

# Fall in paddy price frustrates growers

SHYKH SERAJ

The news that broke across the country recently is about a frustrated farmer, Abdul Malek Shikder, who sets his paddy plants ablaze out of frustration of low price in Tangail's Kalihati upazila. The news has shocked the nation. It is hard to believe that the farmer himself sprayed kerosene on part of his golden field. The prices of paddy have kept falling in the last several months owing to a good harvest in the previous three crop seasons. In the past few weeks, on my verified YouTube channel and Facebook page farmers have commented that they are not getting reasonable price for their produce. I received thousands of messages on messenger and everyone quoting the same low price factor.

Farmers in Kalihati have grown paddy on 18,530 acres of land this year and the harvest is bumper. Farmers across the country have planted paddy on 49.33 lakh hectares of land in the ongoing Boro season, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE). The cost of growing paddy is more than Tk 500 per maund while the grain is being sold at Tk 500 per maund, according to farmers in Kalihati. They also said that they need over Tk 1,000 to take the harvest home. Most of the farmers are getting half the production cost, counting up to Tk 3,000 in losses in per bigha (33 decimals) land.

Beyond everything else, the fire on the paddy really broke my heart. When Abdul Malek gets only Tk 500 for per maund of paddy, whereas with labour cost and others, he's paying a lot more than I have said earlier. This is nothing new for the farmers. They earlier destroyed their tomatoes, eggplants and also threw away milk on roads for not getting fair price. We definitely feel the pain for the farmers, but at the end of the day, what do we actually do for them?

During the March-April period this year, at the open field pre-budget, 2019-2020, dialogue session, Krishi Budget, Krishoker Budget, farmers were complaining about the Aman market then and were panicked about the upcoming Boro price. They said they would be finished if the price goes down. That is what actually happened in reality. In front of former Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, a farmer in Natore said, 'What should I say Sir, the production is great but what will I do with this. There is no price. Not even half the production cost comes return if I sell it at Tk 500 to Tk 550 per maund.'

Farmers are saying, in the past one decade, they never faced such a huge price fall. Farmer Matiur Rahman from Dinajpur's Birul upazila said one sack (76 kg) of BRRI 28 rice is being



Shykh Seraj talks with Thakurgaon farmers on recent massive price fall of Boro paddy.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

sold at Tk 1050 to Tk 1150 whereas per sack production cost is Tk 1300. For the past ten or fifteen days I have been going to the markets and talking to the farmers. The price gap is extreme and the pain of the farmers is increasing every day. Farmer Abu Helal Khan from Mymensingh's Bowla village in Phulpur upazila, says the price per maund is only Tk 550. The farmer urged the government to procure rice directly from them so that they can get the fair price. Amirul Islam, another farmer from Sunamganj's Bishambarpur says on his eight bigha land, he cultivated BRRI 28 and BRRI 29 and yielded around 12 maunds. He spent Tk 5000 for one bigha and got only Tk 5500. He was complaining how he will run his family with this petty profit of only Tk 6000 from 12 maunds.

Farmer Bikash Kumar from Netrakona yielded five maunds from each katha of land. He sold the produce at only Tk 480 per maund whereas Bikash says he spent at least 1900

taka for production, harvest threshing etc. I asked the farmers why you are still producing paddy since there is so much loss. They say it's in our blood and we can't just leave it. The government's rice procuring time is pretty long and they say a special syndicate eats the butter and farmers are wasted. Syndicate people spread rumours and buy the paddies at a very low price from the farmers. It's happening in Barisal, Brahmanbaria, Patuakhali, Rajshahi, Bogura and many other parts of the country. Almost 95 percent of paddy and rice remain beyond government's procure system and those remain in the open market. And, somehow this open market is so strong to give a fight to the government. And, at the end of the day farmers are losing everything, no money, no profit, no honour.

Bangladesh is self-sufficient in food production, it really feels good and I really feel proud of it. The research team has worked well to propel the sector. Government has

provided a lot to ensure farmers move onward. But, if farmers keep on losing in such manner at the market, it will be very difficult for the government to keep on subsidising. On the other hand, why would farmers keep on growing paddies when they are always under the loss factor? We need the solution very fast, first of all to come out of the import dependency and to make sure that we achieve the sustainable development goal in the given period of time. Government must however control the market and save farmers from the intermediaries. If the procurement process starts a bit early farmers can sell their paddies as soon as they harvest as many of them do farming on credit for agro-inputs. For paying back the loan right after harvest they need to sell half of their paddies as they don't have any preservation facility. On the other hand, if they don't pay back the Mahajan (moneylender) they can't start work for the next crop. To cut back the labour cost, mechanised farming is

a great option and the government certainly can think deeply about this on how to help the small farmers so that they get proper subsidy and other facilities for agricultural mechanisation.

Dear readers, we must remember many farmers are losing interest in paddy cultivation. If the number of such farmers increases, the area of paddy cultivation will decrease as well. In this regard, there could be a crisis in the staple food production. There will certainly be a threat on food security. Geographically Bangladesh is very ideal for paddy cultivation and traditionally the land of Bengal is rich for this crop. Keeping this heritage crop at the heart of our farming scenario, we need to take forward our farming sector. We must remember we are sons and daughters of farmers and farming is our sole identity.

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, *Swadhinata Puroshkar* and *Ekushey Padak*, respectively. He is an Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, *Hridoye Mati O Manush*.



A Boro farmer, tired of waiting for customers to sell his produce for a reasonable price at Dhela Pir market in Nilphamari on Tuesday, finally sold the item to an agent of a rice mill for much lower than expected price. Inset, frustrated farmers burn Boro paddy on a road at Zero Point in Joypurhat town, protesting the authorities' failure to ensure fair prices of paddy to save the growers from market manipulators.

PHOTO: STAR

## Assaulted Pabna college teacher afraid to attend classes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The Pabna college teacher, who was assaulted on Sunday allegedly by activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), said he could not attend classes or file any case against the powerful thugs out of fear for his life.

In a CCTV video footage, that went viral since the attack, a group of youths were seen pouncing, one of them kicking, on Masudur Rahman, lecturer of Bangla department at Shahid Bulbul Government College in Pabna town, while he was leaving the campus on his motorbike.

Right before one of the youths kicked Masudur in the back, several others were seen punching him and issuing apparent threats.

Speaking with this correspondent, Masudur and sources at the college said the attackers were mostly outsiders, but they were led by Shamsuddin Junnun, president of BCL unit at Shahid Bulbul Government College.

"Before I realised anything, the attackers punched me, kicked me mercilessly. At one stage, several teachers and students saved me [from further beating]. Threatening me, the attackers said they would cut off my hands if I went to the college again," Masudur said.

Soon after the attack, an allegation of sexual harassment against the teacher was submitted to the college authorities by a girl student of another college.

The same girl had an argument with Masudur at the college examination centre of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) a few days back, on May 6, when he stopped her from copying answer script of another girl, said Masudur.

The aggrieved girl is most likely behind the assault, he claimed, adding that the false allegation of sexual harassment was raised only to justify the assault on him.

SM Abdul Kuddus, principal of the college, said an inquiry committee

formed by the college authorities started investigating into the allegation of sexual harassment against teacher Masudur.

Admitting that the assault on the teacher took place before the sexual harassment complaint was filed by the girl, the principal, however, could not provide any reason why no committee was formed to probe into the attack on a teacher on his college campus.

Refuting the allegation of leading the attack on his teacher Masudur, the college unit BCL President Shamsuddin Junnun claimed that someone else, not BCL, attacked the teacher and that could have something to do with his alleged sexual harassment on a girl.

Rather, "I went to save the teacher," he said, adding, "Teacher Masudur Rahman is accused of harassing an HSC examinee in his examination centre on May 6. The girl filed a complaint with the college authorities and they are investigating into the incident."

Meanwhile, the assault on college teacher Masudur Rahman sparked an outcry in social media and among teachers across the country.

Nurjahan Akter, a history department assistant professor at Shahid Bulbul Government College, said although a college teacher was heinously assaulted on his very campus, no action was taken against the perpetrators in the last four days.

"Attack on one teacher is tantamount to attack on the entire teaching community. We want justice," she also said.

Harunur Rashid, secretary of BCS Teachers' Association at the same college, said they would launch nationwide agitation programme of teachers unless the perpetrators of teacher Masudur are brought to book.

## Video clip of doc's attack on patient's son goes viral

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A video clip of a doctor's attack on an attendant, also the son of a female patient, at Pathorghata Upazila Health Complex in Barguna went viral in the social media, which created anger among the local people.

The victim is Jilani, 15, son of Julia Begum of Khastabak village in Pathorghata upazila.

Jilani said the doctor attacked him when he inquired about the condition of his mother who was admitted there with injuries on Monday.

## Arson attack on Kalsindur school in Mymensingh

Two-member probe body formed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Unidentified criminals torched the office room of Kalsindur Secondary High School, also famous for producing female footballers in national level, in Dhobaura upazila of the district on Tuesday.

The fire burnt 16 important documents, including all the academic certificates of two teachers of the institution, and 15 medals won by the female footballers in domestic and national levels, acting principal of the institution Ratan Miah said.

Although no case was lodged as of filing of this report around 9:00pm yesterday, a two-member

probe committee, headed by Dhobaura Upazila Secondary Education Officer Shafiul Alam, was formed yesterday to investigate the incident and was asked to submit its report within the next seven working days.

After visiting the spot yesterday, Mymensingh Superintendent of Police Shah Abid Hossain said the arson attack seemed to be a planned one as only selective documents were torched.

At least 13 girls from the institution are regular players of different age-level national football teams of the country.

Students found the lock of the school's office room broken and

saw smokes coming out of it around 7:30am on Tuesday, the acting principal said.

Later, teachers of the institution rushed to the spot and doused the blaze, he said.

Though the institution went into vacation on May 6, it was holding special classes for a few students.

Principal Ratan said a vested quarter might have launched the attack as the institution is under process of nationalisation.

Miscreants took away the resolution book that recorded some important resolutions of recent months, he said.



Mymensingh Superintendent of Police Shah Abid Hossain yesterday visited the torched office room of Kalsindur Secondary High School in Mymensingh's Dhobaura upazila.

PHOTO: STAR