

Despite fertile land loss, weather stresses and depleting irrigation water, Bangladesh's agriculture keeps contributing a fifth of the GDP each year. Along with other factors, government's policy support in the form of fertiliser subsidy plays a big part here. But misappropriation of the key agro input by a syndicate involved in shipment and transport, and mismanagement by the authorities, in this case Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, have tainted this otherwise commendable effort. If such large-scale corruption is outrageous, the culture of impunity within the corridors of the BCIC and elsewhere is worrisome. This systematic graft has cost the state about Tk 100 crore each year since 2009. In this four-part report, **HASAN JAHID TUSHER** exposes the corruption in the fertiliser sector. Here is the first part.

FERTILISER RIDDLE 1

Exists on paper, lost in reality

Fertiliser worth over Tk 900cr vanishes on way to farmers in 8 years; syndicates making hefty sums from clandestine 'transit game'; audit being done on imaginary data; no one gets punished

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Sometimes, a simple phrase can make you richer by hundreds of crores of taka. Consider the magical term "in transit," which is making a syndicate of fertiliser traders unimaginably rich. This syndicate along with some officials of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) has made off with urea worth hundreds of crores of taka over the last eight years with impunity, The Daily Star has found.

As of 31 December last year, at least 2.58 lakh tonnes of the key agro input valued over Tk 900 crore never reached the buffer warehouses of the state-run BCIC. It is this Corporation that looks after the production, import and distribution of fertiliser through traders across the country.

This huge volume of fertiliser remained "in transit," a tricky buzzword used in the country's typical, flawed urea distribution system. Though traders and transport carriers must deliver the fertiliser within 21 days of unloading in Chittagong and Mongla ports, it is hardly ever delivered and its status is shown in transit for an indefinite period.

These traders and carriers with complicity of some officials at BCIC's head office and at different district warehouses misappropriate thousands of tonnes and sell those in and outside the country, multiple reliable sources have said.



Sacks of urea fertiliser piled up in the open in Mahendranagar of Lalmonirhat as there is no room left inside the government warehouses nearby. Dealers taking delivery of the fertiliser on trucks. The photo was taken recently.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Bird flu recurs after three years

2,268 birds culled at a Dhamrai poultry farm; 40 countries reported new outbreaks: WHO

REAZ AHMAD

unit on January 16.

Director of Livestock Research Institute, Dr H B M Golam Mahmud, confirmed The Daily Star yesterday that so far it was the only case of bird flu at a commercial poultry farm while the cause of death of nearly two dozen crows in Rajshahi earlier last week was also diagnosed to be with H5N1 virus.

Dr Mahmud, also a chief veterinary officer currently representing Bangladesh in Paris-based OIE, however, assured that there was no reason to panic as surveillance has been in place since detection of bird flu in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

The world is better prepared for the next influenza pandemic but not at all well enough. We cannot afford to miss the early signals.

MARGARET CHAN
DIRECTOR GENERAL
WHO

MURDER OF MP LITON Hasina slams rights bodies for silence

Addresses top cops; police press for separate division



STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday came down hard on the rights bodies that remained silent over the killing of Awami League MP from Gaibandha-1 Manjurul Islam Liton.

"These days, we often hear a hue and cry even if a small incident takes place. But when an MP was killed, neither any human rights organisation nor any person uttered a single word. Bangladesh is a strange country!" she said.

Hasina was addressing senior officials of Bangladesh Police at the Prime Minister's Office on the occasion of Police Week 2017.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Brexit needs UK parliament nod

British govt loses appeal as Supreme Court rules PM May must give parliament a vote before start of EU exit talks

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Theresa May must give parliament a vote before she can formally start Britain's exit from the European Union, the UK Supreme Court ruled yesterday, giving lawmakers who oppose her Brexit plans a shot at amending them.

A "straightforward" bill will now be rushed to parliament within days, the government said after the country's highest judicial body decided May could not use executive powers known as "royal prerogative" to invoke Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty and begin two years of divorce talks.

However, the judges did remove one major potential obstacle for the government, saying May did not need the approval of Britain's devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland before triggering Brexit.

"We will within days introduce legislation to give the government the legal power to trigger Article 50," Brexit minister David Davis told parliament. "This will be the most straightforward bill possible to give effect to the decision of the people and respect the Supreme Court's judgment."

May has said she intends to invoke Article 50 before the end of March but the ruling means the Brexit process is now open to scrutiny from lawmakers, the majority of whom had wanted to stay in the EU.

However, the main opposition Labour Party has said it would not block Brexit although it would try to amend the legislation.

"Labour will seek to build in the principles of full, tariff-free access to the single market and maintenance of workers' rights and social and environmental protections," party leader Jeremy Corbyn said.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

TOP!
QUOTE

"Our leader [Sheikh Hasina] has asked us not to hold any rally blocking roads. We do politics for people. We have to see that people don't suffer. I'm apologising for today."

AL GENERAL SECRETARY
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NEWS ANALYSIS

FACTS and alternative facts

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Media was the recipient of severe criticism of some ruling Awami League MPs including Leader of the House Shiekh Hasina during a discussion in parliament on Sunday, January 22.

Participating in the discussion on an obituary motion on AL MP Manzurul Islam Liton, they blasted the media for not writing, as they claimed the truth behind an incident of shooting of a minor boy allegedly by Liton.

The shooting incident in 2015 in Gaibandha triggered public outcry. Media extensively ran reports on it. All leading national dailies Prothom Alo, Ittefaq, Samakal, Kaler Kantho, Janakantha and The Daily Star in their almost identical reports alleged that the MP shot the boy.

The family members of the victim and locals were the sources of the media reports. Victim's father also filed a case against the MP accusing him of attempting to murder his son.

But in parliament, the ruling party MPs came up with a different version of the incident. They claimed that criminals were lying in ambush there to kill MP Liton and he fired in the air in self defence. They claimed that MP Liton did not shoot the boy.

Sundarganj Police Station of Gaibandha in its investigation into the incident, however, found a different story, one that all the media reported.

It did not find any incident of criminals lying in ambush to kill Liton as was claimed in parliament to criticise the media.

At the end of thorough investigation, police submitted the charge sheet against MP Liton to a Gaibandha court to

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2

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to our Members on the Board of Bangladesh Bank

Dr. Jamaluddin Ahmed FCA

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