



Workers load bitter gourds in a truck at Bathina village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila to send the vegetable to another district. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

# Bitter gourd brings sweet smile to farmers

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT with ANDREW EAGLE

Bitter gourd traders from across the country are converging on Thakurgaon these days: gourd yields are high and prices are healthy; the weather has been kind. Local farmers too cannot help but smile.

"I cultivated bitter gourd on 75 decimals, with expenditures amounting to around Tk 50,000," says farmer Nipendranath Barman, 32, from Dakkhin Bathina village in sadar upazila. "Already I've sold 73 maunds of the crop for Tk 92,000. I expect to earn another Tk 1 lakh in the next six weeks as harvest continues."

Nipendranath sowed his crop early this year, a move that has proved beneficial. "Bitter gourds are usually a crop planted at the end of the monsoon as the water recedes," he says, "but I started in the last week of July to maximise profits.

After only 40 days the first gourds were ready, with a favourable selling rate of up to Tk 1,400 per maund.

The farmer says he has been cultivating bitter gourd for the past five years. "Last year I made Tk 1.7 lakhs in profit from bitter gourd on the same land; such profits are not possible growing a more traditional crop."

Meanwhile Komola Kanta Barman, 35, a farmer from neighbouring Akcha village is similarly pleased with his bitter gourd success. "To grow the gourds on 25 decimals I spent Tk 15,000," he says. "So far I have sold 6 maunds of gourd at Tk 1,400 per maund. Usually gourds can be picked twice a week until November. I hope for good profits this year."

Vegetable trader Md Bablu, 45, from Awliapur village in Thakurgaon sadar upazila says he has been buying bitter since the first week of September to supply to distant mar-

kets including Dhaka's Karwan Bazar and Nimsa Bazar in Comilla. "The purchase rate from a farmer's field is about Tk 1,400 per maund, which means if I sell 100 maunds in city markets I make a profit of between Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000," he says.

According to the department of agriculture extension, Thakurgaon famers have cultivated vegetables on 4,601 hectares this season, with 310 hectares devoted to bitter gourd.

"Early winter vegetables like bitter gourd are giving farmers a good return," says department of agriculture extension's resident deputy director, Arshed Ali. "For this reason farmers are showing more interest and bitter gourd cultivation is gradually increasing in the district."

"Besides, this year the weather has been favourable and the supply of seeds and fertiliser smooth," he adds.

# Indigenous teenage girl gang-raped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Police arrested two people for allegedly raping a teenage indigenous girl in Bandarban.

The arrestees are Md Shahidul Islam, 22, and Md Nurul Islam, 24.

Police said the 14-year-old victim was picked up on her way to a shop near her house on October 8.

She is from Marma community of Kyamolong para area under Sadar upazila of the district.

According to the girl, Shahidul and Nurul took her to Kuhalong Union Parishad complex and raped her that night.

They also threatened the girl and her family not to disclose the matter to police or anyone.

Family of the victim filed a case with Bandarban Sadar Police Station on Wednesday.

The victim was admitted to Bandarban Sadar Hospital on Wednesday for medical examination.



An under-construction cluster village for the homeless people at Jorgachha union in Sonatola upazila of Bogra. PHOTO: STAR

# Cluster housing hope for the homeless

MAMUN-UR-RASHID, Bogra

Work for cluster housing on 8.27 acres of government land is going on for the homeless people in Jorgachha union of Sonatola upazila under the district, much to the happiness of 40 beneficiary families.

Sonatola upazila project implementation office is conducting the Tk 60 lakh work and around 75% of the work has already been finished, said Ziaur Rahman, upazila project implementation officer.

Each family will be provided a house including kitchen, sanitary latrine, and flower tubs and a tube-well for six families

each will be provided for safe water supply, project sources said.

A large pond is being dug for fish cultivation by the cluster village people.

The housing project meant for the shelterless people of Jamuna and Bangalee river basin areas will have arrangement for income generating activities like cattle and poultry rearing and fish cultivation, said Sonatola Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mirza Shakila Dil Hasin, also president of cluster village implementation committee.

Last year, the authorities built 60 other houses for the homeless people in the upazila at a cost of Tk one crore.

# 2 Jhenidah children missing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Two children in Jhenidah Sadar upazila have been missing for two weeks.

The missing children are Likhon Mia, 14, son of Lalchand Mia and Palash Mollah, 8, son of Aksed Ali Mollah of Uttar Narayanpur Trimohini.

Lalchand said one Sumon, son of Hashem Ali of Chorkol village of the same upazila, took his son Likhon to Dhaka on October 5 promising job in a garments factory. He said on October 15, Sumon informed him over phone that his son Likhon left Dhaka for home. Since then Likhon has been missing, Lalchand added.

Earlier, Likhon informed the family over phone that Sumon had tortured him, said Lalchand, adding that he informed Jhenidah Sadar police of the matter.

Palash's father Aksed said his son became dumb and physically challenged as his right leg was affected in an accident. He went missing on September 4 when he was playing at nearby Dakbangla Bazar.

Jhenidah Police Station Officer-in-Charge Harendra Nath Sarker said two general diaries were lodged in this regard.

# Illegally imported rice seized at Hili land port

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two customs officials of Hili land port in Hakimpur upazila under the district were closed yesterday after Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized 151 tonnes of rice that was imported from India without paying the stipulated revenue on Tuesday.

They are customs superintendents Md Alauddin and Suvash Chandra Kundu, said land port officials.

Tipped off, a BGB team wanted to check the weight when eight trucks loaded with imported rice entered Hili land port on Tuesday afternoon, said Major Hasib of 20 BGB Battalion in Joypurhat.

"The port authorities and customs officials tried to manage the BGB men but the latter

remained stiff. After weighing the eight trucks, 151 tonnes of rice was found beyond the declaration mentioned in the documents," he said.

Suchi Enterprise of Bogra imported the rice in six trucks while Mojumder Enterprise of Dhaka imported the item in two other trucks.

"The two traders evaded a total of Tk 13.28 lakh and 800 in taxes and so, customs authorities will realise fine from them. Two customs officials of Hili have been closed on charge of complicity," said Md Fakhru Amin Chowdhury, assistant commissioner of customs at Hili land port.

A section of traders, customs officials and men of contracted port operator Panama Port Link Ltd are involved in dodging tax on imported rice, said BGB officials.

"আবুল হায়াতের গল্পের কতগুলো নিজস্বতা আছে। চরিত্রে সৃষ্টিতে তাঁর কৃশলতা অবাধ করার মতো। তাঁর গল্পগুলোও তিনি তুলে আনেন সেনাজানা পরিপার্শ্ব থেকে।"

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