

Jute price fall upsets Bogra farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

The sudden fall in the price of jute in the local markets has disappointed the farmers of Bogra and may discourage them from cultivating the golden fibre.

They were hopeful of getting high price for jute this year to recover the loss they incurred due to damage to other crops by the flood.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) sources said 15,665 hectares of land were taken under jute cultivation this year though the target was 15,781 hectares and production target was 1.73 lakh bales. Over 60,000 bales have been harvested so far and farmers hope the yield would be over one lakh bales.

Local farmers said they had sold jute at Tk 1,800 to Tk 2,200 per maund initially what they are now selling at Tk 1,300 to Tk 1,500. The price of jute sticks has also fallen, they added.

Talebur Rahman, jute cultivator of Char Bati in Sadar upazila, said he cultivated jute on three bighas of land and might suffer loss.

Mozahar Ali, jute seller at Shariakandi jute market, said the buyers are paying lower prices than that of last year last season and the number of buyers is decreasing as most of them have formed a syndicate.

Shariakandi Upazila Agriculture Officer Md Kamruzzaman said flood affected farmers reaped the jute and brought it to the market at the same time, causing a temporary price fall due to supply more than the demand. The farmers would get expected price soon, he hoped.



Huge amount of silt deposited in the Teesta River is creating hindrance to smooth flow of water during monsoon while two dredgers lie idle at one corner of the silt trap area at Dalia point in Nilphamari. PHOTO: STAR

Silt in Teesta triggers flood

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The huge amount of silt deposited in the Teesta River and irrigation canals under Teesta irrigation project is creating hindrance to smooth flow of water, triggering recurrence of flood during the rainy season as the riverbed and the canal bed have risen as a consequence.

This situation has arisen as the silt trap situated near the Teesta Barrage has been nearly filled up as the Water Development Board (WDB) could not conduct proper dredging during the last two years. This will also create problems in irrigation of boro paddy fields in the dry season, as the water may not flow through the irrigation canals smoothly due to the raised beds, said AKM Shamsuzzoha, executive engineer, Dalia divisional office of WDB.

WDB sometimes diverts excess water of the Teesta through the irrigational canal network during flood to reduce water pressure in the river, he added.

WDB sources in Dalia division said the

Teesta brings nine lakh tonnes of silt from upstream every year, and if the silt is not cleared by dredging of the silt trap, a large amount may be deposited on the river and irrigation canal beds, raising their heights.

The silt trap, an artificial deep-water body having an area of 54 acres and height of 47.56-metres above sea level, is located at the junction of the Teesta and the main irrigation canal at Dalia point in the district.

When river water carrying silt enters the main canal, it is diverted to the silt trap where the silt is trapped and the clear water flows through the canals to the desired places, sources said.

Md Rubayat Intiaz, sub-divisional engineer of WDB in Dalia division, said "The silt trap in Dalia has risen by about 3.5 metres, making it unable to receive additional silt coming with upstream water, as sufficient dredging wasn't possible in the last two years due to fund constraint."

"At least 4-5 lakh tonnes of silt need to be removed in the 2016-2017 fiscal year, otherwise

the raised canal beds may obstruct smooth flow of water, which may hamper irrigation in the next boro season," he added.

WDB officials said as river and irrigation canal beds have risen, onrush of water now overflows their banks, causing floods.

When this correspondent visited the silt trap, he found that the two WDB-owned dredgers, each having 530-horse power capacity, are lying almost idle as they are at least 20 years old. Both are presently capable of removing only 120 cubic metres of silt per hour.

Fuel consumption is also high as each dredger consumes 135 litres of diesel per hour, which would have been around 25 percent less if the dredgers were new.

AKM Shamsuzzoha said they had sent a letter to higher authorities requesting allocation of adequate fund in 2016-2017 fiscal year in order to carrying out full dredging in the silt trap for keeping the river bed and canal beds within the required depth.

SNIPPETS

10 villagers hurt in clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

At least 10 people were injured in an attack allegedly by their rivals in Sadar upazila yesterday. Police and locals said some sixth grader boys, who hail from Mirzapur and Bepariara villages, locked in an altercation on the premises of Sharifpur High School over learning their lessons on Tuesday. On the issue, a good number of people of Mirzapur village attacked the villagers of Bepariara, leaving at least 10 people injured. The attackers also vandalised a number of houses during the incident.

Schoolgirl gang-raped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A minor schoolgirl was allegedly gang-raped in Kulaura upazila on Tuesday. The family members alleged that Masum Ahmed of Amanipur village along with some accomplices picked up the girl from her school, took her to a nearby forest and raped her. Hearing screams, local people rushed in, rescued the girl and sent her to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital. However, the alleged rapists managed to flee the scene, said police.

Journos protest militancy

A CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Journalists of the district at a human chain protested militancy. Rangamati Press Club, Rangamati Journalists' Union, Rangamati Reporters' Unity and Journalist Network jointly organised the programme in front of deputy commissioner's office in the town yesterday. The participants strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Ghulsan, Solakia and other places of the country in the name of religion.

8 Jamaat-Shibir men held

A CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Police arrested eight activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir from Borashula area of Narail Sadar upazila yesterday. On secret information, the law enforcers raided the area and arrested the eight with jihadi books and leaflets of Jamaat-Shibir, said Superintendent of Police Sardar Rakibul Islam.

Snake kills charmer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A snake charmer died from snakebite in Rangpur city yesterday. The deceased was Laboni Begum, 45, wife of Sabuj Mia of Betola in Sadar upazila. Locals said being informed, Laboni went to the area and put her right hand into a hole to catch a poisonous snake but it bit her. She

Razzak, an inspiring tree lover

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

A youth of Hatibandha upazila of the district has been planting trees to save the green world since his school life.

Abdur Razzak, 34, son of Nurul Haque, earns around Tk 8 thousand from private tuition, and spends around Tk 6 thousand for planting trees. He has planted 16 thousand trees on both sides of 12 roads at eight villages of Hatibandha upazila, and distributed 14 thousand plants to teachers and students at 25 educational institutions in the last 12 years.

Razzak said many fruit trees have started bearing fruit, and local people and passers-by are happy to get fruits from roadside trees. "I feel proud when local people greet me, recognising my voluntary work," he said.

Four years ago, Abdur Razzak did not have any money, but he was determined to distribute plants among the students of different educational institutions. He went Sonali Bank in Hatibandha and took a loan of Tk 32 thousand. But he has

not been able to pay all the installments due to his meagre earning.

Razzak is the eldest of seven siblings. He obtained BA Degree from a local college in 2012, but he didn't try to get a job. He works with his father on their 8 bighas of cropland every day. He spends the morning and night giving private tuition.

Students and teachers of schools and colleges in Hatibandha call Razzak 'tree Razzak'.

Shamsunnahar Akhter, a student of HSC at Hatibandha Women's College, said students are being inspired by Razzak to plant trees.

Al Amin Khan, executive engineer of LGED in Lalmonirhat, said Razzak has planted many trees on both sides of LGED roads in the villages of Hatibandha upazila. "Trees save the environment, they also save roads in villages," he added.

Razzak said he feels hurt when anybody cuts green roadside trees. "Roadside tree fellers are enemies of human beings as they destroy the environment," he added.

Thousands celebrate deity's river journey

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Thousands of devotees thronged the Kantajew Temple in Kaharol upazila of the district yesterday to mark the river journey of Lord Kantajew.

The devotees gathered on both sides of the 40km long Dhepa River and offered prayers as the idol made its way by river from the temple at Kantanagar to the historic Dinajpur Rajbari temple.

As per tradition, the idol of Lord Kantajew (Krishna) was placed on a decorative boat on the bank of Dhepa River at Kantanagar village under tight security around 9:00am.

After arriving at Sadhurghat along the Punarbhaha River in Dinajpur town the idol would be taken to Dinajpur Rajbari, nearly 5km away from the river bank, said Premnath Roy, one of the organisers.

In addition, the devotees who came from different parts of the country offered prayers, food, fruits and milk to the deity.

Amalendu Bhowmik, trusty of the temple, said as part of the 350-year-old traditional religious festival of the Hindu community, the idol is brought to Dinajpur Rajbari Temple a day before the Janmashtami celebrations.

Four crops a yr, boon for farmers

SHYKH SERAJ

Dear readers, a few days back I went to Jhakuapara of Gaibandha, a district in the country's northern region. There, the landscape is different; some lands are higher and some low. On the relatively high lands farmers are cultivating a local variety of Aus, known as Parija. These farmers are cultivating four varieties of crops in a year.

On the other hand, the low lands can barely grow anything during the rains as you all know northern districts are prone to recurrent floods that affect the low lands most.

Since the cultivation of high-yielding Boro started, everything changed. All the calculations of production changed. According to researchers, in Bangladesh, now Aman is cultivated in 48% of lands and Boro in 45%. Aus is cultivated in only 9%. However, Boro tops in terms of production.

During the ongoing monsoon, vast areas of land usually remain under water.

Now, the high lands of the north see smooth cultivation throughout the year. Right now, the plants with ripe or nearly ripe golden paddy swing in the lands, offering a soothing natural beauty.

Farmer Shamsul Haque has his land of Parija right beside his house at Collegepara of Laxmipur union in Gaibandha district. I went to his land on 4th of August when farmers are expected to sit idle, looking at their flooded lands.

But the scenario has positively changed.

Like Shamsul, many other farmers are now cultivating Parija which takes only 90 days to harvest. Technology has made this revolutionary change.

My question to Shamsul was why Parija has become so popular. "It takes only 90 days to grow and it's definitely cost effective," replied Shamsul.

This is the magic of the 'four crop rotation', which has literally changed everything. Generally farmers cultivate Mung dal during March-April. After harvest, in May-July, they cultivate Parija in 90 days. During August-October, they cultivate Aman. From November to January, the farmers bring the Rabi crop on the fields. Therefore, with ease, the farmers now can cultivate four different crops on the same land in a year.

Medium-high land is ideal for Parija cultivation. There are around 6 lakh hectares of such land in 16 districts of the north. Across the country, there are 18 lakh hectares more. Four crops can easily be cultivated on these lands.

I talked with Noya Miya, a farmer who is pretty happy growing Parija.

"Do you cultivate Parija?" "I do and rest of my family members, as well."

"Is there any change in your life?"



Shykh Seraj talking with a farmer at the latter's Parija paddy field at Jhakuapara in Gaibandha district. PHOTO: STAR

"We have developed a lot. I produce four crops per year and earning more than before."

RDRS, a development organisation, is implementing this four crop rotation method in coordination with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU).

In these areas of the north, agriculture was somewhat a profession to live by anyhow. However, after the implementation of the four crop technology, agriculture has now become very much profitable for farmers.

Overall, the socio-economic scenario of the whole area has changed. Now, all the farmers have positive experiences.

The Department of Agricultural Extension is playing a vital role in promoting the cultivation of Parija.

Dr MG Niyogi, an agriculture expert, started working on Parija 8-10 years back. Currently, he is working as a consultant of a project of World Bank. He suggested inclusion of this four crop cultivation technology in national planning.

Dr Mainul Haque, professor of Agronomy Department of BSMRAU, also says that this four crop technology can play a good role in ensuring long term food security.

Shykh Seraj is a Media and Agriculture Development Activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and recipient of Ekushey Padak, FAO A.H. Boerma Award and many other prestigious accolades. At Channel i, he is Director and Head of News. He is also Director and Host of the popular agro-documentary, "Hridoye Mati O Manush".



I also talked with Khorshed Mia, another farmer who is cultivating Parija. "How much do you get from a bigha?"

"12-14 maunds." "Is the production cost less than other paddies?"

"A lot less." Now Khorshed doesn't need to spend for irrigation. Rainfall does it for him. Parija needs very little fertiliser compared to other varieties, says Khorshed. Because Khorshed grew Mung dal on the same land.

"The fertility was already there in the field," says Khorshed. "And that's why it worked pretty well for Parija," added Khorshed.

"We used to produce only two crops in a year. Since 2014, we are producing four crops a year, which is really great for us," says Rahman, another sturdy farmer.

In his land, the total cost of cultivating four crops on a bigha through the year is Tk 14,070 while his earning stood at Tk 29,130 from the very land. It means he's making a profit of 15 thousand and 60 taka from a bigha of land.

Rahman has in total 25 bighas of land. So, he earns around approximately 3 lakh 75 thousand taka from 25 bighas, in just one season.

Dear readers, the northern Bangladesh is regarded as a crop repository. However, the region also faces 'Monga', a seasonal food scarcity that affects a large section of poor and marginal people. Hopefully the situation has improved a lot recently. Again, the northern Bangladesh has risen with prospect of enrichment.

This is high time for introducing four crop rotation across the country. Protecting the soil health is also very important.

The gains through innovative crop farming in the high areas of the north will spread throughout the whole country if works are done by concerned government offices and development organisations, using the indigenous knowledge and experience of farmers.

Happy denies torture

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want to work or could not work properly, she said in her testimony at a Dhaka court yesterday.

"I fell victim to an accident that broke my leg," Happy said while giving her statement in connection with a case filed for alleged torture. "I filed the case against the couple after being pressurised by others."

Judge Tanjina Ismail of the Fifth Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression recorded her statement and fixed August 31 for the next hearing.

Her latest testimony is in marked contrast to her words when charges were first filed against Shahadat and Nrittya.

Dhaka police had registered a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act against the couple on September 7, 2015.

Happy fled Shahadat's Mirpur residence on September 6 and Pallabi police rescued her with numerous marks on her body from Kalshi area later that night. After being handed over to Mirpur police she was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment. She had told Dadan Fakir, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, that she was tor-

tured by the couple.

As doctors screened Happy's body, they found that her left foot was fractured; there were blood clots around both the eyes; numerous marks of bruises on her hands and back.

Dr Bilkis Begum, coordinator of the one-stop crisis centre (OCC) at DMCH



Happy

where she, told The Daily Star on September 7, quoting the victim, that: "For the last one year the couple, particularly Nrittya, used to beat her up with whatever they found at their disposal if she failed to carry out her duties and also in case of delays."

The victim also said that she was brought here to take care of Shahadat's

baby. But later she was forced to do household work, Bilkis had added.

On October 5 Shahadat was arrested, two days after Nrittya was arrested from her relatives' house in Dhaka. Shahadat was eventually granted bail later that year on December 8. Shahadat was also temporarily suspended by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in September 2015, which was lifted in May this year but for domestic cricket only. He participated in the Dhaka Premier League, but will not be considered for national selection until his legal issues are resolved.

After yesterday's statement, Special Public Prosecutor Ali Asgar Swapon declared her a 'hostile witness' and questioned her on different points on the repression and torture.

The PP also asked her about her previous statements given to a magistrate where she said that she was tortured inhumanely by the couple.

But she denied all the questions asked by the prosecution.

Swapon told The Daily Star Happy had been staying at the Mahila Ainjibi Samity and yesterday she appeared before the court under the supervision of the Samity.