

Chuadanga Scam: Charges framed against four

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A special tribunal in Kushtia framed charges against four people in a case filed over using bamboo sticks in place of iron rods in construction of a government-funded building in Chuadanga in 2015.

The four accused in the case are Monir Hossain, proprietor of construction firm Joy International Limited, Ayub Hossain, in-charge of project equipment procurement at Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Abdus Sattar, managing director of construction firm Consortium, and Kamal Hossain.

Ashraful Islam, judge of the tribunal, ordered to frame charges against the four accused on Monday in connection with the filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Office in Kushtia, lawyer Al-Mujahid Mithu said on Wednesday.

According to the case statement, construction work of 3,750 square-foot plant control office and a building, under Phyto Sanitary Capacity Strengthening Project of DAE, in Chuadanga's Darshana municipality started on December 1 in 2015 at a cost of Tk 2.1 crore.

The building was scheduled to be handed over to the authorities concerned in June 2017.

After completion of about 70 percent work of the project, local people staged demonstration on April 6 in 2016, protesting use of bamboo sticks instead of iron rods in the construction work.

Later, DAE formed a probe committee headed by Marina Jebunnahar, senior monitoring and evaluation officer, who filed a criminal case with Damurhuda Police Station accusing Monir Hossain, Ayub Hossain, Kamal Hossain and Abdus Sattar in April 12 the same year.

According to the ACC office in Kushtia, ACC submitted the charge-sheet to the court on November 20, 2018.

SHYKH SERAJ

Starting today's article with statistics provided by the Bangladesh Bank. According to the statistics, in six months, from July to December 2020, banks have given loans a total of Tk 12,077 crore (USD 1420 million) to the farmers, collected Tk 14,091 crore (USD 1657 million) from the farmers at the same time. It means, banks have collected 22.53 percent more agricultural loans, compared to the total disbursement. Although, there was a special instruction from the Bangladesh Bank regarding the payment of instalments, farmer kept on paying off their loan instalments. It can be said that our farmers were at the forefront who worked hard towards a sustainable economy during the coronavirus pandemic. In 2020, Bangladesh Krishi Bank has distributed agricultural loans worth Tk 4,636 crore (USD 545 million) and despite the spread of COVID-19, the bank was able to recover Tk 4,000 crore (USD 474 million) that year. Real farmers are not defaulters and they have proved it even during the pandemic. Whenever they failed to repay a small loan, the law enforcers are always there to arrest them, but the big fish manage to escapes through the loopholes of the law.

It is difficult for a farmer to get a loan as we have prolonged negligence regarding the farmers and farming

Shykh Seraj is

Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is a BIDS, 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.



sector. According to a 2019 study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), farmers in Bangladesh typically borrow more than 81 percent of loans from various private sources, including NGOs, relatives, private banks and moneylenders. The interest rate of these loans is 19 to 63 percent while the interest rate is nine percent at Krishi Bank. But for some unknown reason,

only 6 percent of the total loan comes from Krishi Bank. IFPRI's survey found that 36.4 percent of the total loans were borrowed from NGOs, where the farmer has to pay an interest of more than 20 percent. According to IFPRI, 19 percent of farmers take loans from relatives. 15 percent from the landowner, 11.4 percent come from moneylenders and 3.6 percent from various associations and cooperatives. Farmers get the largest share of the loan from the Krishi Bank, which is about 15 percent. Large, medium and small farmers together get 36 percent of the total loan while marginal farmers get about 5 percent. The total percentage of loan all the farmers get is 36 percent. Sharecroppers, the farmers who cultivate other people's land on lease, do not get this loan. As a result, they have to rely on loans from other sources, including NGOs.

Small NGOs and associations began to form in the districts and upazilas from the 80s to the early 90s of the last century. Along with other developmental activities, these institutions started a micro-credit programme. Institutions thrive mainly on interest earned from loans. But there is no such change in the farmer I have witnessed. The farmer falls into a debt trap and sometimes carry the burden of prolonged loans that they take from NGOs and local moneylenders. Farmer Rafiqul Islam from Natore, at one of the open-air discussion among

farmers and policymakers, popularly known as 'Krishi Budget Krishoker Budget' (Farmers' Voices in Budget, aired on Channel i), said he has never seen any political person become poor while doing politics, but the farmers are not well off doing their profession, which is farming. "We don't have capital, no one thinks about our market, no one talks about us," Rafiqul angrily said. Such anger doesn't only come from Rafiqul, but almost every farmer bears the same agony. Most importantly, the moneylenders expanded their business by capitalizing on the poor state of the farmers and they never want them to get out of this vicious circle of borrowing money from the locally-rich and powerful people.

Usually, the prices of fruits and crops are not that well during the season. So if the crop is preserved, the farmer would probably get a higher price during the off-season. After harvest, a farmer has to sell the crop for two reasons. Small and medium farmers do not have any arrangement for crop storage. After taking loan at a high interest from a moneylender, it becomes obligatory to repay the loan in time. Usually, the farmer has to sell the crop from the land to repay the loan. Otherwise, he will not get a loan from the moneylender for the next crop. According to a recent research report by Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), farmers have to sell 52

percent of their surplus paddy within a month at the beginning of the season. In one to two months 25 percent paddy has to be sold, in two to three months 18 percent and in four months or more 5 percent. However, if the farmer had three to four months to repay the loan and there was a system to save the crop, they could have benefited a lot. Once upon a time in this country, farmers used to get loans by storing grains in food storages. That excellent project called 'Foodgrain storage loan project' was stopped by the muscle power of the moneylenders.

Another problem regarding loans is arranging loans for landless farmers and sharecroppers. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 19 percent of the 35.5 million agricultural households in the country are sharecroppers. According to this calculation, the number of sharecropping families in the country is more than 65 lakh (6.5 million). There are about 23,23,270 (2.3 million) landless farming families in Bangladesh and these families are directly engaged in farming, by leasing other people's land. According to the existing agricultural loan policy of the government, the owner of land up to five acres will get a maximum loan of Tk 2.5 lakh (USD 2964) and they have to mortgage their land. Those who do not have land will also get this loan, but in that case, they have to submit the lease

A farmer at his onion field in Chapainawabganj.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH



The seasonal sawmill of Ashraful Islam in Char Jatrapur of Kurigram's Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Seasonal sawmills bring relief to Kurigram char residents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Residents of Char Jatrapur, a remote river island or char in Sadar upazila of Kurigram, used to spend an excessive amount of money on transportation when they had to buy timber or wooden planks from the mainland for their homes or boats.

The situation has improved to some extent after a seasonal sawmill has started operating near the river dock on the Brahmaputra char about ten years ago.

Instead of travelling two to eight kilometres to reach a sawmill on the mainland, the residents of Char Jatrapur have been getting what they need from their neighbourhood sawmill and at the same time, saving time and money.

Ashraful Islam, the owner of the

mill, said he has been running the sawmill -- powered by a shallow diesel engine -- on Char Jatrapur for nearly four months every year over the last ten years.

The mill is operated from mid-January till mid-May and when the mill is closed down, its main parts are taken apart and stored in a safer location.

As a resident of the char, he feels obligated to ensure that locals are benefited by the mill and that is the reason why the service charges at his mill are same as that at sawmills on the mainland, he also said.

Nader Islam, who operates ferryboats at the river dock in Char Jatrapur, said timber is in high demand in the char as several hundred ferryboats as well as fishing boats need to be repaired and many

new ones built every year.

The sawmill in Char Jatrapur has been of great service to locals with its affordable timber and wooden planks, he added.

Locals said more and more new sawmills are being set up on remote chars on the Brahmaputra these days.

Farmer Atiar Rahman, from Char Parbati, said timber is an essential commodity that is used not only to build new houses in the chars, but also to repair hundreds of homes that get damaged every year due to floods.

Thanks to the local seasonal sawmills, those days are gone when they had to spend a hefty amount of money to bring in timber from distant sawmills on the mainland, he also said.

Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh Department of Cyphers Ministry of Defence Ganabhaban Complex Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207



Invitation for Tender (IFT)

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Defence		
2	Agency	Department of Cyphers		
3	Procuring Entity Name	Director, Department of Cyphers		
4	Procuring Entity Code.	Not used at present		
5	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka		
6	Invitation for Tender Ref. & Date	23.10.0000.001.07.031.18-169, Date: 04-03-2021		
KEY INFORMATION				
7	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)		
FUNDING INFORMATION				
8	Budget and source of funds	Government of Bangladesh		
9	Development partners (if applicable)	N/A		
PARTICULAR INFORMATION				
10	Project/Programme Code (if applicable)	N/A		
11	Project/Programme Name (if applicable)	N/A		
12	Tender Package No.	01		
13	Tender Package Name	Personal Computer (Desktop)		
14	Tender Publication Date	05-03-2021		
		Date	Time	
15	Tender Last Selling Date	15-03-2021	5:00 PM	
16	Tender Last Submission Date and Time	22-03-2021	12:00 PM	
17	Tender Opening Date and Time	22-03-2021	12:15 PM	
18	Name and Address of the Office(s) -Selling Tender Document (Principle) -Selling Tender Document (Others) -Receiving Tender Document -Opening Tender Document	Department of Cyphers, Ministry of Defence, Ganabhaban Complex, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207		
19	Place/Date/Time of Pre-Tender Meeting (Optional)	Not Applicable		
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER				
20	Eligibility of Tenderer			
21	Brief Description of Goods or Works	Detailed Tender Description are given in TDS.		
22	Brief Description of Related Services			
23	Price of Tender Document (TK)	1000/- (One thousand) Taka		
	Package No.	Location	Tender Security Amount (TK)	Completion Time in Weeks/Months/days
24	01	Dhaka	3% of the price offered by the bidder.	30 days
PURCHASER DETAILS				
25	Name of Official Inviting Tender	Mohammad Hossain Ali		
26	Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Deputy Director (Admin & Technical)		
27	Address of Official Inviting Tender	Department of Cyphers, Ministry of Defence, Ganabhaban Complex, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207		
28	Contact Details of Official Inviting Tender	Tel: 58152635		
29	The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders			

Ashraful Islam
04.03.2021

(Mohammad Hossain Ali)
Deputy Director (Admin & Technical)