

Struggle for livelihood

Mathbaria municipality staff remain unpaid for 13 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Employees and workers of Mathbaria municipality have remained unpaid for 13 months, and are facing financial hardship.

They said 69 permanent and 65 master rolled employees and workers of the municipality have remained unpaid from October last year to till now. As a result, they are passing their days in hardship.

"It has become difficult for us to run our families and meet other demands as we have remained unpaid for over one year," said an employee of the municipality wishing anonymity.

He also said they are running their families by taking loan from others.

Another employee Md Shah Alam, assistant accountant (in-charge) of the municipality, said when the municipality earns money, the mayor pays their salary. But the amount is very little.

"We are paid from the earning of the municipality. As inhabitants are not paying taxes, we are unpaid," he said.

Md Harun Ur Rashid, secretary of the

municipality, confessed the fact.

He said many inhabitants of the municipality are not paying their taxes. "Due to financial crisis of the municipality, the employees and workers have remained unpaid for over one year," said Harun.

Around TK 20 lakh is needed to pay the salary of the employees and workers. As the municipality is an autonomous organisation, the salary of its employees and workers is paid from collected tax money and other income of it, he said.

Residents of the municipality said around one and half years ago, the municipality increased the amount of taxes. They protested the decision and even stopped paying tax.

At one stage, the municipality authority changed their decision and decreased tax charge. But many people are not paying tax.

Md Manjur Rahman, councillor of ward no 2 of the municipality, declined to say anything about the matter.

Meanwhile, Mayor Rafiuddin Ahmed Ferdous is now out of the country.



Rabiul Islam with his device for lifting water using underground gas at Sukhnagari village in Madarganj upazila of Jamalpur. Inset, the innovative mechanic's motor engine set with two pumps.

PHOTO: ABM AMINUL ISLAM



ABDUCTION OF TRADER 2 policemen suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Authorities have suspended two policemen of Brahmanbaria Sadar Model Police Station on Wednesday for their alleged involvement in abducting a trader and realising ransom for his release.

Police detained ASI Rafiqul Islam, constable Shariful Islam and one Akhi Akhter.

Akhi started a conversation with fertiliser trader Jakir Hossain in Puratan Kachari Pukurpar on Monday, requesting him to take her to her home as she was ill.

When they reached Akhi's house, Rafiqul and Shariful took away Tk 12,000 from Jakir and demanded Tk 3 lakh for his release.

The kidnappers set him free after collecting Tk 93,000 ransom from his family.

Yunus freed from inhuman captivity

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Physically challenged Yunus Ali of Munshipara village in Monirampur upazila of Jessore finally got freed from chains tied to a tree on Wednesday night, thanks to the initiative of the local administration following media reports.

Yunus, 55, son of late Fazlu Biswas of the village had been kept chained to a jackfruit tree on the bank of a pond for four months by his son and daughter-in-law. He had to stay there day and night, even during storm and rain.

He was still wearing an iron chain when Monirampur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mohammad Obaidur Rahman, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Monirampur Police Station Mokarram Hossain and local union parishad Chairman Gazi Mohammad Ali reached the spot at 9:00pm on Wednesday.

After freeing Yunus and taking him to a room of the house, the UNO announced that he will get a beneficiary card meant for disabled people.

He asked the family to take care about proper food and clothing for Yunus.

The official also said that a new house would be built for Yunus.

Yunus expressed gratitude to the media people for publishing news on him, which led to his rescue.

Free automated irrigation

Jamalpur inventor Rabiul uses underground gas to power water pumps

ABM AMINUL ISLAM with ANDREW EAGLE

Since at least the 1980s, the farmers of Jamalpur's Sukhnagari village in Madarganj upazila faced an unusual problem. Across 150 acres of farmland none had been able to raise groundwater for irrigation. Despite repeated attempts, the usual diesel pumps failed. It was a riddle seemingly without a solution until in 2008, mechanic Rabiul Islam, who only studied up to Class VIII, set himself the challenge to find one.

"I installed a diesel-run shallow pump machine in a corner of the affected area just as others had done," says Rabiul, now 55. "I too, could not raise groundwater. When I tried again the following year, I again failed."

"It was in 2010 that I discovered the reason: the pipe was not raising water because it was full of air. I thought about how to make a device that would free the pipe from air and the following year I succeeded. In 2011, I was able to irrigate three of the acres for Boro paddy for the first time." It wasn't the end of Rabiul's discovery.

He wondered why the pipes in that area should be full of air, and what sort of air it

might be. In the process of investigating the air in the pipes he struck a match. The air started to burn.

"Then I understood it was actually natural gas. I wondered if it wouldn't be possible to run the engine of the pump machine with that very gas, in order to bring the groundwater to the surface without any additional supply of diesel. Such a pump system would be self-sustaining and free."

Rabiul had already shown he wasn't one to only sit and think. Surely enough he worked towards putting theory into action. "For Tk 40,000 I managed to buy a second hand 1800cc microbus engine," he explains. "I attached two pumps to it and started irrigating Boro paddy fields."

"I added another 20-foot pipe with a filter," he continues, "and joined it to the 180-foot bore pipe to enable the gas to be collected separately and subsequently fed to the carburetor of the motor engine, to serve as its fuel." His innovative self-fuelling pump system worked.

"With the one engine I have capacity to irrigate around fifty acres, with the engine running around-the-clock. Currently I have brought twenty acres under my irrigation scheme."

To irrigate the remaining 130 acres, Rabiul says two more motor engines will be required, with associated pipes, all of which he cannot afford to install. "If the concerned authorities stepped forward to help me with logistic support, I can irrigate the whole area for Boro cultivation," he says.

Sukhnagari's farmers are understandably impressed by Rabiul's invention. Last year he took 400 maunds of paddy in exchange for the irrigation water he is providing.

"Rabiul is a pioneer," says the agriculture officer of Madarganj Tanvir Ahmed. "He should be nationally recognised. If Rabiul's irrigation system is applied in other parts of the country's gas-belt, where the natural gas cannot be used for other purposes, the overall cost of Boro production will be reduced."

After being informed about the innovation, Md Suzaul Hassan, divisional head, Geological Division of Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration & Production Company Limited (BAPEX), said they will look into the matter whether it's true sending a person to the area.



The normally crowded potato seed market in Boithakata bazar under Nazirpur upazila of Pirojpur appears deserted due to lack of buyers as sale of seeds has decreased because of bad weather.

PHOTO: STAR

Bad weather frustrates potato seed sellers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Sale of potato seeds at Boithakata bazar under Nazirpur upazila of the district has decreased alarmingly due to bad weather for the last few days, worrying the traders.

Wholesalers said they have been passing anxious times for around one week as they have not been able to sell potato seeds.

"Around 25 traders of potato seeds are sitting idle as there are hardly any buyers in the market," said Sohel Bahadur, a wholesaler in Boithakata bazar.

Traders in the market said they bring potato seeds from Jessore, Rajshahi and Dhaka, and wholesale buyers as well as local retailers buy those from them.

"Wholesale buyers from nearby Nesarabad, Nazirpur, Kawkhali and Bhandar upazilas in Pirojpur, and from different areas of Barguna, Patuakhali and Barisal buy potato seeds every year from Boithakata bazar," said wholesaler Jahirul Islam, adding that very few buyers came to the market during the last few days.

Beginning from November, trading in potato seeds continues till January, and

around 1,000 sacks of seeds are normally sold every day. Each sack contains 84 kg of seeds. As the seeds cannot be stored for a long time, sellers have to sell them quickly.

"After bringing the seeds to the market, the biggest wholesale market of potato seeds in the southern region of the country, we can store them for a maximum of eight days," said wholesaler Md Rafikul Islam, adding that if they cannot sell them within this time, the seeds get damaged.

Selling and buying of potato seeds at Boithakata bazar starts from early morning to night time during the season, and normally around 300 wholesale buyers and local retailers collect potato seeds from there. But because of bad weather for the last few days, the number of buyers has decreased alarmingly as farmers fear that the seeds will get damaged, traders said.

"Normally, we sell one maund of potato seeds for Tk 600 to Tk 700, depending on the quality," said Md Abu Salek, adding that they face a loss of Tk 100 to Tk 150 per maund.

He added that they have stored the potato seeds and are not bringing new seeds to the market.

Protest against ghost bills

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Speakers at a rally in Kalihati upazila yesterday demanded an end to 'ghost' electricity bills from Power Development Board (PDB).

They said around 2,000 electricity consumers in the area have been receiving ghost electricity bills from PDB.

They have been spending extra money for the ghost electricity bills every month since electrification in the area in 2013.

Abdul Aziz of Beripitol village said the present reading at his metre shows 1412 but it was shown as 2915 units in the bill.

Anwar Hossain, executive engineer of PDB-3 in Tangail, said as contractor firm Moon Power Engineering Limited distributes electricity bills by their appointed employees, they are responsible for this.

FF HOSSEN ALI MURDER

Next hearing on January 23, 24

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

A special tribunal here yesterday fixed January 23 and 24 of next year for hearing of the explosives case related to the murder of freedom fighter Hossen Ali.

Criminals killed Hossen, 68, around 7:00am on March 22 last year on the road beside his residence at Krishnapur (Gariapara) village under Kurigram municipality and fled away, blasting bombs, said Kurigram public prosecutor (PP) advocate Abraham Lincoln.

His son Ruhul Amin Azad, 30, filed two cases, one for murder and another under Explosives Substances Act, with Kurigram Sadar Police Station the same day and police submitted charge sheet to Kurigram Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court on November 7 last year.

Hossen had converted to Christianity from Islam in 1999.

"One of four accused in the explosives case was killed in a gunfight with law enforcers while police arrested Jahangir Alam, 25, (alias Rajib Gandhi) and Golam Rabbani, 22. Another accused is absconding," said the PP.

Alam and Rabbani were produced before the tribunal at District and Sessions Judge's Court yesterday.

Rain delays early vegetable farming

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Early cultivation of vegetables in Nazirpur upazila of the district has been delayed by over one month this year due to excessive rain last month.

The upazila is specially known for its early vegetables, which are sent to different areas of the district and to other districts.

"Every year, we grow different varieties of early winter vegetables and our gardens remain full during this time. But we have not been able to sell them as we could not grow them in time due to excessive rainfall during the planting season," said Tuhin Mollah of Baniary village in the upazila.

They planted seeds several times, but the rain destroyed them and delayed production, said farmer Amal Biswas.

Prices of vegetables are high due to the crisis of vegetable supply in the market. Brinjal is being sold for over

Tk 50 per kg, while tomato and bean are sold for over Tk 60 per kg. The prices of other vegetables are also about the same. One bundle of leafy vegetables is sold for over Tk 20.

Farmers said the prices of seasonal vegetables increased two to three times more than in previous years as they could not grow vegetables in time.

One kg of brinjal was sold for Tk 20 to Tk 25 last year, but the price increased by around two to three times this year, and it is same for other vegetables, said farmer Ripan Sikder.

Sub-Assistant Upazila Agriculture Officer Bijan Krishna Howlader said if the weather remains favourable, the farmers will be able to recover the loss.

Vegetables are mostly grown on the bed of fish enclosures in the upazila, he said, adding that vegetables have been cultivated on around 150 hectares of land this year and over 6,000 families are involved with the profession.



Only tomato plants have borne vegetables in Baniary village under Nazirpur upazila of Pirojpur as excessive rain last month delayed early cultivation of other vegetables.

PHOTO: STAR