

Eid brings no joy

The poor in Teesta, Dharla basin areas could not buy vermicelli, new clothes

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

This year, Eid-ul-Fitr did not bring any joy for the ultra poor people of five upazilas of the district, especially in the Teesta and Dharla river basin areas, as they were not able to buy even vermicelli and sugar, let alone new clothes.

Sekherbanu Begum, 47, her ailing husband Moinuddin Mia, 58, and their daughter Marufa Akhter, 9, of Teesta river basin village Bagdora in Sadar upazila were crying as there was no food in their house on Eid day.

"We did not have breakfast and lunch on Eid day," said Sekherbanu Begum. "My daughter and ailing husband wanted food from me but I failed to give them food as I was jobless during Eid day," she said, adding that she earned her livelihood as a day labourer in the village.

Sekherbanu said she went to the union parishad (UP) member and chairman to get a Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) card but she did not get it. "The joy of Eid is not for us, as we cannot buy new clothes and good food to observe the day," she added.

Mahmuda Begum, 33, wife of Bablu Mia of the village, said they could not enjoy Eid as they were not able to purchase new clothes or vermicelli and sugar this year. "We, the vulnerable people in the village, did not get VGF card, whereas many well-to-do families got the card," she said, adding that Eid brings only sorrow for them.

However, Julekha Bewa, 62, widow of late Khadimuddin Mia of Shiberkuti village in Sadar upazila, said she got 13 kg of wheat before Eid but she did not use it on Eid day. "Earlier we were given rice as relief material before Eid, and we used it during Eid, but it was different this year," she said.



Sekherbanu Begum along with her nine-year-old daughter Marufa Akhter in her arms and ailing husband Moinuddin Mia cry as there was no food in their house on Eid day. PHOTO: STAR

Office Assistant of District Relief and Rehabilitation Office Abul Kalam Azad said 7,68,430 kg of rice was allocated against 76,843 VGF cards for vulnerable families in 45 unions and two municipalities before Eid.

However, acting District Food Controller Abdus Salam Mia said, following the food ministry's letter, they allocated 9,98,959 kg of wheat instead of 7,68,430 kg of rice due to shortage of rice in the warehouse.

Deputy Commissioner AFM Alauddin Khan said wheat was distributed instead of rice among the VGF card holders before Eid following the ministry's direction.



Marooned people pass hard days at Bhukshimul village in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar and inset, officials distribute delicacies among the sheltered flood victims at Uchail Government Primary School in Kadirpur union of the upazila. PHOTO: STAR



Joy of Eid eludes flood victims

Many are still living in shelter centres, survive on relief

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The Eid-ul-Fitr hardly brought any joy for the flood hit people in different areas of Juri, Kulaura and Barlekha upazilas under the district as the affected people, many of them living at shelter centres, are surviving on relief.

"We could hardly think about new dresses and delicious food for the family members on the Eid day as managing regular flood remained our main concern," said Faraz Ali of Sonarpur village in Juri upazila.

Water level of the Kushiara river is now flowing above the danger level, said Bijoy Indro Shankar Chowdhury, executive engineer of Moulvibazar Water Development Board.

Hundreds of villages in Barlekha, Juri and Kulaura upazilas are now under flood water that continues increasing during the ongoing rains, said locals and officials.

Bhukshimul, Kadirpur, Brahmanbazar, Jaychandi and Baramchal unions in Kulaura upazila and

Joyfarnagar, West Juri and Sagomal unions of Juri upazila are more affected.

Visiting Moulvibazar-Barlekha road including nearby Bhukshimul and Juri areas on the Eid day, this correspondent found a large number of houses as well as roads under water. Local people are using boats to move from one place to another.

"Earlier I lost my Boro paddy. Then my Aus paddy was washed away too," said Moinul Islam of Bhukshimul village.

After losing standing crops in flood, farmers in the area are now being forced to sell their domestic animals for low prices to manage bare daily necessities, said Kishore Roy Chowdhury Moni, vice chairman of Juri Upazila Parishad.

He demanded adequate relief materials, especially food, for the affected people. Farmer Moin Mia, 65, of Bhukshimul village said he along with other hapless villagers took shelter on a road.

"The flood has washed away our Eid joy. I am yet to bring my damaged dwelling huts back to liveable condition for want of money," said Abdul Quddus, a

day labourer of Buhai village in Juri upazila.

Several others including Sahin Reza, Sahab Uddin, Abdul Hannan, Ripon Miah and Emran Hosain echoed the same.

Habibur Rahman, chairman of Kadirpur union parishad of Kulaura, said shelter centres were opened for flood victims in Chakapan Government Primary School and Uchail Government Primary School in the area.

Mintu Chowdhury, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Juri, said 50 tonnes of rice and cash Tk 1.20 lakh were allocated from the district administration and it has already been distributed.

Kulaura UNO Chowdhury Golam Rabbi said rice, dry food and cash money have been distributed in different areas including Bhukshimul, Kadirpur, Joychandi, Baramchal and Brahmanbazar unions.

Tofail Islam, deputy commissioner of Moulvibazar, said 294 tonnes of rice and 49,200 VGF cards have been distributed among the flood victims.

Idols vandalised in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Unidentified miscreants vandalised six idols of Hindu Goddess at a temple in Sadar upazila of the district in the wee hours of yesterday.

Devotees found the idol broken when they went to perform their puja at the temple in Berai area in the morning.

Demanding immediate arrest of the culprits, president of Berai Pashchimpara Kali Temple Committee Chittaranjan Das said criminals might have committed the shocking act to harm the communal harmony among the local people.

Officer-in-Charge Nazmul Haque Bhuiyan of Sadar Model Police Station said police started their investigation.

Bright prospect of mushroom farming

SHYKH SERAJ

Today, I talk about mushrooms, one of the most valuable agricultural products that has great demand in the global market. It is known to all that button mushroom is the most popular mushroom variety among other varieties. Cultivation of button mushroom started in the 16th century. However, on a commercial scale, the cultivation was initiated in Europe around the 17th century.

Mushroom farming can be a profitable business with low capital investment. It is an art which requires both study and experience. I went to Saidpur upazila of Nilphamari district to visit a mushroom farm in Technical College area. You probably have watched on TV that I have been showcasing mushroom for many years, highlighting its features as a crop, its medicinal properties and varieties -- oyster, button etc -- and how it can be cultivated. For some reason, mushroom is not getting popular in Bangladesh. It might be because of social mindset or misconception. However, it has great use and market worldwide. There is a huge market of mushrooms in countries like China, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Singapore etc.



Already, he has received many awards. He has also achieved Bangabandhu National Agriculture Award for cultivating mushrooms. Moreover, he is probably the only person in Bangladesh who cultivates gano mushrooms on a large scale.

An individual who wants to start his own mushroom farming business must have undergone technical training on mushroom farming to gain expertise. "I could make this successful because I had clear strategy, target market and proper training," says Azizul Haque. Environment plays the most important role in mushroom farming business because different varieties require different kinds of environment.

Mushroom is being cultivated for three decades in Bangladesh. Entrepreneurs do understand its possibilities and value. However, demand for it is not increasing among buyers and consumers, thus there are many examples of failures and some success stories. In this regard, Azizul Haque has shown a great example of success by making a huge platform for producing mushrooms. His courage is astounding. He has 45 thousand mushroom spawns in three sheds. Without a doubt, Azizul Haque is one of Bangladesh's pioneer mushroom growers.

"What variety of mushroom are you growing?" I asked Azizul. "Oyster or gano?" I added.

"I'm growing both by following vertical expansion method," Azizul replied.

Growing mushrooms is a craft, a work of

art. From far away, it looks like rice kept in poly-bags.

I had a chat with him in one of his sheds. "So, how many spawns can you make from each row following vertical method from this shed?"

"600." "How much mushroom do you get from here?"

"800 gm to 1 kg." So, in this row only, there are 600 spawns or bags. If 1 kg of mushroom is produced from each bag, then at least 600 kg of mushroom is grown from a single row like this.

Back in 2011-2012, you probably watched on Krishi Dibanishi (BTV) that Azizul cultivated gano mushroom at his own residence. It is famous for its medicinal features. He became popular by making tablets of this mushroom with medicinal properties in his home at that time. Many were benefited by his mushrooms.

"I started eating mushrooms from 28th of September, 2011. I lost huge amount of fat by doing so," said Azizul Haque. He also used to go to a doctor for cardiac problems. But after he started eating gano mushroom tablets, he never had any reason to visit his doctor.

Mushrooms have been shown to have anti-inflammatory, antiviral, cholesterol-reducing, and immune-enhancing properties, as well as helping to reduce blood pressure and blood sugar levels. Consumption of mushrooms was found to

be associated with lower risk of heart disease in one European study. A study of Korean breast cancer patients also found consumption of mushrooms to be associated with a significantly decreased risk of breast cancer.

"How much mushrooms do you produce in a season?"

"In this shed, I have 30 thousand spawns. I have two more sheds inside the compound. In those two, one has 10 thousand and another has 5 thousand spawns. So, there are 45 thousand spawns in total. From those, I get around 30-35 tonnes of mushrooms.

Azizul sends mushrooms to Saidpur, Rangpur and Dhaka.

Dear readers, Bangladesh today needs fully export-oriented mushroom growing, processing and freezing plants. The objective is to bring an agro-revolution in the country and to build up the nation by creating more job opportunities with more big entrepreneurs taking the challenge in hand. Also, for the small entrepreneurs mushroom can become a good source of income from the domestic market. It may provide livelihood to many poor families in one way or other because of low capital investment and it is affordable for everyone to take mushroom cultivation/farming as an enterprise. Indeed, mushroom farming, if done in proper manner and with utmost care, can become an established and profitable enterprise.

Farmer killed in Patuakhali clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A farmer was killed and five other people were injured in a clash over a petty matter on Monday in Ghatker Andua village under Mirzaganj upazila of the district.

The victim was identified as Zafar Howlader, 30, son of Musa Howlader of the village, said Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Mirzaganj Police Station Monir Hossain.

The injured -- Shahid Howlader, 35, brother of the victim, Shahid's wife Rina Begum, 30, their son Rifat, 13, Habib Howlader, another brother of the victim, and Alamgir Hossain, 35 -- are under treatment at Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Police and locals said Zafar's buffalo ate the Aman seedling on his cousin Malek Howlader's field and a quarrel took place over the matter. At one stage Malek and his men attacked Zafar and his family members with sharp weapons and sticks.

Locals rescued them and took them to Mirzaganj Upazila Health Complex where the doctor declared Zafar dead.

Then doctor referred the others to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, where they are under treatment.

Safia Begum, sister of the victim, filed a case with Mirzaganj Police Station in this regard.

"We arrested accused Alamgir Hossain from Barisal town on Tuesday for his alleged involvement in the incident," the OC said.

MMCH store, ICU burnt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A fire burnt the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and a store room of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) on Tuesday.

Six critical patients, undergoing treatment during the fire incident around 10:00am, were rescued unhurt and later shifted to the general ward of the hospital, said Prof Dr ANM Fazlul Haque Pathan, head of the unit.

On information, four fire fighting units went to the spot and doused the fire after an hour-long hectic effort and rescued the patients.

The important unit of the hospital will resume its operation partially from today as most of the life-support machines and other equipments were totally burnt in the fire, said the doctor.

Abdur Rahman, station officer at Mymensingh Fire Station, said primarily they suspect that the fire might have originated from an electric short circuit at the store room of the unit.

A five-member probe committee headed by Dr Abdul Gani, deputy director of the hospital, was formed to investigate the incident and asked to submit its report within three working days, said Dr Laxmi Narayan Majumder, assistant director of the hospital.

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".



India has been producing mushroom, mainly for domestic market, for more than four decades. In India, its production earlier was limited to the winter season, but with technology development, mushrooms are produced almost throughout the year in small, medium, and large farms, adopting different levels of technology.

People are gradually becoming aware of mushrooms in our country. One of the biggest sheds of mushroom in Saidpur is Fatema Mushroom, where I went a few days back. Azizul Haque has been cultivating mushrooms here for a long time now. He has many achievements under his belt.