



Barisal potters' future looks bleak

SUSHANTA GHOSH with ANDREW EAGLE

he says.

"Demand is decreasing to the point where I have decided to pursue some other business to support my family."

Pots, tubs, jars, jugs and other wares: all fetch only minimal market prices nowadays. "Clay and labour costs are not insignificant," says another artisan, Rudra Paul. "But a clay tub will only sell for Tk 10. The retail price for most items is similarly cheap and it's difficult to recover costs."

An average potter can make around 1,000 pots per month, an output that will realise sales of about Tk 10,000 "After cost of all products sell, even then we earn a very meagre income."

"The products from Maheshpur Paul Para are very traditional in design," notes the deputy general manager of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation for Barisal. "Such designs are not very attractive to customers anymore. What the potters need is a modern concept to catch the market's interest. But at the current time we have no project to help them develop their technical skills."

"We want to save the profession of our forefathers," says Santi Paul despondently. "It seems quite impossible."

VESTIGE OF A FADING TRADITION: Clay-made items are kept on the premises of a house at Maheshpur Paul Para, a neighbourhood famous for traditional pottery, in Niamati union of Barisal's Bakerganj upazila. Inset, a woman engaged in making earthenware at her home in the area.

PHOTO: STAR

USE OF LOW QUALITY MATERIALS Locals stop construction work of school building

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Local people and school managing committee members have stopped the construction work of Tindu Groupingpara Primary School in Tandarban's Thanchi upazila on Monday, protesting use of low quality materials in construction of the schoolhouse.

U Cha Ching Marma, president of the school managing committee, held the engineer concerned responsible for not supervising the construction work properly.

Crani Aung Marma, a local ward member, said, "We informed the authorities concerned about the matter several times but they didn't pay heed."

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Bandarban allocated Tk 68 lakh for construction of two-story Tindu Groupingpara Primary School under the Third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP 3).

Sub-contractor of the project Rokon Mia, also a Class IV employee of Thanchi LGED, said, "If you have any query in this regard, contact upazila engineer of the LGED as I work as per his instruction."

When asked, engineer Tofazzal Hossain of Thanchi LGED said, "No one but the contractor concerned is responsible for the alleged use of low quality materials."

Thanchi Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Jahangir Alam said he had already talked with the engineer concerned in this regard and is investigating the matter as well.

Sister-in-law strangles man

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpore

A man was killed allegedly by his brother's wife over a trifling matter at Godhijai village in Jessore's Jhikorgachha upazila on Monday.

The victim was Motiur Rahman, 45, son of late Abdul Qafur of the village.

Quoting locals, police said Motiur and his brother's wife Raihatun Nesa locked in an alter-ego over their children's quarrel at Motiur's house on Monday night.

At one stage, Raihatun strangled Motiur. Police later arrested Abu Hossain, brother of Raihatun, in this connection.

Plague kills 100 goats in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

At least 100 goats have died of Peste Petis Ruminants (PPR), also known as goat plague, in flood affected areas of the district.

Mansur Ali, 42, of Dhalaru river Char Shiberkuli in Sadar upazila said two of his three goats died of the disease last week and another was affected yesterday. "I took the affected goat to the upazila livestock office for vaccination," he said.

No livestock official visited their village to create awareness about the viral disease of goats after the flood, he added.

Momena Begum said one of her two goats died yesterday and the other died two days ago due to the disease. "I did not have any idea about PPR disease so I could not vaccinate my two goats," she added.

Abu Taleb, 48, said one of his four goats died of the disease on Monday morning. "I collected PPR vaccine from the livestock office and vaccinated the other three goats yesterday," he said.

Nur Jahang Begum, 52, of Bumka village said two of her five goats died of PPR disease last week. "As I did not know about the disease, I could not provide treatment to my goats," she said.

Altaf Hossain, 56, of Teesta river Char Shalman in Kalgan upazila, said one of his three goats died and many villagers lost their goats due to the disease that broke out after the flood.

District Livestock Officer Nasir Uddin Khan said PPR vaccine is available in their stock but people are not aware about the disease, so they do not contact livestock officials in this regard. Livestock officials have started working to create awareness about PPR disease among the flood affected people and are also providing vaccines, he added.

Man murdered by son

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A man was killed allegedly by his son in Agailihara upazila early Saturday.

Police arrested accused Rejal Molla, 28.

The deceased was retail cloth trader Sattar Molla, 50. He got married for second time after demise of his first wife two years ago.

Police said Sattar was sleeping when Rejal called him.

Rejal hit his father with a sharp weapon as Sattar came out of his room, leaving him seriously injured. Sattar later died at the upazila health complex.

Rejal told police that his mother was subjected to negligence of his father when she was alive. Sattar even did not arrange Janaza for his mother.

Stop military ops against Rohingyas

FROM PAGE 1

been forced to flee violence in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State in which the United Nations has described as "ethnic cleansing".

"We are all shocked by the dramatic escalation of sectarian tensions in Myanmar's Rakhine State," Gutierrez told world leaders.

In an interview earlier this week, Gutierrez described the address by Suu Kyi as "a last chance to speak out and put in motion an end to the mass exodus."

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron has called for an end to Myanmar's military campaign, describing the plight of the Rohingyas as ethnic cleansing in his first address to the United Nations.

"The military operation must stop, humanitarian access must be guaranteed and the rule of law restored in the face of what we know is ethnic cleansing" in Rakhine state, Macron told the General Assembly.

In another development, Britain yesterday said it suspended its educational training courses for the Myanmar military due to the ethnic violence in Rakhine state.

London said it had "deep concern" about "human rights abuses and would not be resuming the military courses unless there is an "acceptable resolution" to the ongoing Rohingyas crisis.

"The action the military are taking against the Rohingyas people needs to stop," British Prime Minister Theresa May told the UK's Sky News in New York.

"There will be no further defence engagement or training of the Burmese military by the Ministry of Defence until there's a resolution of this issue."

In London, a government spokesman said in a statement, "In light of the ongoing violence in Burma's Rakhine state, the growing humanitarian crisis it has caused, and our deep concern about the human rights abuses that are taking place, we have decided to suspend the educational courses provided to the Burmese military until there is an acceptable resolution to the current situation."

"We call on the Burmese armed forces to take immediate steps to stop the violence in Rakhine and ensure the protection of all civilians, to allow full access for humanitarian aid and to facilitate the civilian government's implementation of the Rakhine Advisory Commission's recommendations in full."

Britain's young foreign minister Mark Field has said the UK urges forces to provide vocational courses, focused on language training, governance, accountability, ethics, human rights and international law to the Myanmar military.

Britain will not provide combat training, Field said.

Some 150 members of parliament wrote to Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson on September 6 calling for the training programme to be suspended.

Nigeria's President Muhammad Buhari urged also fellow leaders at the United Nations General Assembly to condemn Myanmar's "ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingyas people.

Comparing the situation in Myanmar's Rakhine province to the massacres in Bosnia in 1995 and Rwanda in 1994, the leader of Africa's most populous nation declared, "The international community cannot remain silent."

Meanwhile, China said it supports efforts by the Myanmar government to protect its national security and opposes recent violent attacks in the country's Rakhine State, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

Wang told Gutierrez at a meeting at the United Nations on Monday, "China advocates Myanmar and Bangladesh resolve the problem via dialogue and consultation."

Wang said China sympathises with those who have fled to Bangladesh, and it would send humanitarian aid to Bangladesh.

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ISHWARDI-DHALARCHAR RAIL LINE Farmers to plant 30 lakh palm trees

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Palsha

Farmers in the district have taken an initiative to plant 30 lakh palm trees along the newly-built rail line in Ishwardi upazila.

Bangladesh Krishak Unnayan Samity (BKUS) will organise the planting of trees along the Ishwardi-Dhalarchar rail line.

The farmers' organisation announced this at the inauguration of seed collection programme on September 14.

We have taken an initiative to plant 30 lakh palm trees alongside the newly built Ishwardi-Dhalarchar rail line in the district to commemorate the 30 lakh martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the Liberation War for the sake of building Bangladesh," BKUS President Siddikur Rahman Moyoze told journalists.

"We will plant six lakh trees this year, and the rest will be planted within the next five years," Moyoze added.

Bangladesh Sugarcrop Research Institute (BSRI) Director General (DG) Dr Amzad Hossain inaugurated the seed collection as the chief guest. Ishwardi Agriculture Officer Rawshan Jamal, Amirul Islam, teacher at a Malaysian University, and leading farmer Abdoul Jalil, among others, spoke on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the DG said BSRI will assist the farmers with technical support in the plantation programme.

The speakers stressed the necessity of palm trees for environmental balance, saying, that palm trees reduce the risk of lightning strikes and planting of the trees is a great move to save the environment.

Govt wasn't alert to depleting stock

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Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Food Minister Qamrul Islam and food officials sat with the traders represented by Bangladesh Rice Millers Association (BMRMA) leader Raqibul Karim, its General Secretary Layek Ali and several others. Former food minister Muhammad Abdur Razaque was also present.

At the meeting, Qamrul said this ministry proposed the Tk 10 lakh rice programme for 50 big bag ultra-poor for the time being and would rather go for a wider OMS programme in all upazilas from today.

This time, the government increased the subsidised price of rice to Tk 30 a kg to Tk 15 last year. Yet, the new price is at least Tk 20 a kg lower than the current market price of coarse rice.

Responding to a demand from the traders, Tofail told the meeting that traders would be allowed to pack rice in plastic bags instead of jute sacks.

Traders said the decision would help them reduce rice price by at least Tk 1.5 a kg.

Matia spoke of higher AUS yield this season.

Razaque said the crop loss this year would be much more than 20 lakh tonnes.

He pointed out that Boro crop was damaged not only by flash floods, but also by fungal attack.

The former food minister also said the government needs to give top priority to the Public Food Distribution System.

Razaque said the government should price the staple would come down by Tk 2 to a kg very soon, as the government has agreed to allow plastic bag packaging and facilitate transport of imported rice on a priority basis.

Rice traders alleged that the food ministry didn't pay any attention to a fast depleting government food stock and responded late to the urgency of replenishing the rice reserve after the Haor deluge.

They blamed the government for the failure to raise its stock and the delay in reducing the high import duty on rice.

A rice miller from Dinajpur said the government's domestic rice procurement programme in the Boro season failed mainly due to its offer of low price.

"I incurred a loss of Tk 2 crore for providing the government with 7,500 tonnes of rice." Yet, the government didn't increase the purchase price, he claimed.

Traders and millers told the meeting that the government refused to give better price for homegrown rice but it later procured the staple from abroad at much higher prices.

Chitta Majumder, a leading private rice importer, said that if the government had cut duty on rice right after the flash flood-induced crop loss, a situation like this would not have arisen in the first place.

A rice trader from Jopurhat was also critical of the government's foot-dragging in reducing import duty.

"Instead of slashing the import duty at one go, the government did it in phases. And every time the government reduced duty, Indian exporters hiked rice prices."

Master plan

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"The project is underway. However, its master plan and design is crucial in executing the project in a faster pace," Mohiuddin Ahmed Khan, secretary of Payra Port Authority, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Of the 19 components of the project, 12 are already implemented under foreign direct investment, and the rest under the government-to-government deals with an estimated cost between \$11 billion and \$15 billion."

The Payra port venture has drawn investment and development proposals from China, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and India.

According to techno-feasibility study prepared by British firm HR Wallingford & Consortium, the Payra port will require around 7,000 acres of land. Of the land, 6,000 acres will be used for port development, 500 acres for coal terminal and the rest for resettlement of people affected by construction of the port.

Project officials said so far Tk 600 crore had been spent on various purposes of the mega project.

Cry for direct train service PM's promise not met in five years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

People in the district have been continuing their agitation for direct train service with the capital as they face untold sufferings to travel only 100 kilometres due to inadequate bus service and regular traffic congestion on Dhaka-Tangail Highway.

They have been observing various programmes for the last few months to realise their longstanding demand. Thousands of people from all walks of life joined the programmes, including mass signature campaign, human chain, rally and sit-in.

Students, service holders and traders travel to the capital for different purposes, including jobs and businesses, every day.

"Local people sold their lands to the Railway at half the market rates for construction of train tracks through the Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge," said Tangail Babsoyee Oikya Jote President Abdul Kalam Mostofa Lata.

"Though at least 12 trains ply the route, only a few of them stop for a few minutes at Tangail rail station with only 120 seats for several thousand passengers," he said.

"A direct train service, which will start from Tangail for Dhaka at 6:30am, and from Dhaka for Tangail at 6:30pm, is needed urgently," said local Janata Bank branch manager Jahangir Alam.

"Dhaka-Tangail direct train service is now the main demand of the 40 lakh people of the district," said Sajjad Khoshnood, member-secretary of the Train Service Implementation Committee.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a public meeting in Tangail on June 30 in 2012 promised that Dhaka-Tangail commuter train service would be introduced. A letter was also sent immediately from her office to the railway ministry in this regard," said committee convener Sayeed Mohammad Lutfulah.

Lutfulah said the PM's commitment has not been implemented even after five years although all necessary facilities are available to start the service. It should be all the lawmakers in the district who introduced Railway Station at Bangabandhu Bridge East.

Awami League lawmaker Sanwar Hossain said direct train service is a must. He said upgradation of the two-lane Dhaka-Tangail Highway to four-lane would not reduce traffic congestion due to rapid increase of industries on the way to the capital from the district. He said all the lawmakers in the district would talk to the PM in this regard.

Deputy Commissioner Khan Mohammad Nurul Amin said the district administration has sent several letters to the railway ministry in this regard and talked to the minister when he visited the site of a collapsed railway bridge in Tangail recently.