

BORO FARMERS Kushtia DC brings smiles to some

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

Moyen Uddin was overjoyed after being able to sell his Boro paddy at a government procurement installation at a fair price, thanks to the proactive initiative from the Kushtia district commissioner.

A marginal farmer of Alampur village in Kushtia sadar upazila, Moyen sold 25 maunds of paddy at Kushtia sadar food warehouse yesterday. He was all smiles when he held his cheque of Tk 26,000.

"It saved me from incurring huge loss," Moyen said while referring to the current low prices in the open market where farmers are compelled to sell a maund of paddy at Tk 500-580, when the government procurement rate per maund has been fixed at Tk 1,040.

The government has fixed the procurement price of paddy at Tk 26 per kilogram for this year's Boro harvesting season.

Moyen is one of the thousands of lucky farmers inducted in the government Boro procurement list. He said he cultivated paddy on his four bighas of land and harvested 82 maunds.

He said he received a phone call from Kushtia sadar upazila agriculture office on Friday. They asked if he was willing to sell his paddy to government food warehouses. Moyen gladly accepted the offer.

Other listed farmers in the district were also receiving the same phone calls. It was due to the efforts of Kushtia Deputy Commissioner

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hugs a girl during an iftar mehfil at the Gono Bhaban yesterday. Injured freedom fighters, orphans, people with special needs, religious scholars, and victims of August 21 grenade attack, among others, joined the mehfil.

PHOTO: PID

5 cops closed as suspect in custody runs away from court

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Five policemen were closed to police lines in Kishoreganj after a handcuffed accused fled from the court premises in the district yesterday.

Constables Nazim Uddin, Foysal Mia, Momtaz Uddin, Shahjahan, and Joyal were taking the suspected drug dealer to a courtroom when he escaped.

Morshed Mia, 27, of Manikdi area in Bhairab, was arrested with 15 yaba pills Saturday night, said Mukhlesur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bhairab Police Station.

Before entering the courtroom on the second floor of the building, the handcuffed suspect started running and fled around 3:30pm, said the OC.

A case was filed with Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station against Morshed.

Twelve coach operators fined

They overcharged passengers, did not hang fare charts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection yesterday fined 12 coach operators for not hanging fare charts at ticket counters and for charging extra.

Four teams of the directorate realised the fine during their drives in the capital's Darussalam and Sayedabad areas as part of its market monitoring activities ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

"We have slapped a symbolic fine and warned them [coach operators] that no company would be allowed to charge extra or charge passengers without providing proper service," said Manjur Mohammad Shahriar, deputy director (Dhaka division) of the directorate, who led the teams.

He said as per the relevant law, changing fare charts at the counters is a must, but 11 companies were fined Tk 5,000 each for not doing so.

Nabil Paribahan, Desh Travels, Shyamoli Paribahan, Shah Fateh Ali Pari-bahan, Ena Enterprise, and Hanif Paribahan were fined in Darussalam. AK Travels, Starline Special, Dreamline, Ena Enterprise, and

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Correction

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In the third paragraph, it was published: "On this day in 1981, then newly elected AL President Sheikh Hasina had returned home from self-exile. She had left the country after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members in 1975."

The paragraph should be read: On this day, in 1981, then newly elected Awami League President Sheikh Hasina returned home from her self-exile after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members. We apologise to our valued readers for the grave mistake.

Farmers not doing well

FROM PAGE 1

Tk 750 per maund, he said.

According to a market survey by the Department of Agriculture Marketing, production cost of Boro paddy is Tk 988 for one maund. It includes family labour, interest on working capital and cost of lease or rent of land.

During a visit to Dhan Mahal of Barmi Bazar on Wednesday, a well-known paddy market in Gazipur region, the high yielding varieties BRRI 28 and BRRI 29 were selling at Tk 500 to Tk 550 per maund.

The price went up to Tk 580 in the afternoon.

In Naogaon, Jirashail paddy, a fine variety, was selling at Tk 700 per maund. The price was up to Tk 1,000 last year, said Jahur Ali, a farmer in Raninagar upazila of the district, over the phone on Friday.

In the hoar region of Sylhet, paddy is selling at maximum Tk 600 a maund. Last year, it was Tk 750, said Abdul Kader, a farmer of Madongouri village in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar.

In Kushtia, the price range of different varieties is Tk 580 to Tk 850 per maund.

In Dinajpur, BRRI 28 and BRRI 29 are selling at Tk 550 per maund whereas last year it was Tk 850, said Shishnabi Mondol, a famer in Surail village under Chirirbandar upazila.

The paddy market has been witnessing such low prices since the end of January, a month after Aman paddy hit the market.

A maund of paddy was selling at about Tk 600 in early February, and the price further dropped to around Tk 500 after Boro harvesting started

in late April.

Farmers in different areas blamed millers for the fall in paddy prices.

The millers, who are the major buyers of paddy, are not making purchases since the harvests began, they alleged.

Addressing the allegation, KM Layek Ali, general secretary of the Bangladesh Auto Major and Husking Mills Association, said millers are still overburdened with the paddy they bought in the last Aman and Boro seasons.

"Our warehouses are full and we don't have money. So, how do we buy the paddy?"

Abdul Mueyed, director of the field service unit at the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said a bumper production of paddy in the current Boro and last Aman season has played a role in pulling paddy prices down.

In the immediate past Boro season, the hybrid, high yielding and some local varieties were grown on around 49.34 lakh hectares of land, which is one lakh hectares more than the target.

In the last Aman season, rice production stood at 1.53 crore tonnes, or 13 lakh tonnes more than target, the director added.

The total production cost of a maund of paddy was around Tk 960, he said.

Layek Ali, secretary of the millers' association, also cited the same reasons for the fall in market prices.

After crop damage in the hoar areas in 2017 due to flash floods, a large quantity of rice was also imported, he mentioned.

In 2017-18, around 39 lakh

tonnes of rice was imported, while it is 2 lakh tonnes till May 9 this fiscal year, according to data from the food ministry.

Layek Ali further said if the government decides to export fine rice, farmers may then get good prices.

Abdul Mueyed, director of the field service unit, said the government was preparing a list of farmers to buy paddy directly from them.

This effort would increase paddy prices in the country, he added.

However, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque said procuring paddy directly from farmers would not push up the price.

"It's very difficult to solve the problem immediately," he said on Saturday. "Export could be one solution. But this will create a problem in case of natural calamities."

The food ministry data till April 9 shows the stock of rice in the government-owned warehouses is 10.36 lakh tonnes. It is quite sufficient with no possibility of food grain deficit currently, reads a statement on the ministry website.

The total production of rice in 2017-18 was 363 lakh tonnes, according to the DAE.

The total rice consumption in Bangladesh is 352 lakh tonnes per year, meaning that there is a surplus, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) cited in its GAIN report 2019.

[Our Correspondents from Gazipur and Dinajpur contributed to the report]

No bar for journos

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Switzerland, and Sweden at his secretariat office.

"I want to clearly say to you that the words 'sub judice cases' have a meaning. It means that the case is pending, but its trial proceedings are yet to start. I think the Supreme Court has talked about such cases in its circular," said Anisul.

He said reporting and giving opinions would have to be separate.

"I think if you want clear opinions from the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court about the circular, they [judges of the Appellate Division] will give the same opinion," the minister said.

He also said, "They [the judges] directly did not say anything about the circular, but I have learnt something from them."

On Thursday, the SC administration issued a circular asking print and electronic media to refrain from reporting on ongoing cases at the court.

Md Golam Rabbani, registrar of the SC's High Court Division, signed the circular saying, "It has been noticed recently that some electronic and print media are giving scrolls or publishing news on ongoing cases, which is absolutely unexpected.

"Under the circumstances, it is being requested, upon orders, that all concerned refrain from publishing

news or put up scrolls about ongoing cases," the notice read.

Different journalists' organisations urged the SC to withdraw the circular, saying that if an embargo is imposed on reports on ongoing cases, people will be deprived of information.

At the meeting with foreign delegates, the law minister yesterday said the government would take all steps so that the Digital Security Act is not misused.

The Digital Security Act was formulated to control cybercrimes, not to curtail the freedom of press, he added.

EDITORS GUILD REQUESTS CLARIFICATION
Editors Guild, Bangladesh, yesterday urged the SC Secretariat to clarify its instructions for the media.

It said like that of any other country, the media in Bangladesh reports on important and relevant exchanges between judges and lawyers during hearings of cases.

Such practice by the media has been going on for a long time. Therefore, why the issue of publishing such news has been termed "recent" is not clear, said a statement signed by Editors Guild, Bangladesh, President Toufique Imrose Khalidi.

The media cannot report on any ongoing cases if the SC instruction is to be followed. It can report only after the verdict of a case is delivered,

it added.

Thus, the issue needs to be clarified so that the media can provide people with information. "However, we agree that the media should refrain from making any observations or giving any opinions on court proceedings."

Trump may pardon military men accused of war crimes: NYT

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump has asked for files to be prepared on pardoning several U.S. military members accused of or convicted of war crimes, including one slated to stand trial on charges of shooting unarmed civilians while in Iraq, the New York Times reported on Saturday.

Trump requested the immediate preparation of paperwork needed, indicating he is considering pardons for the men around Memorial Day on May 27, the report said, citing two unnamed U.S. officials. Assembling pardon files normally takes months, but the Justice Department has pressed for the work to be completed before that holiday weekend, one of the officials said.

Accord gets its way

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2,500, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh's original tenure had ended on May 30 last year.

The platform though was pushing to stay on in the country for three more years to see through the remediation works it had started in its 1,600 sourcing factories -- a demand that the government and the garment factory owners were not willing to entertain.

It got a six-month extension until November, much to its dismay.

The Accord then took the matter to court and after much discourse it came to a close yesterday with the Supreme Court verdict.

It, however, had to make compromises.

Other than settling for an earlier exit from Bangladesh, the platform agreed to form a garment factory safety entity to be called the RMG Sustainability Council (RSC) with representation from the BGMEA, brands and global and national trade unions.

The RSC will take over the Accord's operations and inherit the infrastructure and staff.

All existing transparency features of the Accord will also be maintained, including full disclosure of all results of inspection and remediation activities on a public website.

It will work in cooperation with the government to ensure that its work compliments that of the Remediation Coordination Cell, an entity under the labour and employment ministry that will eventually be responsible for ensuring workplace safety in Bangladesh's garment factories.

Over the course of this year, the

Accord will work intensively with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association to get the RSC ready, it said in a statement yesterday.

The garment sector's apex trade body in another statement said it has agreed on some important points to run the RSC.

There will be no termination or escalation of any factory from the Accord's end without the consensus of the BGMEA's technical team.

The Accord agreed that there will be no group termination in case of the failure of one factory and there will be no duplication of inspection between the safety initiatives, according to the BGMEA statement.

In case of any dispute between the BGMEA technical unit and the Accord, the matter will be referred to the RCC for final settlement.

The parties also agreed to work on developing modalities for listing new factories within the safety regimes.

"This represents the true spirit of collaboration," the BGMEA said.

As of now, the Accord engineers have verified that about 225 of its sourcing factories have completed safety remediation of fire, electrical and structural safety hazards, Rob Wayss, executive director of the Accord, told The Daily Star last month.

The platform wants to verify in person that all its sourcing factories have completed their recommended remediation works.

Approximately 18 per cent of the items that are reported as fixed are found not to be fully and/or not properly fixed when Accord engineers conduct the verification inspections, according to Wayss.

Modi win likely

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Today's Chanakya, Modi's alliance is likely to get around 350 seats. One poll by Neta Newsx, though, forecast Modi's group falling 30 seats short.

The poll of polls, an aggregate of exit polls, gives the NDA 302 of 543 seats and the Congress and its allies 122.

The poll of polls indicates that the BJP, as it had calculated, will make up for its losses in Uttar Pradesh with a surge in Odisha and West Bengal.

In Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress will get 26 of 42 seats and the BJP will move to double digits at 14 - from two the last time, predicted exit polls.

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) will be neck and neck with the BJP, the poll of polls showed. That is a huge improvement for the BJP, which won just one of the state's 21 seats in 2014.

The gains in the two states will offset what the BJP is predicted to lose in Uttar Pradesh, where it scooped 71 of 80 seats in 2014. The poll of polls predicts 49 seats for the BJP. The Mayawati-Akhillesh Yadav combination is given 29 seats while the Congress is set to do no better than it did in 2014 - two seats, if exit polls prove correct.

The poll of polls also indicates that the Congress will crash in the three big heartland states it won in December, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

"The exit polls results are according to our expectations," BJP national vice president Vinay Sahasrabudhe told NDTV.

Voting in one of India's most acrimonious elections in decades ended yesterday after seven rounds held over a month-and-a-half.

Exit polls, though, have a mixed

record in a country with an electorate of 900 million people - around two-thirds of whom voted in the seven-phase election. They have often gotten the number of seats wrong, but the broad direction has generally been correct, analysts say.

In 2014, the poll of exit polls - an aggregate of various exit polls - gave the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) 288 seats in parliament and the Congress-led UPA 102.

The gap turned out to be far wider. The UPA, which had been in power for two straight terms, was reduced to 59.

With the predicted result, Indian equity markets are expected to rally sharply today, while the Indian rupee is also likely to strengthen versus the US dollar, according to market participants.

A clear win would mean Modi can carry out reforms investors expect to make India an easier place for doing business, they said.

But a big win for Modi would fan fears that Hindu hardliner groups would be further emboldened to pursue partisan programmes such as punishing Muslims for the slaughter of cows, considered sacred by Hindus, rewriting school textbooks to reduce India's Muslim history and attack liberals.

Critics say Modi sought to win votes by stoking fear among the Hindu majority of the potential dangers posed by the country's Muslims and Pakistan, and promoted a Hin-du-first India.

But his supporters say Modi and his allies are simply restoring Hinduism to its rightful place at the core of India's society. Muslims make up about 14% of India's 1.3 billion population.

Dilip Agrawal, 46, who runs a mill in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, said he had voted for Modi, despite the difficulties faced by farmers.

Meghna grabber

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Foreshore is the sub-soil lying between the lowest watermark during normal dry season tide and the highest watermark during normal monsoon tide.

In a notice on February 7, the river custodian asked Khan Brothers to stop filling up the Meghna foreshore and also clear whatever work they have done on the river land.

The commission also warned the company of legal action, including contempt of court proceedings, if it failed to do so.

But during a follow-up visit on February 19, this correspondent saw the construction work was still on and the slipways were near complete.

Tofayel Kabir Khan, managing director of Khan Brothers Group, said they had removed the enclosure and stopped the construction work.

When pointed out that The Daily Star saw workers building the slipways, he said, "We needed to finish the job during the dry season as we cannot do it during monsoon."

But he had earlier admitted that they encroached upon 4,500 square feet area, some 150 feet into the river with BIWTA's "verbal approval".

Saila Farzana, deputy commissioner of Munshiganj, said they could not evict the high-profile

grabbers such as Khan Brothers as they were busy with other work.

Asked about their action, Gulzar said, "We served an eviction notice on them and will go for eviction once we get the equipment."

Grabbing a river or obstructing or diverting its natural flow is a violation of Bangladesh Water Act, 2013.

In a landmark verdict in 2009, the High Court also declared all such activities illegal.

The BIWTA also cited this verdict in its February 7 notice to the company.

Informed that the firm was going on with the construction and the slipways were almost ready, Gulzar said, "We will soon go for eviction."

Meanwhile, the BIWTA is likely to launch a four-day drive to evict the Meghna grabbers from Char Balaki in Gazaria to Baidyer Bazar in Sonargaon.

Char Betagi is a low-lying shoal near another shoal named Char Balaki, both of which are surrounded by the Meghna, at the confluence where the Shitalakhyia and the Dhaleshwari flow into the Meghna.

In many cases, river grabbers first manage some documents claiming ownership of shoal land. They then fill up the shoal area and beyond it, and gradually alter the natural course of the river, officials said.