

COVID-19 FALLOUT

Jhenidah's bamboo artisans seek urgent help

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

The ongoing restrictions on public transport and reduced business hours imposed on shops and marketplaces, to contain the second wave of the pandemic, are causing severe financial hardship to Jhenidah's bamboo artisans.

In Kayargachhi Abashan Prokolpo of Jhenidah Sadar upazila, 20 families of Bed community rely on bamboo crafts for their livelihood. Around 25 more families of the community also live in Garaganj Bazar area of Shailakupa upazila and 10 families in Sadhuhati union of Sadar upazila in the district.

Members of the Bed community have been making household and agricultural accessories, tools and novelty items with bamboo for ages. The craft is passed on to the next generation, especially to the boys, when they reach around 10 or 12 years. The Beds do not usually send their children to school or take on other profession.

While visiting the Prokolpo area in Sadar upazila, many of the Beds told this correspondent that their income from the sale of bamboo items had been dwindling over the last two or three decades and the community has been struggling for survival.

But the various restrictions imposed during this year's outbreak of Covid-19 pushed them to the curb, forcing them to live from hand to mouth. Without any significant earnings, most of them have been getting deeper in debt, they also said.

Ananda Kumar, a resident of the Prokolpo, said he has expertise in making Sharpsh (food cover),



A member of Bed community, in Kayargachhi Abashan Prokolpo of Jhenidah Sadar upazila, making household accessories with bamboo.

PHOTO: AZIBOR RAHMAN

Turi (a type of serving bowl) and novelty items such as flower vase, pen holder and toy winnowing fan.

The craft he inherited from his father, and his father from Ananda's grandfather, did not help his father or him maintain solvency. Despite the fact, his father never asked Ananda to go to school at young age, as value of education has no meaning to the Bed community.

His weekly earnings fell to around Tk 1,500, from around Tk 5,000 that he earned during pre-Covid restriction days. Like him, most of them now cannot afford to have even two square meals a day,

Ananda added. Projapati Rani, another member of the community, said she and her husband can make 50 to 60 pieces of basket, toy winnowing fan and Sharpsh in one week's time, at a cost of Tk 300.

During regular times, their weekly earnings from sales would be around Tk 800 to Tk 900, which is not enough to support the family. But now, they do not even have that income, as wholesalers do not come to the local market anymore.

Finding no prospect in the craft, their son has decided to become a barber, she also said.

Requesting urgent assistance from the government, the members of the community said unless they are provided financial stimulus or bank loans with low interest and relaxed repayment options, survival will be extremely difficult for them.

Contacted, Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer SM Shahin said currently they have been concentrating on providing assistance to transport workers who had been out of jobs due to the restrictions.

The Bed community has not been affected severely and their issues might be addressed at a later time, he also said.

BORO HARVEST

Hopes dampened by falling prices in Pirojpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

The joy of reaping a good harvest this year did not last long for Boro farmers in Pirojpur after they stumbled on unexpectedly low prices at markets.

The harvesting of Boro began in the last week of April and likely to be over around the first week of May.

Farmers said the harvest has been good this year according to their anticipations, as they did not face any natural calamity or serious pest attacks in the rice fields.

Farmer Golam Mostofa Howlader, from Jujkhola village in Pirojpur Sadar upazila, said, "This year I hope to get over 50 maunds of paddy from each bigha of land."

Another farmer, Shohag Sheikh, from Uttar Kadamtala village in the same upazila, said they did not encounter any problem in the fields during harvesting this year -- thanks to clear days without rain.

However, day labourer wages during this peak season rose to between Tk 750 and Tk 800, he also said.

Many of the farmers said that despite a good yield amid favourable weather conditions, their hopes for a good return of investment are being dampened by the falling prices of paddy at markets.

Even though the government buys paddy every year, only a few farmers can sell it to the government, they also said.

"Now the highest amount you can get for a maund of paddy is Tk 700," said farmer Barun Kanti Majumder, adding that Tk 900 for a maund of paddy on an average would ensure minimum profit for them.

Wholesale paddy buyer Milton Mridha, from Jujkhola village in the upazila, said the prices of Boro has been going down after rice millers stopped its procurement.

Shepon Chandra Ghosh, agriculture officer in Sadar upazila, said, "This year the production of paddy is good and if no natural disaster occurs before harvesting, they will benefit from it."

They were also providing necessary assistance to farmers so the latter can sell paddy to the government, he added.

According to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension in Pirojpur, Boro has been cultivated on 24,533 hectares of land in the district this year, up from last year's 22,915 hectares.

The government has set a target of buying 4,260 tonnes of paddy, at Tk 27 per kilogram, between April 28 and August 16 this year, as per a notice issued by the food ministry.



Farmers busy harvesting Boro paddy in a field at Jujkhola village of Pirojpur Sadar upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Dhaka hopes to get them before Eid

FROM PAGE 1 informed them that the vaccines would start arriving before Eid while Health Minister Zahid Maleque shared a more specific date -- May 10.

"The health ministry will decide when and how many doses of the vaccine will arrive, and what will be the transportation system. They know when we'll need it," Momen told UNB, adding that they just have helped the health ministry establish communications with China and Russia.

The foreign minister said everything was closed in China due to the holidays and that the holidays would end today.

"It takes some time as vaccines are produced based on orders," Momen said, adding that discussions with Russia and the United States were on to get more vaccines.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday reaffirmed that the government would procure vaccines at any cost to protect its people from coronavirus. "We are bringing more vaccines, no matter how much money is required; we will

bring more vaccines." China was supposed to give 5 lakh doses of vaccine as a gift apart from supplying vaccines through commercial purchase.

Bangladesh has received 7 million Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine doses produced by Serum Institute of India (SII) through a contract. Bangladesh also received 3.3 million doses of vaccine as a bilateral partnership gift. This is the largest amount sent from India to any country.

The US has decided to share its entire stock of Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccines with the world once it clears federal safety reviews, the White House said. As many as 60 million doses expected to be available for export in the coming months.

"We sought vaccines from the US as they've a stock of 60 million doses. We would definitely welcome it," Momen said.

He said they came to know, not through any letter (formal channel), but publicly that the US identified India and

Brazil as priority countries to supply the vaccines.

Momen said the US assured all concerned of making the vaccines available for other countries, including Bangladesh, once they have surplus.

"I can assure you when we can reach the level of the critical mass vaccination and we've surplus, we'll absolutely make vaccines available in whatever different ways," said John Kerry, US special presidential envoy for climate, told reporters during his recent visit to Bangladesh.

The foreign minister said they were continuing their diplomatic activities using digital tools despite global disruptions due to the pandemic.

"We're continuously connecting with everyone," he said, mentioning that webinars and WhatsApp emerged as means of communication.

Momen said in-person meetings and negotiations came down significantly due to the current situation. "But in-person meetings are good for better negotiations."

Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation BCIC Bhaban, 30-31, Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh www.bcic.gov.bd তারিখঃ ০৩ মে, ২০২১খ্রিঃ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি শিল্প মন্ত্রণালয়ের অধীনস্থ বাংলাদেশ কেমিক্যাল ইন্ডাস্ট্রিজ কর্পোরেশন-এর নিয়ন্ত্রণাধীন কারখানা সমূহে নিয়োগের জন্য বাংলাদেশের স্থায়ী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে নিম্নোক্ত শূন্যপদ সমূহে উপযুক্ত প্রার্থীদেরকে অনলাইনে আবেদন ফরম পূরণ করার আহ্বান করা হচ্ছেঃ

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ পুলিশ সুপারের কার্যালয় শরীয়তপুর। "The Public Procurement Rules- 2008" মোতাবেক ২০২১-২২ অর্থ বৎসরের ১ম কয়েটারের জন্য শরীয়তপুর জেলা পুলিশ রেশন স্টোরের রেশন সামগ্রী ক্রয়/ সরবরাহের নিমিত্তে ঠিকাদার নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে বাংলাদেশের প্রকৃত ব্যবসায়ী/সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে নিম্নলিখিত শর্তাধীনে সীলমোহরযুক্ত খামে প্রতিযোগিতামূলক দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।