

Sunflowers a new cash crop for Noakhali coast

NURUL AMIN with ANDREW EAGLE

In coastal Subarnachar upazila in Noakhali, sunflowers are adding not only beauty to the landscape, but hope. Fields previously uncultivated for their saline soils and lack of access to irrigation are now awash with the yellow flowers, bringing new life to the local economy.

"I spent Tk 8,000 to grow sunflowers on an acre and earned Tk 24,000 from the harvest," says one farmer, Abul Hossain from Charbata union. "As a new crop it's not easy to sell the sunflowers but we hope sales opportunities will improve over time."

He also notes difficulty in accessing credit for the crop. "Most local farmers are sharecroppers," says Hossain. "They rely on loans to get started. Many more farmers would like to grow sunflowers if collateral-free finance was available."

The idea of sunflowers as a commercial

crop first reached the area in 2015, when a private firm grew the plant on 35 acres on an experimental basis. Farmers were encouraged by the low production cost and healthy investment return; more so that the flowers thrive in saline soils.

This year sunflower fields cover 515 acres in the area, with production rates of some other crops including watermelons, peanuts and soybeans having fallen in favour of sunflowers.

"Sunflowers could be a major cash crop in the sandy char (landmass emerging from riverbed) areas of Noakhali," remarks Dr Md Abul Hossain, deputy director at the district's agriculture department office.

"We plan to assist farmers in marketing their crop. Government initiative in providing accessible loans to sharecroppers would also help the industry develop," he said.



A blooming sunflower field in Subarnachar upazila of Noakhali.

PHOTO: STAR

Mother, son pass Dakhil exams together

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A woman and her only son passed the Dakhil (SSC equivalent) examinations this year from different institutions under Baufal upazila of the district.

Housewife Jesmin Akhter passed her exam from Rajapur Salehia Dakhil Madrasa in the upazila with GPA 3.60 while her son Mohammad Saifullah Bin Zakaria with GPA 4.28 from Keshabpur Fazlul Haque Alim Madrasa.

Jesmin's two daughters, Sayeeda Akhter, a third-year honours student, and Afsa Begum, a first-year honours student, are studying in colleges.

Jesmin, wife of Mohammad Zakaria

Khan, lives near Kalishuri Bazar area in the upazila with her five-member family.

"It makes me really happy as me and my son passed the same examinations this year," Jesmin said, adding that she is continuing her studies as she has a desire to receive higher education.

"I feel proud of my mother for her desire to obtain higher education," Saifullah Bin Zakaria said.

Superintendent of Rajapur Dakhil Madrasa Maulana Nurul Islam said nine students out of 20 examinees of the institution passed the Dakhil examination this year.

"We thank Jesmin for continuing her studies alongside her household work," added the superintendent.



Saifullah Bin Zakaria and his mother Jesmin Akhter.

PHOTO: STAR

Appoint VC soon Demand students of Fazilatunnesa Mujib Science and Technology University in Jamalpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Students of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Fisheries College in Jamalpur, which was recently upgraded as Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Science and Technology University, have demanded immediate appointment of a vice-chancellor at the university.

"We will not return to our classes and examinations until the demand is fulfilled," they said at a press conference at Mymensingh Press Club on Monday.

Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Fisheries College, the first fisheries college in the country, was established in Melandah upazila of Jamalpur in 2000. It got affiliation from Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) the same year and has been running under the university since then.

There were demands on various occasions to upgrade the college as a university.

A bill, titled "Bangamata Fazilatunnesa Mujib Science and Technology University-2017," was passed in the parliament in November last year, students said.

"For the last one month, we have been placing our demand for appointment of a vice-chancellor at the university but no initiative has been taken yet," they said.

As the demand was not fulfilled, around 180 students of first and second year did not fill up forms for their semester final examinations, they said.

When the authorities asked those students to leave the dormitories, other students joined them. The authorities closed the college for an indefinite period on April 26, the students said.

If a vice-chancellor is appointed soon, it will be very helpful for around 350 students of the institution.

Vice-principal of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Fisheries College Rafiqul Bari Mamun said, "We also want appointment of a VC soon. But there is no scope to appoint a vice-chancellor right now as the bill for the university is yet to be gazetted."

Determination key to Helena's success

The 15-year-old physically challenged girl achieves GPA 4.89 in SSC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

In spite of her physical disabilities, 15-year-old Helena Khatun continued her studies and passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations from Ghagra High School in Gafargaon upazila.

Born with growth deficiencies in her legs and right hand, Helena passed her SSC exam from science group this year and secured GPA 4.89.

Helena's firm determination for study overwhelms others, said Mukbul Hossain, headmaster of Ghagra High School.

The girl, who cannot even move normally like others and hails from an ultra-poor family, had to work hard to continue her studies, the headmaster said, adding that she passed her Junior School Certificate (JSC) examinations from the same institution in 2015 with GPA 4.85.

Helena, youngest among six siblings, lost her sharecropper father over a year ago.

During the exams, she had to go to Khairullah Government Girls' School centre in the upazila headquarters, about seven kilometres from her house,

by a battery-run auto-rickshaw.

When she was a student of Class III and had to crawl to her classroom, the school authority arranged a wheelchair for her, Mukbul said, adding that they also provided her education free of cost and helped her with free coaching.

While talking to this correspondent, Helena said she was not fully satisfied with her result and will work harder for better results as she wants to be a doctor in future.

Expressing gratitude to her teachers and classmates, Helena said they all were very supportive to her.

She also thanked her mother who always inspired her to continue her studies.

Recalling her earlier days, Helena said, seeing her devotion for education, her mother Fajila Khatun used to take her to school in her arms about a kilometre from their house.

Fajila said as her daughter was good in her studies since the primary level, she extended all possible support she could to her.

Gafargaon Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Dr Shamim Rahman said Helena has shown how one can overcome challenges and be an inspiration for others.

"We wish her more success in future," the UNO said, adding that they will provide financial support to the poor merito-

Irrigation hampered as grabbers occupying Teesta canal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Grabbers are occupying the vital Dinajpur secondary canal near Teesta river by making makeshift sheds on bamboo stilts on the canal.

They build the sheds with bamboo and polythene sheets and then gradually fill the space under it with earth for months so as not to draw people's attention, thus narrowing the canal.

Dinajpur Secondary Irrigation Canal under Teesta Irrigation Project covers irrigation in 35,000 hectares of Boro fields this year in Jaldhaka and Sadar upazilas of the district and Khansama upazila of

Dinajpur.

On a visit to different places, this correspondent saw that vested quarters had built shops to make a market on the canal using bamboo stilts at Kanial khata, Kalitola and Bahalipara villages of Sadar upazila and Harish Chandrapat and Uttar Deshibai villages in Jaldhaka.

"Grabbers first build shops on the water using bamboo stilts and then slowly fill the canal under the shops with earth at night to avoid attention of the authorities concerned," said Headmaster of nearby Panchapukur Girls' School Babul Hossain.

"We built shops supported by

bamboo poles on the water, but we have not filled the canal with earth, so it is not an offence," said grocer Mahendra Roy, 45, of the area.

"Water Development Board (WDB) officials at field level are aware of it. Whenever they visit us, we 'satisfy' them. Local ruling party men also help us as we support them on village issues," said Anwar Hossain, who has a stationery shop on the canal at Kanial khata village.

"Grabbers have narrowed the stream in the Dinajpur Secondary Irrigation Canal, hampering irrigation in 35,000 hectares of Boro fields. I have brought the matter to

the notice of the higher authorities," Nilphamari Agriculture Extension Officer Motahar Hossain said.

"It is difficult to look after the 22.50-km-long Dinajpur Secondary Irrigation Canal due to manpower shortage," said WDB Section Officer Mahmudul Hasan, also in charge of monitoring the canal.

"We sent a letter to the deputy commissioner a few months ago, requesting him to launch eviction drive, but we are yet to get a response," said WDB Executive Engineer Md Hafizul Huq.

He will raise the issue in the next district coordination committee meeting, he added.



Unscrupulous people are building a market on the important Dinajpur Secondary Irrigation Canal under Teesta Irrigation Project at Kanial Khata in Halua bridge area of Nilphamari Sadar upazila, hampering the flow of water and irrigation of 35,000 hectares of Boro fields.

PHOTO: STAR

Physically challenged Helena Khatun returning home from her SSC examination centre in Gafargaon upazila of Mymensingh. Struggling with congenital physical challenge and poverty, she has got reward for her perseverance, achieving GPA 4.89 in the SSC.

FILE PHOTO: STAR



Alleged robber killed in 'gunfight' with Rab

Three firearms seized after the incident in Sundarbans

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A criminal allegedly belonging to a gang of forest robbers was killed in a 'gunfight' with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Dakatiya Canal area under Sharankhola Range of the Sundarbans in the district yesterday morning.

The 'gunfight' took place when alleged members of a notorious robber gang, locally known as Gariber Bondhu Bahini, fired gunshots at a patrol team of Rab in Dakatiya Canal area, Rab sources said.

The 'gunfight' continued for about 45 minutes. Later, the law enforcers searched the area and found a bullet-hit dead body and three firearms.

Local fishermen said that the deceased was a member of Gariber Bondhu Bahini.

However, the proper identity of the deceased could not be ascertained, said Deputy Commander of Rab-8 Major Sohel Rana Prince.

The elite force handed over the body and the firearms to Mongla Police Station.

Two cases were filed in connection with the incident, said the officer-in-charge of the police station.

JCD leader hurt in attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader was injured in an attack by criminals in Nazirpur upazila on Monday night.

The injured is Majedul Kabir Russel, convener of Nazirpur upazila unit of JCD. He runs an electronics shop at Sreerumkathi bazar in the upazila.

Gazi Nuruzzaman Babul, president of Pirojpur district unit of BNP, said when Russel was returning home from his shop, a group of 10 youths, equipped with sticks and iron rods, attacked him, leaving him injured.

Locals took him to the upazila health complex and then he was taken to Khulna for better treatment.

Russel is active in social media. He wrote on different issues in social media that led to the attack, said Babul.