



A large number of bee boxes have been set up in mustard fields in Chalanbeel area. The photo was taken from Mannannagar in Tarash upazila of Sirajganj last week. PHOTO: STAR

# Apiculture thrives in Chalanbeel

Local beekeepers likely to earn Tk 25 crore honey from mustard fields

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Apiculture in mustard fields during winter has been gaining popularity among farmers at Chalanbeel in both Pabna and Sirajganj districts for the last couple of years, as it helps in bumper production of crops as well as in production of honey.

Around 1,500 tonnes to 2,000 tonnes of honey are likely to be collected from the mustard fields in Pabna, Natore and Sirajganj this year, with the target of earning an additional Tk 25 crore, said North Bengal Beekeepers' Association President Md Jahangir Alam.

Around 68,000 hectares of land have been brought under mustard cultivation in Pabna, Sirajganj and Natore this season and over 60,000 bee boxes have been set up in the vast mustard fields in Chalanbeel, he added.

"Over 800 bee farmers from different dis-

tricts went to Chalanbeel area in December, expecting to collect 1,500 tonnes to 2,000 tonnes of honey from mustard fields on 68,000 hectares this year and expect to earn around Tk 25 crore," Jahangir told this correspondent.

"Honey is collected by setting up special boxes for bees in the mustard fields. The bees collect the nectar from mustard flowers in blossom from the surrounding fields. They process the nectar into honey in the honeycomb-laden boxes. Due to this process, farmers get 25 percent to 30 percent additional production of the crop, said agriculturist Jafar Sadek.

"Bee farmers from different parts of the country have gone to Pabna, Sirajganj and Natore to set up bee boxes and collect honey from the mustard fields. Chalanbeel farmers did not have any interest in setting up bee boxes in mustard fields four or five years ago, but now they realise that bee keeping in mus-

tard fields brings 25 percent to 30 percent additional crop," said beekeeper Md Shajahan Ali of Pabna's Ishwardi upazila.

Shajahan set up 200 bee boxes at Chachkia village in Pabna's Bhangura upazila in December, and is getting two kg to three kg of honey from each box every week.

The total domestic demand for honey is around 2,500 tonnes annually. In spite of the fast growth in the volume of scientific honey production, 70 percent of the item still comes from abroad, said Abdul Ahad, secretary of North Bengal Beekeepers' Association.

"Mustard field is more suitable for honey collection than any other winter crop. I have set up 200 boxes in one bigha of land at Aligram village under Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj this year. I collect three kg to four kg of honey every week. Honey collection from mustard field will continue till February," he said.

# Idol, ornaments stolen from temple

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Unidentified criminals stole an idol of Hindu deity Krishna and gold and silver ornaments from Gobinda Jeu temple at Gobindanagar in the municipality area early yesterday.

However, none of the remaining idols were stolen or damaged during the incident, said police and the temple's priest.

The incident took place between 12:00am and 5:00am, said Sadhan Chakrabarti, the temple's priest. He said he lived right next to the temple.

"I locked the temple on Monday night keeping the idols and valuables inside and went home. When I came to the temple in the morning I saw that the lock of the room was broken. Then I noticed that the bronze idol of Krishna and half a gram of gold and 10 grams of silver ornaments were missing," he added.

Thakurgaon Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ashikur Rahman said they have visited the spot and were looking into the matter seriously, adding that a drive is on to nab the culprits.

Arungshu Datta Tito, district unit president of Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad, said they demanded proper investigation into the matter to arrest the thieves and recover the idol and ornaments. He mentioned that in 1980s a touchstone statue was stolen from the temple and could not be recovered.

"We are preparing to file a case regarding the theft," he said.

# One held for rape attempt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Police arrested a man on charge of attempting to rape a fourth grader girl from Dohisara village under Nagarkanda upazila in the district yesterday.

The arrestee is Shahadat Hossain Mollah, 45, a farmer of Dohisara village under Nagarkanda upazila.

"Shahadat forcibly took the girl to an orchard and tried to rape her when she was going to their onion field at Charjosordi village around 8:30am today. Hearing her scream, locals came to the spot when Shahadat man aged to flee," Miraz Hossain, sub-inspector (SI) of Nagarkanda Police Station, said, quoting the victim's family members.

"The girl's mother filed a case against Shahadat with the police station. Police arrested the accused from Dohisara village around 2:30pm. He will be produced before a court tomorrow [Wednesday], he said.

# Blankets for cold-hit poor still far short for demand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Although district administration as well as some non-governmental organisations are distributing warm clothes, especially blankets, among poor cold-hit people in Teesta and Dharla river basin areas, it is not sufficient as per its required demand.

"We have already distributed 20,000 blankets among cold-hit people of different villages," Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shafiqul Arif said, adding that his office has sent a letter to the ministry concerned, seeking allocation of more warm clothes.

Over 500 blankets were distributed among cold-hit ultra poor people in Teesta and Dharla char areas, Lalmonirhat Ladies Club President Shahin Akter said, adding that, "We selected the beneficiaries from

remote char areas as people there are badly affected by the ongoing cold spell for want of warm clothes."

Besides, many other non-governmental organisations like Try Foundation, a voluntary platform, and Professional Journalists' Platform (PJF) in Lalmonirhat distributed warm clothes among cold-hit people.

Widow Rabeya Bewa, 63, of remote char area Harinchawra in Sadar upazila, said she got a blanket which is helping her in the ongoing cold wave.

Farm labourer Didarul Islam, 58, of Boalmari char in the upazila, said, "I didn't receive any warm cloth and I do not have the ability to buy any."

"I cannot sleep at night as I do not have any clothes to warm me during the ongoing cold wave," said Nurjahan Bewa, 65, of Bongram village in the upazila.

# Father, son electrocuted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A man and his son died when they were electrocuted at Fulhari village in Narottampur union under Kabirhat upazila.

The incident occurred at 9:00pm on Monday.

Salahuddin, 45, came in contact with a live electric wire of Palli Bidyut when he touched the electric pole on the bank of a pond while washing his feet and fell into the pond. His only son Md Sourav, 13, went to save his father, but he also got electrocuted and fell into the pond. Both died on the spot, said Kabirhat Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mirza Hasan said.

Noakhali district Palli Bidyut General Manager Shanker Dutta said a three-member investigation committee has been formed to look into the matter. If the investigation reveals anybody's negligence action will be taken against him.

# Same work but half wage for women

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Women labourers at the brick fields in the district are facing serious wage discrimination despite doing same hard work like male workers.

The wage is half of their male fellows as they have no alternative option for earning, said the female labourers.

Saleha Begum, 44, a female labourer at a brick field in Sarodubi village in Hatibandha upazila, said 40 to 50 women work for manufacturing bricks at each of 47 brick kilns in the district and they are deprived of getting fair wages.

"We work daylong like a male labourer but we are paid fifty percent wage than that of male worker," she said.

"We start our work early in the morning and leave the brick kiln in the evening every day," said Rabeya Begum, 35, another labourer at the same brick field.

"We get Tk 350 to Tk 400, whereas a male labourer is paid Tk 800 to Tk 1000 per day," she said, adding the brick kiln owner deprived them of fair wages as the owner very well knows that they have no alternative option for earning in the area.

Mabiya Begum, 42, a woman labourer at a brick kiln in Doljor village of Aditmari upazila, said they prepare soil for manufacturing bricks but their earning is too little.

"If we place our demand for same wage to the brick kiln owner, he replies 'give up the job' and then we don't dare to raise our demand again," she said.

Sultan Mahmud, 46, a male labourer at the same brick kiln, said women labourers work all day but they are treated as male labourers' assistants so brick kiln owners pay little wage to them.

"It is true women labourers do work same like us, they even work more sometimes," he said.

Lutfar Rahman, a brick kiln owner at Sarodubi village of Hatibandha upazila, said women day labourers are available here. They give the women labourers the same wage as other brick kiln owners in the area.

Moniruzzaman Monir, general secretary of Bangladesh Sangjukta Sramik Federation in Lalmonirhat, said they are trying to get the brick kilns' women labourers together for raising voice for fair wage.



A woman labourer works at a brick field at Sarodubi village in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila. PHOTO: STAR



Illegal stone lifting from the Dharla river continues at Banglabari in Patgram upazila of Lalmonirhat, posing threat of erosion in the area. PHOTO: STAR

# No let up in illegal stone lifting from Lalmonirhat rivers

50 dredgers destroyed, Tk 1,50,000 fined in one week

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Although the administration appears to be active against the illegal lifting of stones from three rivers in Patgram upazila, stone lifting has not stopped.

Locals said stones are being lifted from three rivers -- Dharla, Singimari and Saniyazan -- at many areas in the upazila. The stones are kept openly on the roadsides for sale, but the administration is not taking stern action against the lifters, they alleged.

"The administration conducts drives against illegal stone lifting, but it is just eyewash as the lifters get information before the drive," alleged Zahurul Islam, 62, a farmer at Dangirpar village.

The lifters take away the dredgers before the officials reach the spot and bring those back when the officials leave, villagers said.

received life threat," said Anowarul Islam, 48, of Banglabari village. "Illegal stone lifting from the rivers is damaging embankments and village roads," he said, adding that they cannot sleep peacefully during the night due to the loud sound of the dredgers round the clock.

Patgram Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abdul Karim said 50 dredgers have already been destroyed through burning and throwing into the river in the last week, and a total of Tk 1.5 lakh was collected as fine from the illegal stone lifters. "We are conducting drives regularly," he said, adding that no case has been lodged as the dredger owners were not found on the spot.

Schoolteacher Noor Hossain, also a farmer at Maminpur village, told this correspondent that if the administration conducts drives and seizes the illegally lifted stones, the lifters would face loss and would not be interested in lifting stones from rivers. "The administration dumps the dredgers in the

river but the stone lifters recover them immediately," he said.

Alleged stone lifter Pakhi Islam said not only he, but many other people in the upazila are involved in lifting stones from rivers. "We collect stones from rivers but it is not a threat for anything, while the collected stones are used for the country's development works," he said, adding that many local people are happy getting job opportunity for lifting stones from rivers.

"The lifters are not daring to lift stones in daylight now, maybe they are lifting it during the dark of night, but we are keeping alert," the UNO said. "If stone lifting is not ended we will go for tougher action, including filing cases, arresting the lifters and seizing lifted stones," he added.

Patgram upazila people urged the authorities concerned to take stern steps to stop illegal stone lifting from rivers in the greater interest of saving rivers, roads, farmlands and environment.