



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A worker processes natural dye from indigo leaves at a factory at Rajendrapur village in Rangpur Sadar upazila, a farmer tends his indigo plants at Goalpara village in the same upazila, and local farmers load harvested indigo leaves on a tractor trolley to take it to a factory for sale. PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

Indigo farming boon for growers

About 2,000 farmers in Rangpur cultivated the colour producing plant on 3,000 acres of land this year

KONGKON KARMAKER, BACK FROM Rangpur

After 160 years of 'Nil Bidroho', the iconic peasant movement over cultivation of one of the original sources of blue dye--Indigo, many growers in Rangpur are now making a fortune by planting that very plant. According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), about 3,000 acres of land in the northern district are currently under indigo cultivation. About 2,000 farmers in Rajendrapur and Paglapir of Rangpur Sadar upazila are involved in the process. People who are engaged in other jobs are also planting indigo seeds to generate some extra income.

"We collect the seeds from Living Blue, a local indigo leaf processing factory, and sow them by the roads," Dinesh Chandra Roy, a farmer of Goalpara village in Sadar upazila, told this paper on August 29. "The cultivation starts at the end of February while harvesting starts at the end of July and continues for three months," said Dinesh, who so far has earned Tk 3,000 by selling the leaves. Living Blue, which was set up in 2008 in Rajendrapur, buys indigo leaves from the farmers at Tk 3 per kilogram, said Husne Mubarak Bappy, assistant production manager of the factory. "The annual production target is 1,000

kilogram blue dye," he said. Subhash Chandra Barman, a farmer of Rajendrapur, has been planting indigo seeds since 2008 on his 50 decimals of land. "There are many advantages of indigo plantation. It requires less irrigation, pesticides and manpower. This helps growers to reduce production cost. "A farmer can harvest leaves at least thrice and earn Tk 20,000 to Tk 22,000 in a season," Subhash said, adding, "Besides, the dried plants can be used as fuel." After meeting the local demand, the indigo dye produced in Rangpur are now being exported to different countries including America, France, Germany, India, Singapore,

Canada and Japan, according to Mubarak. "Each kilogram of pure indigo dye is sold at Tk 4,000," he said. Dr Mohammad Sarwarul Haque, deputy director of Rangpur DAE, said, "Indigo farming is more convenient compared to other crops so more farmers are going for it." Indigo processing regained popularity among farmers in Rangpur region over the last 15 years. According to Banglapedia, indigo production and export was a booming business in Bengal province in the early 19th century. But it depressed in the 1840s and '50s and as a result, the profit from indigo production turned uneconomic at

the raiyat or peasant level. Hence the peasants refused to grow indigo but the planters, who had already invested huge capital and were not able to withdraw quickly, put pressure on the peasants to continue production. The consequent conflict between the peasants and the planters led to open resistance from peasants which is called the 'Indigo Revolt' or 'Nil Vidroha'. It arose in Jashore and Nadia district in the Indian state of West Bengal in 1859 and quickly spread to other districts. It continued till 1862 when government interfered in favour of the peasants.



KB Ghat, a famous fish landing station in Bagerhat, sees only small amounts of hilsa as catches are poor during the ongoing season. Inset, trawlers at the station. PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTY

Bagerhat fishermen worried as hilsa catches poor

District fisheries official attributed less availability of the popular fish to lack of rain amid the climate change

PARTHA CHAKRABORTY, BAGERHAT

The ongoing hilsa season sees poor netting of the popular fish in the coastal waters, much to the frustration of fishermen and traders of Bagerhat's KB Ghat. Several fishermen at the famous fish landing station said their families are passing hard days as the catches are not enough even to recover the cost of deep-sea trips on trawlers. "Over 600 trawlers from Bagerhat got engaged in catching hilsa in the sea and different rivers after a 22-day ban on hilsa catching ended on July 23 but the catches are much less than expected," said Hazi Abed Ali, president of Bagerhat KB Ghat Fishers Association. Trawlers are returning with only two to ten

poons (a pon=80 pieces) of hilsa and most of the fish are medium and small sized ones," he said. "We have got only three pons of hilsa in 15 days and sold it for Tk 26,000. "Considering the money we have spent, there is only a little profit, which is not enough to buy fuel, ice, and food to go to the sea again," said Sagor Molla, 30, a fisherman of Patharghata, who came to sell fish at Bagerhat KB Ghat. Another fisherman Akkas Ali, also owner of a trawler, said, "We are getting only five to six maunds (a maund = 40 kg) of hilsa roving all day and night in the sea whereas we got 20 to 25 maunds of the fish last year. After buying foods, nets and ice and paying the fishermen, I have not much money. Now I am worried about repaying the loan of Tk 5 lakh taken from

an NGO." Trawler owner Altaf Majhi of Patharghata, who came to sell fish at KB Ghat, said he went to the deep sea with 12 fishermen and came back to the shore on August 30, after 12 days. "We were able to catch only 10 pons of hilsa that sold for Tk 70,000 whereas we had to spend about Tk one lakh for the trip," he said. Harun Bara Mia, 55, a hilsa trader of Kachua upazila of Bagerhat, said he never saw such a crisis of hilsa in last 20 years. Bagerhat District Fisheries Officer Dr Md Khaled Kanok attributed the less availability of hilsa to less rain amid the climate change. However, the fishermen of Sharankhola near the Sundarbans are getting a little more hilsa than the fishermen of KB Ghat, he added.

4 kids drown

STAR COUNTRY DESK

A Rohingya kid among four children drowned in Patuakhali and Cox's Bazar on Tuesday, report our correspondents. Three kids drowned in Patuakhali's Sadar and Kalapara upazilas. The deceased were Ria Moni, 6, daughter of Shahidul Islam and her neighbour Hasan, 5, son of Azimul Haque of Dharandee village in Sadar upazila and Fazlul Karim, 2, son of Abdur Rahman of Panjupara in Kalapara. Families sources said, Ria Moni and Hasan accidentally fell into a pond nearby their home while playing on its bank and drowned. Meanwhile, Fazlul faced the same fate when he was playing on the bank of a pond near their house at Panjupara village. In Cox's Bazar, Erfan Ali, 11, son of Aman Ullah, fell into a water body at Noyapara Rohingya refugee camp in Teknaf upazila while playing near the water body and drowned.

Fish worth Tk 2.5 lakh floated dead

Rivals poured poison in the pond at night!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Fish worth over Tk 2.5 lakh floated dead in a big pond at Fatikha village in Sundarganj upazila yesterday. Fish farmer Ful Mia, lessee of the pond, filed an FIR with Sundarganj Police Station accusing Rubel Mia and a few others of the village. Earlier on September 4, supporters of Ful Mia and Rubel Mia locked in a clash that left injured five people including Ful Mia who is still under treatment at Sundarganj Upazila Health Complex, police quoted family members as saying. The poisoning of the fish in the pond might be a sequel to the clash, locals said. "Ful Mia released fry in the pond covering three bighas of land. The fish have grown to about 70 maunds (one maund = 40 kg) worth about Tk 2.5 lakh. On Wednesday morning, neighbours saw fishes floating dead on the water," goes the statement of the FIR filed with the police station. Police visited the spot, but Rubel Mia and his family members fled the area by the time. SM Abdus Sobhan, officer in charge of Sundarganj Police Station, said, "A huge amount of dead fish was found floating on the pond water apparently due to pouring of poisonous elements. Further investigation is going on."



Law enforcers seized these 457 plum-headed parakeets and detained four people for illegally catching the birds in Shibirer Haat area of Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila on Monday night. PHOTO: RABZUL HASAN