



Sukhjan Begum processes vermicompost with earthworms at Dapna village in Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah.

PHOTO: STAR

Vermiculture brings self-reliance to 2,000 Jhenidah women

AZIBOR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Rebeka Khatun and Sukhjan Begum, from Dapna village in Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila, around 2,000 local women and girls are becoming self-reliant by producing earthworm rich vermicompost fertiliser. Rebeka and Sukhjan initially participated in training on the subject provided by Japan-based non-government organisation Hunger Free World, before motivating other village women to take up the activity as well. "Vermicompost has ended my poverty," says Rebeka. "I used to sell gold ornaments door-to-door. Then one day a housewife assumed I was a beggar asking for alms. It made me so ashamed I decided to find something else. When I met SM Shahin, in-charge of the Hunger Free World project, I found what I was looking for."

"I once collected paddy from rat holes to feed my family," recalls Sukhjan, "My husband was reluctant to work. I helped other people embroider nakshi kantha bedcovers for a small income. I sold puffed rice door-to-door. That was before I discovered the potential of vermicompost." The women started to produce their own vermicompost in 2005. "Nowadays I have 100 pots producing fertiliser in 16 village households," says Rebeka. "I sell 20 maunds of fertiliser per month for Tk 8,000, with another Tk 10,000 per month earned from selling worms. We now have a brick home. We installed a tube well, built a sanitary latrine and a cowshed for my three cows, as well as a biogas plant. From vermiculture income I have also purchased 14 decimals and taken one bigha of land on lease." "All 97 of the households in the village now produce

vermicompost," says Sukhjan. "I maintain 200 pots in five households. My monthly income is around Tk 15,000, which has enabled me to increase my assets and improve my family's living standard." Neighbour Sonabhan Khatun meanwhile anticipates a monthly income of around Tk 12,000 from her vermicompost business. Vermiculture has made her solvent, she says. "Most of Dapna's women are involved with vermicompost production," notes an official at the upazila agriculture office. "Worms are sold at Tk 1500 per kilogram, while the fertiliser fetches Tk 10 per kilogram. Many of the women are now leading solvent lives." The women of the village have also formed a savings association with income from vermiculture, where they each deposit a portion of monthly earnings. The combined savings currently amount to Tk 3 lakhs, which is used to fund

loans for members and to contribute to the education costs of village students from the poorest families. Farmers have proved supportive. "Their organic fertiliser is more effective than chemical ones. It doesn't harm our soil, which then retains fertility for much longer," says farmer Altaf Hossain of nearby Neamotpur village. Environmentally-friendly vermicompost is currently the fertiliser of choice for around 60% of farmers in the area. "The women with vermiculture experience also provide training for others," notes Hunger Free World's SM Shahin. "An organic farming training centre has been established at Agmundia village in Raigram union for the purpose." In recognition of Dapna's burgeoning vermiculture industry, on 4 January 2017 Khulna's deputy commissioner visited the village to observe their success.

SLOW PROGRESS IN CONSTRUCTION

Road mishap frequent in Lalmonirhat

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Vehicles sometimes fall into the roadside ditch while using a risky diversion road in Mahendranagar area beside the Mahendranagar-Mostofi road as construction of a culvert on the road is progressing very slowly. The Barabari-Mahendranagar and Barabari-Kulaghat roads that connect with the district headquarters in Sadar upazila are also unfit for traffic movement, forcing vehicles to use the risky diversion, transport workers said, adding that they would not use the diversion if there was another alternative option for connecting with the district town. Truck driver Nur Islam, 45, said repair work of the Mahendranagar-Mostofi road was completed two weeks ago, but construction of the culvert is yet to be completed. "Twelve loaded trucks fell from the diversion road into the roadside ditch in the last two weeks," said General Secretary of District Truck and Tank Lorry Sramik Union in Lalmonirhat Abul Kalam. "We requested the Local

Government Engineering Department (LGED) authorities several times to build the culvert as soon as possible, but to no effect," he added. Bus driver Zia Islam, 42, said, "There are two other connecting roads to the district town but those are totally unfit for traffic movement." Executive Engineer of LGED in Lalmonirhat Al-Amin Khan said the contractor started constructing an 8-by-18-metre culvert, repairing a 5.53-km road, and a 90-metre road protection work costing Tk 4.35 crore on January 19 in 2016, and the work was to be completed in June 2016. As the contractor failed to complete the work in the scheduled period, he got two more dead lines -- October 2016 and December 2016 -- which were also missed, Al-Amin added. Contractor Bablu Miah said the road repairing work has already been completed and the culvert construction and road protection work are going on, which will be completed by the current month. "We could not construct the culvert in the scheduled time due to water on the spot," he said. Al-Amin said work on the culvert will be completed by end of February, adding that the contractor missed the deadlines showing various reasons, especially rain and water stagnation.

Cylinder blast feared

Random storage and sale of LP gas in Nilphamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Without following relevant rules, random storage and sale of metallic cylinders containing liquefied petroleum (LP) gas in different areas of the district is posing threat of fatal accidents any moment. A recent fire incident at Oxygen Depot, a LP gas cylinder shop in Neyamatpur area under Saidpur municipality, has intensified the concern among the local people. Sirajul Islam Tarafdar, deputy assistant director (DAD) of Fire Service and Civil Defence Department in Nilphamari, said there is no scope for anyone to sell LP gas cylinders without following LP Gas Rules 2004. According to the rules, only licensed distributors and dealers can store and sell LP gas cylinders and violating the rule is an offence, Sirajul said. The Directorate of Explosives is the lone authority for issuing the license in favour of the distributors and dealers after verifying their warehouse certificates issued by the same department, the DAD added. While visiting different rural markets in the district this correspondent found that LP gas cylinders are being sold even in grocery and sanitary equipment shops and are kept in crowded places for display. Haran Dutta, a LP gas retailer at Baburhat market in Dimla upazila, said he sold different brands of LP gas cylinders but does not know that having license is mandatory.

220 kg hemp seized in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized 220 kg of hemp worth around Tk 33 lakh from Raghunathpur border under Benapole Port Police Station on Wednesday. Afzal Hossain, in-charge of Raghunathpur camp of BGB 49 Battalion, said a team of the border guards, acting on a tip-off, conducted a raid at the house of one Rezaul Islam on Wednesday night and recovered 5.5 maunds of hemp from a hole beside his living room. Sensing the presence of the paramilitary troops, house owner Rezaul, however, fled the spot, the BGB official said. A case was filed with Benapole Port Police Station in this connection the same night.

40 kg of radish at Tk 20!

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

One maund (40kg) of radish is being sold for Tk 20 at the fields in the district, worrying the growers. The price was Tk 120 to Tk 160 at the same time last year, farmers said. Farmer Nazrul Islam, 48, of Khocharbari village in Sadar upazila, said he needs to sell two maunds of radish for buying one kg of rice as radish price has fallen sharply in the local market. "I spent Tk 3 to Tk 4 for producing one kg of radish this season, however, it is being sold at fifty paisa now," he said, adding that he got good prices from selling radish from the first week of December last year to middle of January this year. "I sold 50 maunds of radish for Tk 1,000 on Tuesday, but the labour cost for harvesting those was Tk 1,200," said Rashedul Islam, 50, of Kamlabari village in Aditmari upazila. Delowar Hossain, 55, of Hajiganj village said he cultivated radish on five bighas of land and sold the crop from two bighas for Tk 10 to Tk 15 per kg from the last week of December to mid-January, while radish from the rest of the land was sold at below the production cost.

Vegetable trader Hira Lal Roy, 45, at BDR Hat market, said most customers are not interested in buying radish this year, so it is being sold at Tk 1 to Tk 3 per kg in the local market. "Sometimes we throw away huge quantity of radishes as we cannot sell those," he added. Customer Ziaul Islam of College Road said various types of vegetables are available at fair prices, so they were not interested in buying radish. "We purchased radish at high rate when those vegetables were not available in the market," he said. District Marketing Officer Abdur Rahim said radish price fell sharply in the local market due to huge supply of other vegetables this year. Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Extension in Lalmonirhat Bidubhushon Roy said radish was cultivated on 345 hectares of land this year, while it was 320 hectares last year. He said farmers are getting low prices from selling radish that was cultivated late, however, they got high profit from farming the early variety. They got bumper production of radish due to good seeds and favourable weather this year, he added.



Members of a farmer family sort radish at their field of Khicharbari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. Like many others of the area, they are frustrated due to awfully low price of the vegetable this season.

PHOTO: STAR

Yaba worth Tk 24 crore seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday recovered 8 lakh Yaba tablets worth Tk 24 crore in separate raids at Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar. Commander of BGB 2 Battalion in Teknaf Lt Col Abu Jar al Zahid said they got information that a big consignment of Yaba tablets would arrive from Myanmar at around 1:30am on Thursday and took position at the confluence of the Naf river. They saw an engine boat coming towards Bangladesh and ordered it to stop. The smugglers fired one shot towards the BGB men, who fired two shots in retaliation. The smugglers jumped off the boat and swam back to Myanmar. The BGB men seized the boat and found 7 lakh Yaba tablets in it, which they said was worth about Tk 21 crore. Lt Col Zahid said, following a lead, the BGB personnel also recovered one lakh Yaba tablets worth about Tk 3 crore from Jaliar Dwp in Hnila union. Police recovered the bullet-ridden body of a 'Yaba trader' from Kerontoli hill area adjacent to Teknaf land port. The deceased was Sultan Ahmed Badsha, son of Osir Rahman of the union. Police also recovered a locally made gun and 2,000 Yaba tablets from the spot. Operation Officer of Teknaf Model Police Station Kanchan Kanti Das said Badsha is an accused in more than 15 cases in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar Sadar, Dhaka and Comilla on different charges, including smuggling of Yaba.



Women and children look hapless at a house of Amuli punjee in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar as adult male members of their family left the area in fear of arrest after a slain farmer's body was recovered on Monday.

FARMER MURDERED IN MAMONI PUNJEE

Panicked indigenous men leave Kulaura villages

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The indigenous people of eight villages in Kulaura upazila of the district are passing days amid fear after police recovered a body in the area on Monday. The body of Rimon Miah, 25, a farmer of Mamoni punjee in Kulaura, also resident of a neighbouring village, was found with several bruise marks in the area on Monday morning. Rimon's father filed a case with Kulaura Police Station on Wednesday, accusing unnamed people in connection with the incident. Indigenous people alleged that following the incident, local non-indigenous community people

prevented buyers from purchasing betel leaf in the villages well-known for punjees (betel plantations). "A large number of males of several villages left the area in fear. Our children also stopped going to school due the same reason," said Arvil Rema, 25, a resident of Amuli punjee of Karmadha union. Miki Bareh, 25, a resident of Balaima punjee, said betel leaf is their main source of income and so, they are passing days amid uncertainty. Earlier, whenever something happened, police raided the area, and so, male people ran away in fear, several women at Amuli punjee told this correspondent yesterday.

Indigenous community people were blamed when something happened in the area in the past, said Bably Talang, general secretary of Kuboraz, a development organisation that works for indigenous people. Father Joseph Gomes, member of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's central committee, urged the authorities to conduct proper investigation into the incident. Md Shamsuddoha, officer-in-charge of Kulaura Police Station, said, "Police are investigating the incident. There is nothing to fear for the local residents as only the guilty ones will face action after investigation."