

School or cattle shed?

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

The only primary school at Tejonandi village in Naagoon's Atrai upazila has turned into a cattle shed as classes at the institution remained stopped for long in absence of teachers.

Local residents Mostafar Hossain, Feroz Uddin, Ranjit Kumar Sarker and Nazma Begum in 1990 founded Tejonandi Primary School, which was nationalised in 2012. The founders jointly donated 13.2 kabhas of land for the school.

The school started functioning with some 100 students and continued academic activities for 18 years when a tornado hit the institution and damaged it badly in 2008, said villagers.

After the heavy storm, the teachers tried to rebuild the school, but failed due to shortage of food, they said. Later, students of the school got admitted to other schools.

Rafiqul Islam, a resident of the village, said most parents send their children to Bothakhalil Government Primary School and Shridhal-Gurunoi Government Primary School, which are two km away and the children need to cross a river.

The school was established in the village to ease the suffering of the children but it is very sad that the suffering is back again, said Mosharraf Hossain, one of the founders.

In 2013, local lawmaker Israfil Alam donated Tk 51 lakh for constructing the school building. The contractor handed over the building to Education Engineering Department in the district.

"After that, villagers saw a ray of hope that the school will start functioning again but uncertainties loomed over reopening the school as no teachers have been recruited here till now," said Ranjit Kumar, a founding teacher of the school.

In absence of academic activities at the school, the villagers found the school as a safe house for domestic animals, including cows and goats, said Md Babu, a local of the area.

The beautiful school building has now turned into a dirty place, he said.

Atrai Upazila Education Officer Roksana Anisa said the government is yet to appoint any teacher for Tejonandi Government Primary School.

She hopes that the activities of the school will resume next year as they have requested the higher authorities to restart the school.



Villagers of Tejonandi in Naagoon's Atrai upazila turn Tejonandi Government Primary School into a cattle shed as classes at the school have remained stopped for long in absence of teachers.

PHOTO: STAR

Scanty rain hits Aman farming

Farmers in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh face setback as cracks have developed in fields for lack of water

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Cultivation of transplanted Aman (T-Aman) paddy in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh is facing a setback due to inadequate rainfall during the ongoing monsoon.

Farmers of these districts are yet to transplant Aman seedlings for want of water, while cracks have developed in the fields in many areas where the seedlings had been transplanted earlier.

During a recent visit to different areas, this correspondent saw that cracks have developed on T-Aman paddy fields while many farmers are planting Aman by providing irrigation with shallow pumps.

About 30% of targeted land in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh still remains uncultivated, although the usual plantation period for Aman paddy expires in mid-August.

The season runs through two Bangla months -- Ashar and Sraban (mid-June to mid-August), and the yield declines if paddy seedlings are transplanted after this period.

Aman, cultivated in the rainy season with the help of rainwater, is considered more profitable than Irri-Boro paddy.

Visiting different villages in these districts, it was found that seedlings in many seedbeds are over 50 days old, although seedlings of 18-28 days of age are ideal for transplantation.

Finding no alternative, many farmers prepared their lands with water drawn by shallow or deep pump machines and transplanted Aman. Many others, mostly marginal farmers and sharecroppers, could not afford it and are still waiting for rainwater.

It needs additional Tk 1,500 to Tk 2,000 to prepare one bigha of land with irrigation water, farmers said.

Ratan Chandra Barman, 45, of Bathina village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, told this correspondent, "I am cultivating Aman plants on two bighas of land by providing irrigation that cost additional Tk 1,500. I had to do it as my seedlings were going to be overage."

Md Masum Ali, 43, of Moindanghi village in Boda upazila of Panchagarh said cracks have developed on three bighas of his transplanted Aman land, but he cannot provide irrigation due to financial constraints.

Deputy Director (DD) of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Thakurgaon Maududul Islam said they targeted cultivation of Aman on one lakh 35,743 hectares of land with production target of three lakh 86,035 tonnes of rice, but only about 64,130 hectares of land had been cultivated in the district till Sunday.

DD of DAE in Panchagarh Shamsul Islam said farmers have transplanted Aman on about 79,140 hectares of land while the DAE set a target to cultivate it on 96 thousand 25 hectares, with production target of 2 lakh 71,162 tonnes of rice.

"We are yet to consider the situation as drought, but rainfall is needed soon for achieving Aman cultivation target," Maududul said.



Farmers in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila irrigate Aman plants using diesel-run shallow pump to inadequate rain. Inset, cracks have developed in an Aman field at Yakubpur village in the upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Piper chaba vines lucrative for Kurigram farmers

ABDUL WAHED with ANDREW EAGLE

Farmers in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila are discovering the joy of cultivating the piper chaba plant, a vine locally known as choi jhal that is popularly used as a hot spice additive to flavour meat and fish dishes, as well as for medicinal purposes. With piper chaba demand on the rise, farmers are increasingly keen to grow the vine.

"I have been growing piper chaba within my area nut plantation for around fifteen years," says Hasen Ali, 56, from Chhinai Bazar village in Rajarhat, "and I am increasing production every year. From piper chaba vines I can earn as much as Tk 50,000 per year."

"Demand is increasing exponentially," Hasen adds, "and nowadays every household yard in Chhinai union has a piper chaba vine. Indeed it is so popular that I have a problem

with plants being stolen from my garden time to time. Usually the plants are sold whole to traders, who then cut them into about 4.5-foot long pieces which are measured and sold by the maund.

Teacher Shaiful Islam, 32, of Chhinai Bazar area, is also benefiting from piper chaba. "I have been growing the spice for some years," he says. "This year I earned Tk 10,000 from the crop. Due to stagnant rainwater I lost some of my plants which were damaged near their base; but nowadays I have learnt how to protect them from rainwater."

"I have been selling bundles of piper chaba for about eighteen years," says trader Manik Chandra Roy, 46, from Chhinai. "Among other districts, I sell them as far afield as Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira, where piper chaba is popular but will not grow easily due to unsuitable, saline soils.

Kurigram farmers can benefit a lot

from piper chaba because it grows well in this district.

"People use piper chaba in curry dishes, as an alternative to chillies," says another trader Mozammel Haque, 44. "It's a popular spice. But farmer profits could be greater if modern farming technology was used."

"Piper chaba grows well on higher land," says Rajarhat upazila's agriculture officer Sasty Chandra Roy. "It has medicinal uses and is a popular spice. And it's profitable. Farmers can easily earn up to Tk 500 per kilogram from piper chaba within two years of planting it. Although our office has not actively promoted the vine, we do offer advice to growers when they request it."

Piper chaba is rarely affected by disease and it certainly has potential as a crop for this region."

Flood creates fodder crisis in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Farmers in the district are now using hay as fodder for their cattle as fresh green hay in the Teesta and Dharla river basin areas.

One maund of hay is being sold at Tk 800 to Tk 850, while it was Tk 500 last year. Other items of cattle feed, like oilcake and husk of rice and wheat, are also being sold in the local market at double the price than that of last year.

Abed Ali, 55, a farmer at Paschim Doljor village in Aditmari upazila, said he did not get the expected amount of hay as fifty percent of Boro paddy was damaged by blight disease this year. "As I got little hay, I am selling it at high price," he said.

"I got 45 maunds of hay from my eight bighas of Boro field last year," said Nabilul Islam, adding that he got only 18 maunds from the same field due to blight disease this year.

Cattle farmer Nazul Islam, 48, of flood-prone Tajpur village in Sadar upazila, said he is facing problems feeding his ten cows as all grass has been damaged by the recent flood. "As there is no grass, I have to buy hay at high price from the mainland village," he said, adding that he needs about one maund of hay every day.

"We stored some hay during Boro harvesting period, but a portion of it was damaged by floodwater," said Helal Uddin, 55, of Dharla char Boalmari. "Taking advantage of blight disease this year, the mainland farmers are earning extra profit by selling hay at high price," he added.

Van-puller Nagendra Nath Barman, 44, of Paschim Doljor village in Aditmari upazila, said he carries four maunds of hay per trip on his van to flood-affected villages about 12 to 15 kilometres from the mainland village. "We get Tk 300 per trip for transporting the hay," he said.

District Livestock Officer Nasir Uddin Khan said farmers in flood-affected areas will get new grass in October-November, and they will have to depend on hay till then. "Many farmers collect grass from the mainland," he added.

Graft cases drag on

FROM PAGE 20

similar observation when her lawyers filed two time petitions in the respected cases.

Repeated time petitions for adjourning trial proceedings is causing delay for the disposal of the cases, said Zia Uddin Zia, one of Khaleda's lawyers, quoting the judge of the court.

Hearing the petitions, the judge told the defence that when the court granted Khaleda bail in 2015 on the grounds that she would help the court to dispose of the case, but at this moment she was not doing so.

Defence lawyers filed two time petitions, seeking adjournment for placing self-defence statement of Khaleda in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case and cross-examining

four prosecution witnesses in Zia Charitable Trust graft case.

At one stage of the hearing, the court issued a show-cause notice, asking the defence to explain why Khaleda's bail would not be cancelled. The court gave them 30 minutes to reply.

The defence submitted a reply, saying that their client had gone to London for treatment of her eyes and legs.

Earlier, Khaleda had gone abroad several times for treatment without taking any permission from the court. That is why they did not find it necessary to file petitions, seeking permission from the court, he lawyer AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon told this correspondent yesterday.

In 2015, when Khaleda skipped court hearings on four consecutive dates and

filed repeated time petitions in the graft cases, the court issued an arrest warrant against the BNP chief, who surrendered before the court later.

The anti-graft body filed the cases on August 8, 2011. ACC CHIEF'S BRIEFING

At yesterday's briefing, ACC boss Iqbal said they were receiving different kinds of allegations, including corruption, through the hotline.

"Because of the hotline, people now get a scope for informing them [ACC] about any complaints as well. On July 27, the ACC introduced a hotline number 106 to receive corruption complaints. The ACC has received over 75,000 complaints across the country to date.

Of them, the ACC has primarily selected 250 allegations for enquiry.

"Most of the allegations are petty in nature and do not fall under the ACC's purview for investigation," said ACC's Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya yesterday.

ACC sources said many people made phone calls to the ACC to complain against utility service providers.

"Of the utility service providers, we get most of the complaints against the Palli Bidrut Samity officials for demanding bribe," an ACC source said, adding that the majority of allegations came from rural people.

Joining as the ACC chairman in April last year, Iqbal has taken various measures to strengthen the commission.



Farmer Hasen Ali of Chhinai village in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila standing next to a piper chaba plant, locally known as choi jhal, at his betel nut garden.

PHOTO: STAR