

TK 90 LAKH PROJECT UNDER RUPKALPO 2021

# Many yet to get solar lights in Lalmonirhat char areas

By S DILIP ROY WITH ANDREW EAGLE

When the inhabitants of the char areas in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila first heard that under the Rupkalpo 2021 project the government would be providing 400 solar panels for public lighting and to struggling families in their remote communities, they were naturally pleased. But excitement has turned to frustration since, despite funds having been deposited with the Kaliganj administration months ago there is little sign of progress.

"We heard there is a government fund for installing solar panels at the houses of the most struggling families, as well as in mosques, temples and markets on the river islands," says Mansur Ali 55, a farmer from Bhotmari village. "For reasons unknown nothing has happened. Nobody knows when the solar panels will be installed."

"Our children really find it difficult to study at night without proper lighting," says

Delwar Hossain, 48, a farmer from the Teesta River island village of Kalikapur. "As we can't afford to buy our own solar panel, we were waiting eagerly for the government's promised help. So far we're still in the dark."

"I hoped to get a government solar panel for my home," says Akhter Hossain, 58, a farmer of Shoalmari river shoal in the Teesta River. "I waited until 20 September but the wait proved futile so I installed one at my own expense."

According to The Daily Star sources, a budget of Tk 90 lakh to fund the project reached Kaliganj upazila on 30 June 2016, on the eve of the new financial year. The money, earmarked as the "Solar Panel Installing Programme" was deposited with Kaliganj upazila branch of Sonali Bank in a joint account with the upazila nirbahi officer and project implementation officer as signatories.

"We received the government funds for installing solar panels according to the government's direction," said project

implementation officer Rashedul Islam. But when asked earlier this month why no implementation had taken place thus far he fell silent.

However, upazila nirbahi officer, Shahinur Alam, claimed fifty percent of the project's targeted 400 panels had already been distributed, with the remainder to be distributed within two weeks. "Implementation has been late," he said, "due to problems with the solar panel providers."

Similarly, Lalmonirhat's district relief and rehabilitation officer, Idris Ali, says he heard from the project implementation officer in Kaliganj that although delayed due to local problems, implementation of the solar panels had begun.

Yet according to project implementation office sources, distribution of the first 120 solar panels to project recipients finally occurred last on October 6, several days after the above assurances were given.



Three people pose with solar panels received on behalf of the mosques and temples in Kaliganj upazila headquarters of Lalmonirhat on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR



## Pioneer in malta farming

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Unable to get a job after graduating, Amalesh started growing malta on his paternal land after cutting down betel nut and coconut trees there.

Amalesh Roy, 52, said his cousin told him that cultivating malta is very profitable. He said he went to many places of the country to gather knowledge about malta fruit farming before he started the trade in 2008.

Amalesh said he started getting malta after three years. "The fruits are very sweet and tasty," he said, adding that there is a great demand for his produce in the local market.

After seeing the success of Amalesh, farmers of adjacent areas have also become interested in cultivating malta.

He said he grows malta plants through grafting system, and farmers from nearby areas buy them from him.

Officials from different agricultural departments as well as curious people from many areas of the country visit his malta orchard often.

Now there are 450 malta trees of Bari-1 variety at his orchard, and the trees are full of ripe maltas now.

Malta cultivation is more profitable than cultivation of any other crop, Amalesh said, adding that a

grower can recover his production cost within a short time.

Farmer Probhas Roy said at first he did not know that malta cultivation was so profitable and that it could be grown in their area. He was inspired by Amalesh, Probhas said, adding that he has an orchard with 100 malta trees and has a plan to expand it.

Amalesh is now well-known to Pirojpur townspeople as well as agricultural officials as his malta orchard has given him an identity.

Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Md Hasan Warisul Kabir said Amalesh is the pioneer of malta cultivation in Pirojpur. Now more and more farmers are becoming interested in malta cultivation.

"We give all types of technical support to the fruit growers to inspire more people to cultivate malta and other fruit," Kabir said. Malta is sold at Tk 140 per kg in the local market, he said.

Deputy Director (DD) of Pirojpur Department of Agriculture Extension Md Abul Hossain Talukder said there are 154 malta orchards in the district on 34.66 hectares of land.

"Malta fruit cultivation is spreading rapidly in Pirojpur. There were only three or four malta orchards five years ago," Talukder said, adding that the people in Pirojpur are also growing malta plants as a hobby.

## Tk 4.75cr Indian drugs destroyed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Authorities destroyed huge quantities of smuggled Indian drugs and cigarettes worth over Tk 4 crore 75 lakh on the premises of BGB-28 camp in the district town yesterday.

The drugs including 31,409 bottles of wine, 312 bottles of beer, 10 litres of Bangla drug, and 10,980 packets of bidi (a kind of low quality cigarette) and 11,500 kg of hemp were seized in border areas of the district at different times.

Syndicates of smugglers bring drugs through border points in different upazilas of the district from the neighbouring country and these are supplied to different parts of the country by buses, trucks, minibuses, pick-ups, motorcycles and boats.

A few border areas of Takerhat in Taherpur and Naraontola in Sadar upazila are serving as safe zones for drug smugglers, locals said.

Wine production on the other side of the border is rampant and smugglers prefer the routes in different border areas of Sunamganj as a few rivers there make the task easy, said sources.

Contacted, BGB Commanding Officer Lt Col Nasir Uddin Ahmed said, "Despite lack of logistics and manpower for conducting proper patrol in the border areas of Sunamganj, the law enforcers have zero tolerance about drug smuggling. I think the situation will improve when ongoing construction of our border camps will complete."

## Attempt to rape mute girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A man was arrested on charge of attempting to violate a 10-year-old speech-impaired girl in Senuapara area under Thakurgaon municipality on Friday.

The arrestee was identified as Mukul Hossain, 50, son of late Amir Hossain of the area.

Quoting locals, police said Mukul tied to rape the minor girl while she was alone in her house on Friday night.

The victim's mother returned to the house at that moment and screamed for help to save her daughter.

Police said villagers caught Mukul from the house and handed him over to them.

## CONSTRUCTION OF 4-LANE BENAPOLE-JESSORE ROAD

# Businesses upbeat

The important highway to significantly boost export and import

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Construction of the four-lane Benapole-Jessore highway will formally start soon, amid high hopes that it will boost trade with neighbouring India and make road communications easier across the country.

Considered as one of the country's important business routes, the highway will significantly boost export and import, and contribute to the country's GDP, say government officials and businesspeople.

The present road is one of the busiest, with daily traffic of around 1,000 vehicles. But the highway, having only two lanes, is struggling to accommodate the rising volume of traffic, and sees nagging tailbacks regularly.

All these will be a thing of the past as the highway will be expanded to four lanes from two. The travel time between the port city and the capital will come down to six hours from eight to nine hours.

Former president of Jessore Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mizanur Rahman said, "We are happy and excited about construction of the four-lane Benapole-Jessore highway. We have been waiting for this for a

long time." It will save both time and money, and boost the country's export and import, he added.

President of Benapole C & F Agents' Association Mofizur Rahman Sajon said around 95 percent of the imported and exported goods are transported through the Benapole-Jessore highway.

The reduction in travel time would cut transportation costs, said Al Haj Nuruzaman, managing director of Padma Trading Corporation, an importer in Benapole.

Monirul Islam, lawmaker of Jessore -2 constituency, said they are happy that the road would be expanded to a four-lane one. "The highway will not only contribute to the country's economy but also make travelling more comfortable for passengers," he said, adding that around 1,500 passengers go to India through this road every day.

Monirul requested the authorities not to cut the hundred-years-old Shisu trees (rain tree) beside the road.

The 35.89km highway will cost around Tk 329 crore, and will be completed in 2019.



Work for turning the commercially important Benapole-Jessore highway into a four-lane road is going to start soon, much to the happiness of traders and other stakeholders.

PHOTO: STAR



A tomato grower working at his garden at Baniary village in Nazirpur upazila of Pirojpur.

PHOTO: STAR

## BANIARY 'VEGETABLE VILLAGE' Flood makes tomato farming costlier

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Tomato cultivation at Baniary, a village famous for vegetable cultivation, in Nazirpur upazila under the district, has been delayed this year due to the flood that visited the area around two months ago.

"Normally we plant tomato saplings in our garden between July and August. But this year, flood damaged all of our tomato saplings when we planted it first time," said Juran Bala, a tomato grower of the village.

"To get more profit, we plant tomato early. But this year we have lost the chance," said Md Sujan Mollah, another farmer there.

Visiting the village recently, this correspondent found that both men and women are taking care of the tomato plants in their fields. Others are planting new saplings.

Flowers have already come at some plants.

"This year we had to plant

tomato plants two times as our first plants got damaged. It has increased our production cost," said Sunil Akarshon.

Farmers expect that within one and a half months, they will be able to collect tomato from their garden.

"Every year we can sell tomato in the market at this time. But this year it is going to be one and a half months late," said Ujjal Akarshon.

"Over 1000 farmers have planted tomato on around 200 acres of land at Baniary village. This year tomato farmers have faced serious troubles due to natural calamity," said Bijan Krishna Howlader, sub assistant agriculture officer in Nazirpur upazila.

A large number of farmers at Baniary village grow tomato and other vegetables, especially on the grounds around fish enclosures. Wholesale vegetable buyers from different areas buy vegetables from there and transport them to different areas of the country.

## Fix sugarcane price at Tk 150 a maund Growers urge govt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Sugarcane producers under the Pabna Sugar Mills zone have urged the government to fix its price at Tk 150 in view of the increased production of the raw material of sugar.

They made the demand at a farmers' meeting organised by Bangladesh Sugarcane Farmers Association on the premises of Pabna Sugar Mills on Friday afternoon.

They also urged the government to allot at least 10 kg of sugar as festival bonus to each grower every year.

The present government rate of Tk 110 per maund is too scanty considering the production cost of sugarcane, farmers said at the meeting.

Sugarcane farmers Abdus Sattar, Ansar Ali Dilu, Nazrul Islam, Abu Sayed, Selim Bishwas and Ronju Pramanik spoke on the occasion.

Addressing the programme as chief guest, AKM Delwar Hossain, chairman of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation, said the demand of the sugarcane farmers would be placed to the ministry concerned.

Md Habibur Rahman, BSFIC director, Tofazzal Hossain Chowdhury, managing director of Pabna Sugar Mills, and engineer Mahabubur Rahman spoke at the meeting presided over by Shajahan Ali Badsha, secretary of the farmers' association.