur upazila yesterday. Abdul Mannan, camp commander of BGB-3, said a patrol team of BSF caught them from Balurghat of Dakkhin Dinajpur under Paschimabanga on Wednesday when they entering into India through the border illegally. The four were handed over to their families, he said.

Youth held on rape charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Police arrested a youth at Maddhyam Baishari in Naikkhongchhari upazilla on Wednesday night on charge of violating a 12-year-old indigenous girl. The arrestee is Jasim Uddin, 28, of the area. Sub-inspector of Naikkhongchhari police station Shafiqul Islam said, Jasim raped the girl on her way to join a rehearsal programme for funeral of a local monk in the area around 10:00pm. A case was filed in this connection.

Six get life for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

A court here yesterday sentenced six people to life imprisonment for killing a man in 2001. The convicts are Abdul Barek of Mukuria, Mohammad Nayeb Ali, of Lamapara, Abdur Rashid Bapari of Khandar, Nayeb Ali of Machidingi, Kadir of Mohisorani villages under Gouripur upazila and Hablu Mia of Mymensingh Sadar upazila. The court also fined them Tk 20,000 each. In default, they have to suffer another one year in jail. According to the prosecution, the six killed Gazibur Rahman, 35, of Majipara village under Gouripur upazila due to previous enmity on July 26, 2001. Later, a case was filed with Purbadhola police station in this connection.

40 hurt in AL factional clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

At least 40 people were injured in a clash between two rival groups of AL at Murakori village in Lakhai upazila of Habiganj district on Wednesday. The law enforcers fired 33 rubber bullets to bring the situation under control. Police and locals said a group, led by Abul Hasem Mullah, joint secretary of Habiganj district unit AL and another by Liakot Ali, president of the upazila unit AL, attacked each other lethal weapons, leaving 40 from both sides injured following an altercation over establishing supremacy in the area at 7:00pm.

Admission test

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The admission tests for 2013-2014 academic sessions at Patuakhali Science and Technology University will be held today. The test for unit A will begin from 10 am to 11 am, unit B from 12 noon to 1 pm and unit C from 3 pm to 4 pm, said the authorities. For further visit please visit varsity's website www.pstu.ac.bd.