

# Pineapple boom in the hills

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, *Rangamati*

The hill district sees a bumper yield of pineapples this season, much to the delight of growers.

The commercial production of the popular summer fruit, which started around 20 years back, is increasing every year as farmers have been getting expected prices, said sources at the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

A pair of large size pineapples is being sold at Tk 40-50 while a pair of small size sells at Tk 20-30.

"The price is high as most of the pineapples are being marketed outside the district. I bought a pair of big size pineapples at Tk 60," said Prakash Dewan at Tridiv Nagar.

Some 1,970 hectares of land have been brought under pineapple cultivation this year, while it was 1,865 hectares last year. Per hectare yield is more than 30 metric tonnes this season while it was 25 metric tonnes last year, said DAE sources.

Two varieties of pineapples -- Jiantque (Singapuri) and Honey Queen (Jalpuri) -- are being cultivated in the district.

The fruit is transported from different hilly areas to Samotaghat

Bazar and Old Bus Station point in the district from where the traders send them to other parts of the country.

About 25 trucks of pineapples are being transported to different districts daily, pineapple trader Md Nazrul said, adding that the number of trucks increases during the weekly hat -- Wednesday and Saturday.

The pineapples are mostly grown at Islampur, Betchhari, Bogachhari, Kutukchhari, Ramhoripara of Naniachar upazila; Bondukbhanga, Tomedung, Moghban, Kayindya, Manikchhari, Hazaribug, Katchhari of Sadar upazila; and various other places of Longudu, Barkal, Jurachhari and Kaptai upazila.

I got only Tk 2 lakh by cultivating pineapples on five acres of land last year. I have already earned around Tk 2 lakh and expect Tk one and a half lakh more this year, said Sukkra Charya Chakma, a cultivator at Noa Adam Katchhari of Sadar upazila.

"We provide only technical support to the farmers", said Nitai Chandra Barai, deputy director of DAE. The growers use hormone for getting better output all the year round, he added.



A man selling pineapples in Rangamati. The hilly district had a good season and farmers are happy with their produce fetching good prices. A pair was being sold for Tk 20-50 depending on their sizes.

PHOTO: STAR

# Country in rain-chaos

FROM PAGE 1

soil under the railroads at Analiabari on the east end of Bangabandhu Bridge on the Jamuna River, halting train movement from 11:00am to 3:45pm yesterday.

Dhaka-bound Silk City train from Rajshahi got stuck at Ibrahimabad station while Nilphamari-bound Nilsagar Express was stranded at Tangail Gharinda station and Khulna-bound Sundarban Express at Mohera station in Mirzapur till the tracks were repaired, said railway officials.

While almost one-third of Chittagong has been waterlogged for the last two days, a similar situation prevails in Pabna district headquarters, where the municipality office building itself became inundated.

"Rain water usually flows to the Ichhamati river through the drainage system of the town. Since the waters of the Ichhamati itself have risen, the rainwater has got stuck, causing water logging," Md Tabibur Rahman, executive engineer of Pabna municipality, told The Daily Star.

Md Kabibur Rahman, executive engineer of Water Development Board, Bera Division of Pabna, said

the water levels of the Jamuna, the Padma and the Ichhamati have increased over 5mm due to the incessant rainfall.

In the port city, a construction worker died and four others were critically injured when a boundary wall collapsed on their tin-shed barack.

Fire Service officials said the soil beneath the wall had eroded due to rain, causing the collapse.

Apprehending a landslide, the Chittagong district administration and police yesterday jointly began evacuating people living on risky hill slopes.

Water, gas and power connections to the slums on the hill slopes were severed. In 2012, 28 people were killed in landslides triggered by heavy rain in the city.

Meanwhile, traffic movement on Chittagong-Rangamati and Chittagong-Khagrachhari routes remained snapped since Saturday morning due to water-logging on the highways stretching two-kilometre area from Laliar Hat to Bara Dighirpar in Hathazari upazila of Chittagong.

Earlier, the constant rain from

Thursday extensively slowed down traffic on the Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar route, causing the journeys to stretch to two to three times longer than usual.

It took more than 26 hours for Tasneem Islam, a teacher who went to the beach town Cox's Bazar on a recreational trip, to return to Dhaka as the bus was moving very slowly in the heavy traffic caused by the ceaseless rain.

"I boarded the bus at 8:00pm on Thursday and reached Dhaka at 10:45pm on Friday. The journey usually takes about 8-10 hours," she said.

Torrential rains also flooded two villages of Patiya upazila of Chittagong and Chittagong Port was advised to hoist local cautionary signal number 3.

However, except for Halda at Narayanhat in Chittagong, rivers at all the 84 water-level monitoring stations across the country are flowing below their respective danger levels, said Ripon Karmaker, duty officer of the FFWC.

Of the stations, water level rose at 55 points, fell at 20, remained unchanged at three points and situations at the remaining six points were

not reported, he said.

He also cancelled out the possibility of imminent floods in the next five days.

However, the FFWC website yesterday said, "Water level of the Brahmaputra- Jamuna, Ganges-Padma (and) the Meghna may rise in the next 72 hours".

To citizens' relief, agriculture experts said the monsoon rain would not affect farming much as the Boro crops and wheat had already been harvested.

However, post-harvesting activities like drying and threshing might be hampered by the rain, said Wais Kabir, former executive chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

Shahidul Islam, former director of Agricultural Extension Department, cited another concern, namely, that stagnant rainwater might damage Aus saplings and persistent rain may affect vegetables and fruits.

"The amount of rain that has fallen so far is not likely to create stagnation," he said, adding that the rain would rather be considered as a blessing for those who "start planting Aman crops in advance.

# Drug peddling goes on

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Yaba trade is done slightly more discreetly by peddlers who stand at specific spots and go through the process, the Daily Star correspondents observed in their months-long investigation.

At least 50 sellers supply Yaba tablets to traders coming from different districts at Tk 120 to Tk 350 per piece.

As many as 3,000 to 4,000 of these pink tablets are sold every day in the slum while traders make sales of marijuana worth Tk 5 lakh a day, sources said.

A handful of policemen take bribes of at least Tk 1 lakh a week from the peddlers to let the trading go undisturbed, local people and peddlers told The Daily Star. Even if the law enforcers appear in plainclothes, they can be easily identified by the wireless sets they carry, they said.

Your correspondents on the night of April 5 observed Assistant Sub-inspector of Tejgaon Industrial Police Station Shahin Alam walking round the place in uniform and talking to several drug peddlers.

On February 3, Abul Jafar Manik, the then sub-inspector of Tejgaon Police Station, was seen there, flanked by two more unidentified policemen.

In both cases, locals alleged that the law enforcers had been collecting their weekly sum from peddlers.

Both Manik and Shahin, however, denied doing so.

Manik said he had been looking for an accused in a case. He has recently been transferred to Rayerbazar Police Outpost.

Deputy Commissioner of Tejgaon division Biplob Kumar Sarkar said he had received complaints against sev-

eral policemen.

Seven teams of the narcotics control department have launched drives that go on from 6:00am to 10:00pm every day to rein in the drugs trade, said Mofazzal Hossain, in-charge of the Tejgaon circle narcotics department.

Three teams are always deployed there. Raids are conducted by the other four. A mobile court is also in place along with the teams that conduct the raids. The traders are no longer being sued or fined; they are straightaway being put in jail, Mofazzal said.

The teams handed down jail terms of a minimum of six months to more than 50 drug peddlers in March, he added.

The narcotics control officials also receive bribes on a regular basis, peddlers said.

Peeking through a window of a house beside the rail tracks last month, one of the correspondents saw a pile of marijuana laid out on the bed.

The same month he observed a raid conducted by the Rapid Action Battalion. A middle-aged woman was seen tapping a Rab member on the shoulder, asking him if he wanted marijuana.

Asked why she dared to sell drugs during the raid, the woman replied, "My son was put in jail. I need to get enough money to bail him out."

The more influential drug lords also use the police to ensure their oligopoly in the business, said a drug peddler, aged around 40, who has been trading in drugs for 10 years.

"My family and I have been accused in some 15 cases so far by police on instructions of influential drug lords because they are trying to keep me from this business," he said.



Rail communication between Dhaka and the north and the southwest breaks down yesterday morning after gushing rain water washed away the ground under a rail line in Analiabari of Kalihati in Tangail.

PHOTO: STAR

# Sushma due Wednesday

FROM PAGE 16

Bangladesh has already requested India to extradite Nur Hossain, who was arrested in Kolkata last week, and India is understood to be considering it.

Swaraj, who visits Bangladesh at the invitation of her Bangladeshi counterpart, will also have engagements with think tanks, business bodies and cultural organisations, the statement added.

"This is Swaraj's first stand-alone visit abroad as the external affairs minister and reflects the importance that India attaches to its bilateral relationship with Bangladesh, a close friend and neighbour," it said adding: "The visit will provide further momentum to the close and friendly relations between India and Bangladesh."

Swaraj's visit to Dhaka is part of Prime Minister Modi's outreach to India's neighbours in South Asia,

which was manifest in the invites extended to heads of state and government of the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to Modi's swearing in on May 26. All top SAARC leaders, barring Sheikh Hasina, who was away in Japan on an official visit at the time, attended the event.

Hasina was among the first foreign leaders to felicitate Modi on his and his party's landslide victory in India's parliamentary elections held in April-May and invited him to make Bangladesh his first foreign visit destination.

However, Modi began his international foray as PM with a two-day visit to Bhutan from June 15.

Mahmood Ali too had written to Swaraj soon after she was sworn in as external affairs minister on May 26, inviting her to visit Bangladesh.

# Bye to discrimination?

FROM PAGE 1

Amid such a situation, the government has finally stepped up to do something about it.

The Law Commission has recommended that the government formulate a law to prevent such discrimination.

According to the recommendation, the law can levy a fine of up to Tk 10 lakh or slam down 10 years' jail term for displaying any act of discrimination. It also suggested that the law be titled "Antidiscrimination Act, 2014".

The commission suggests that any victim of discrimination or any person on their behalf can lodge a written complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) or with the court.

The move is widely being seen by rights activists as a long-awaited attempt at ensuring equity which will make people overcome

their prejudices and redefine their concept of what is ethical and what is not.

"The law will point out to society that what it is doing is wrong," said Joya Sikder, president of Sex Workers' Network.

"I have achieved so much recognition nationally and internationally for my work in furthering gender rights, but my father still cannot talk about me with pride," lamented Joya.

A stroll down the sweepers' colony in Ganakuly of the capital or the Hijra settlements of Tongi is enough to justify why such a law is an absolute necessity.

The overflowing sewers, the lack of waterlines, the crowded one-roomed houses bearing signs of abject poverty all around -- are the results of its inhabitants not being able to rise above menial jobs.

Law Commission Chairman Justice ABM Khairul Haque told The Daily Star that the law minister had already promised to take steps towards formulating the law.

The recommendations were made after soliciting opinions from different rights bodies, such as Manusher Jonno Foundation and Nagorik Udyog, and representatives of the underprivileged communities, he added.

Contacted, Law Minister Anisul Huq said that he was yet to go through the Law Commission's proposal.

"After examining the recommendations, I will discuss them with cabinet members. If the cabinet agrees to formulate the law, I will then take necessary measures," he added.

In line with the commission's recommendations, the NHRC itself will investigate the complaints and then send the report to the

court.

In case the allegations are lodged with the court directly, it can either take them into cognisance for trial or forward them to a judicial magistrate for inquiry. The magistrate will have to finish the investigation in 30 days and send it back to the court.

The law commission also suggests the government may set up an anti-discrimination court headed by a district and sessions judge in every district to try such cases. The court will have to complete a trial in 60 working days after the framing of charges.

The court should be empowered to sentence any person or organisation for violating its orders and to issue directives for government authorities to take departmental action against any public servant in such cases.

## On this day 25 years ago we lost you



MUNAWAR MUJIB

A sunbeam lent to us too briefly

In fond remembrance  
The bereaved family and friends