



Members of a Mro family in remote Langkom Mro Para under Lama upazila of Bandarban take rice with only wild spinach as the remote area sees serious food shortage during the ongoing lockdown aimed at checking the spread of Covid-19. *Below, many people like the ones in picture will face starvation if relief is not sent on an urgent basis in remote areas of Bandarban.*

PHOTO: STAR

LOCKDOWN AMID COVID-19

# Food crisis grips communities in remote Bandarban

SANJOY KUMAR BARIUA, *Bandarban*

In Chong Mro, a Jhum farmer of remote Langkom Mro Para under Lama upazila of Bandarban, is worried about arranging food for his family as their earning virtually stopped during the ongoing lockdown imposed to check the spread of novel coronavirus.

"I got only 150 kg of rice from my field in last August which lasted till November. From then on, I managed daily meals for my family by selling banana and other fruits of my garden," said In Chong, father of two children, aged eight and ten.

"But we are eating only wild spinach with rice for the last one month as we couldn't go outside due to corona disease," he added.

Menrao Mro and Chong Rao Mro of the area are also in the same boat.

"I don't know from where I will get food for my five-member family including three children," Menrao said.

"I am worried as I don't know how I will feed my family as the food at my home will barely last a



day," said Chong Rao Mro.

"Ten of the fifteen families living in Langkom Mro Para are facing serious food shortage," said Langkom Mro, karbari (chief) of the Para.

"We locked our Para (neighbourhood) with khasur (bamboo-made barrier) when we heard about the outbreak of

corona disease in our country. But we didn't get any relief from government or non-government organization while villagers are badly suffering due to food shortage," he said.

Reng Yian Mro, karbari of Dekichhara Natun Para, said most of the families of our Para are suffering from food shortage as

the neighbourhood is closed with khasur.

"After putting the khasur, no one goes outside from the Para and nobody is allowed to enter inside the para, said Sing Young Mro, leader of the Mro community.

Contacted, Nur-E-Jannat, upazila nirbahi officer of Lama, said, "I have directed the local public representatives to give priority to remote Mro people while distributing relief as they are facing serious crisis."

Faridul Alom, chairman of Sarai union parishad of Lama upazila, said, "We are distributing food to the remote areas but it is not possible to give food to everyone as we didn't get enough relief. I will tell the ward member to collect information about the most needy ones."

Jamal Uddin, ward member of the area, said, "Around 1300 families live in my ward while I got relief only for 142 families."

Similar situations are prevailing in many remote areas of Alikadom, Thanchi, Ruma, Rowangchhari and Naikhongchhari upazilas of Bandarban.

## Graves of Liberation War martyrs lie in neglect

*Mass killing in Pakshey railway colony yet to be recognized*

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, *Pabna*

Visitors of Pakshey railway office in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila are often surprised to see the awful condition of five graves of Liberation War martyrs near the Pakshey divisional railway office, often try to read the nearly deleted plaques.

The graves carry the mortal remains of a doctor, his three sons and a relative who sacrificed their lives while trying to save others of the railway colony.

Besides, there are graves of 15 to 20 martyrs in the area but no step has been taken to preserve their memory during the 49 years after independence.

Pakistani occupation army along with their local collaborators attacked Pakshey railway colony and the divisional headquarters of the railway West Zone on the night of April 12 in 1971 and killed 15 to 20 people, mostly railway employees, at Juktitola, Babu Bazar, Merinpara and Pakshey Bazar para area.

When they advanced to the railway officers quarters, resident medical officer of Pakshey railway hospital Dr Rafik Ahmed along with three sons and a relative tried to prevent them.

But the brutal force killed Dr Ahmed Rafik, his three sons Zia Uddin Dulal, Saifuddin Mamun and Raich Uddin Shamim and relative Aminul Haque in front of the hospital's residence. While Rafik's wife and daughter somehow saved themselves by hiding in a corner.

The occupation army dumped the five bodies near the water tank of the railway.

The next day, the residents of the rail colony buried them beside Amtola Road near Pakshey divisional railway office.

After the Liberation War, freedom fighters made concrete walls and coverings on the graves and set nameplates of the

martyrs but those are decaying due to the lack of maintenance.

"Dr Rafik Ahmed and his family provided food, shelter and treatment to the freedom fighters during the early stage of the Liberation War, defying life risk. At one stage he embraced martyrdom," prof Abul Kalam Azad, a freedom fighter, told The Daily Star.



Five graves of Liberation War martyrs near Pakshey divisional railway office show all signs of neglect.

PHOTO: STAR

"Steps should be taken to keep the memory of Dr Rafik and other martyrs in the area alive for the future generation," he said.

"Next year we are going to observe the 50th anniversary of our independence. But it is unfortunate that we do not keep the memories of many martyrs like the doctor and his family members in Liberation War," said Md Amirul Islam, a primary teacher of Pakshey.

Contacted, Md Asadul Haque, Pakshey divisional railway manager, said, "Now we are trying to identify all the mass killing spots and mass graves of martyrs in the railway colony area. We have a plan to preserve the mass graves and build a monument in the railway colony area for the sake of keeping memory of the Liberation War."

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN INDIA

# 61 Indian truckers stranded at Burimari land port for weeks

S DILIP ROY, *Lalmonirhat*

It has been more than two weeks when they came to Bangladesh's Burimari land port in Patgram with their trucks carrying jute seeds imported from India. But 61 drivers of the vehicles from that country are still stranded there.

The Indian citizens could not return to their homeland as the Indian authorities have been reluctant to allow them back amid the ongoing lockdown enforced in India to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

Before entering Burimari land port on April 4, the truckers had to remain in quarantine for 14 days at Changrabandha land port in West Bengal of India -- a decision that was enforced by the authorities of both Bangladesh and India.

"We are stranded in Bangladesh as the Changrabandha land port authorities are not allowing us back in India... Our families are worried," said trucker Ramesh Das.

"We've been facing immense difficulties. Since all hotels and restaurants are closed due to the Coronavirus shutdown, we are sleeping in the trucks and cooking our food for ourselves. Even we haven't been able to get in touch with our families at all," he also said.

In the meantime, several talks between the Changrabandha port authorities and clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents as well as export-import dealers of the two countries produced no result.

This correspondent spoke over cell phone about the situation with Uttam Kumar Sarkar, general secretary of C&F agents' association at India's Changrabandha land port.

Uttam said the situation has arisen as the Indian authorities have barred the entry of vehicles through the port due to the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown in the country.

They were trying to get the permission from the Indian authorities for re-entry of the Indian drivers soon, he added.

Alamgir Mia, owner of Rafiq Enterprise, a



PHOTO: COLLECTED

The Indian trucks that remain parked at Burimari land port in Patgram of Lalmonirhat. The drivers and their assistants have been stranded since they arrived there on April 4.

Dhaka-based business that imports jute seeds from India through the Burimari land port, said the Indian government has already earned foreign currency through the export of the jute seeds to Bangladesh.

And now they are dilly-dallying the process of taking their trucks back -- a move that goes against the rules of international business. "I request the embassies and foreign ministries of both the countries to address the situation at the soonest."

Contacted, Somen Kumar Chakma, assistant commissioner (AC) of customs services at Burimari Land Port, said they have been in constant communication with the higher authorities and their Indian counterparts and

that he hoped for a resolution to the situation any moment.

Burimari land port Deputy Director Mahfuzul Islam said the drivers are now staying in their trucks parked inside the premises of the port and C&F agents and importers have been providing food assistance to them.

He also said he informed the local lawmaker, deputy commissioner and police superintendent of the matter already.

Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner Abu Zafar said the Indian high commission and the district magistrate of India's Cooch Behar district in West Bengal state have been informed of the situation, but they were still awaiting a resolution to the matter.

# Curiosity leads to business

*Moulvibazar youth finds success in cultured pearl*

MINTU DESHWARA, *Moulvibazar*

Once unproductive and full of water hyacinth, a five-decimal pond at Moulvibazar's Nuna village has become the centre of attention in the region, as a youth successfully farmed pearls in the waterbody.

The owner of the pond, Sultan Ahmed Rony, who works as a computer operator at the police department in Sylhet, often pondered about using the pond to supplement his paltry income.

In 2018, he heard about pearl farming and watched a number of Youtube videos on the topic.

"I have often seen mussels in the ponds and rivers of our area, but never believed that it is possible to culture pearls from these creatures," he said, adding that the Youtube videos changed his perspective and he wanted to experiment with the idea.

He contacted Ruhul Amin Liton, renowned pearl farmer from Lalmonirhat, and took training on pearl culture from him for Tk 5000.

Towards the beginning of last year (2019), he collected 2000 mussels, cleaned his pond and tested its water quality for pearl farming.

When this correspondent visited his farm, Sultan described the technique he followed.

In nature, pearls are formed when a particle, often called an irritant, enters a mollusk such as an oyster or a mussel. As a defense mechanism, the mollusk secretes a fluid called nacre and coats the particle over two to four years forming the pearl. The particle becomes the nucleus of the pearl.

Cultured pearls are formed using the same principle, explained Sultan.

He said, first a mantle (the organ that forms the shell) tissue and a nucleus is implanted inside a mussel.

A dice made from candle, oyster dust or dental powder is used as the nucleus. An image is imprinted on the dice so that the nacre coatings take the shape of the designed dice producing an image pearl, he said.

Sultan showed some of the flat image pearls he harvested from the mussels farmed last year. Each designed pearl, attached to the inner shell of a mussel, came in a variety of shapes including a

flower, a butterfly, a leaf and even a Hindu deity.

After implantation, the mussels are suspended in the pond from net bags 1.5 feet to 2 feet below the surface of the water. The image pearls are formed within 10 to 12 months, he described.

He said he invested a total of Tk 15000 for collecting mussels, buying implantation equipment, suspending the mollusks in the pond and finally harvesting the pearl.

Till date, Sultan collected 320 image pearls embedded in mussel shells and sold each shell for an average of Tk 300 to local jewellers and other individuals.

He plans to harvest the rest of the about 1600 mussels at stages, said the 27-year-old young entrepreneur.

Bidhan Chandra Mallik, owner of Mausumi Jewelers shop in Kulaura upazila told this correspondent, pearl, known as 'jarwa' or 'naoraton' in Bangla, is very costly. Traditionally, the gemstone was only set with gold along with various coloured stones.

"If it is farmed locally, we will be able to buy it at a lower price compared to the ones sold in Dhaka," he said.

Senior Fisheries Officer Mohammad Azharul Alam of Kulaura told The Daily Star that as far as he knows Sultan Ahmed Rony's venture at pearl farming is the first in Sylhet Division.

He said Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute carried out research on pearl culture and interested people can take training from their Mymensingh training centre.

"The abundance of mussels in haors can create a lot of opportunities for pearl farming in this area," he said.

Jaglal Haider, upazila agriculture officer of Kulaura, said, the soil and weather conditions of the region are suitable for pearl farming. Freshwater pearl can be grown here within eight to 10 months.

He said Sultan's success in pearl farming has attracted the attention of others in the area.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer ATM Farhad Chowdhury of Kulaura said, pearl farming can create a source of income for unemployed youths.

He said the upazila fisheries department can arrange for loans if anyone wishes to start the business.



Sultan Ahmed Rony of Nuna village in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila shows his cultured pearls and describes the technique he followed.

PHOTO: STAR