

Harmful sodium compound found in molasses

SUKANTA HALDER

Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) has found the presence of harmful sodium hydrosulphite or dithionite in the palm and sugarcane molasses produced in the country.

Molasses producers in several parts of the country are using this harmful and banned chemical for more profit, according to BFSA.

A BFSA official said they collected 47 samples from different districts through their field officers from March to June this year.

After a laboratory test, it was found that sodium dithionite was present in 20 samples.

Sodium dithionite paper is used in colouring mills, textile mills, and finished fabrics. In most areas, molasses manufacturers use hydrose while boiling the juice to get the desired colour.

This chemical can cause cancer, dysentery, intestinal inflammation and other gastrointestinal problems in addition to reduced efficacy of insulin, increasing risks of diabetes.

According to BFSA, sodium dithionite

is imported from India to Bangladesh in various ways and supplied to the Bangladesh market.

The agency has instructed the manufacturers to immediately stop using this chemical in molasses. Besides, it has also issued instructions not to transport and sell the chemical in the market.

Golam Rabbani, a molasses seller in Karwan Bazar, said sellers like him buy molasses from different districts outside Dhaka at a wholesale price and no chemicals are added to molasses.

However, he said they cannot test whether any chemicals have been mixed in the molasses after buying it.

A BFSA official said district commissioners and UNOs of the areas famous for making molasses have been contacted in this regard.

"They have been instructed to warn the molasses growers," said the official, requesting anonymity.

Several areas of the country, including Jashore, Kushtia, Satkhira, Faridpur and Natore, are famous for the production of molasses.

Traders said the size of the market for

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PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

At the break of dawn, some 250 to 300 farmers load their boats with their produce to cross Surma river and directly sell them in the local market. The practice is getting popular every day due to the increased profit they've been making compared to what they would've made via a third party. On good days, total sales can bring in over Tk 10 lakh. The photo was taken recently in Sylhet's Tukur Bazar area.

Nine seized vehicles gutted in fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

A fire gutted at least nine vehicles that were seized as evidence in various cases at different times, in front of Ashulia Police Station in Savar yesterday.

Locals said the vehicles were kept beside Nabinagar-Chandra highway for a long time. First a vehicle caught fire and later it spread to the ones next to it.

Anwar Hossain, station leader of DEPZ Fire Service, told The Daily Star that a unit of DEPZ Fire Station rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control in 30 minutes.

The fire might have originated from a burning cigarette left by someone since the vehicles were kept right beside the road, he added.

Contacted, Sub-inspector Awal Hossain, also in charge of the police station's Malkhana (property/evidence room), told The Daily Star, "We are trying to find out the cause of the fire."

Nine of the seized cars were partially burnt, said the SI. He also said, "We will send a letter to the department concerned in this regard."

When asked why the seized vehicles were kept in such an unsafe condition, Officer-in-Charge SM Kamruzzaman said the police station does not have its own place for this purpose.

No Christmas for them

Indigenous people in Moulvibazar afflicted with land-related cases



This is the forestland where around 50 Khasi families have been living and cultivating for years. Their lives are now smothered by the cases filed by the forest department, in which they have been accused of encroaching on this very land.

PHOTO: STAR

MINTU DESHWARA

Lobbing Sumer (40) is the head of a six-member family at Doluchhara punjee in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila. During the last 13 years serving as the Khasi punjee (indigenous village) chief, he had to manage the expenses of seven cases filed by the forest department against the members of their community.

"It takes around three to four years to settle each case. Three cases are still pending. I had to stop sending my two sons to school to meet the expenses. We have been left in a helpless situation," said Lobbing.

He mentioned that around 50 indigenous families are living in this punjee, who have been making a living by cultivating various forest fruits, including betel nut and betel leaf.

However, the forest department has filed 15 cases against these families on allegations of cutting trees and bamboo or theft.

Moreover, viral infection Utram destroyed most of the betel leaf production, followed by the flood.

Prabin Nokrek, one of the accused in the cases, said, "Forest department officials tried to capture our only income source -- betel leaf gardens -- with the help of settlers in the name of social forestry project. We are not on the list of beneficiaries. Our land was being taken away from us but cases were also being filed against us."

Some members of the punjee also complained that false cases have been filed

because they could not pay the money that was asked in return for not filing them.

Cruswell Rang sai (57) said he has been involved in four cases in the past seven years, two of which are still ongoing.

Cruswell is a father of nine children. Only two can go to school, while the rest have stopped due to the financial crisis.

"One has to pay Tk 5,000 to 7,000 to appear in each hearing and some of us have

“ **One has to pay Tk 5,000 to 7,000 to appear in each hearing and some of us have to appear three to four times a month. Our kids want new dresses for Christmas. We cannot even get them that because we have to keep fighting the cases.** ”

CRUSWELL RANGSAI
A local resident accused in multiple cases

to appear three to four times a month. Our kids want new dresses for Christmas. We cannot even get them that because we have to keep fighting the cases," he said.

What's baffling is that the crisis erupted from an error that occurred during a survey.

Lawyer Abul Hasan, general secretary of Greater Sylhet Adivasi Protection Committee, said when the State Acquisition Survey started in the greater Sylhet region during

the sixties, residents of various Khasi punjees were brought under record.

However, in the final record, all their land was recorded as government land. People of the Khasi community could not register them under their names due to a lack of awareness of the complicated process.

"From 2011 to this year, the forest department has filed 15 criminal cases against the residents of Doluchhara punjee. The Khasis have been acquitted in eight cases and seven are still ongoing. They have spent more than Tk 1 lakh on the cases in last November alone," said Abul Hasan.

When asked why the indigenous community was not given prioritised in the list of beneficiaries of the social forestry project, Beat Officer Arjun Kanti Dastidar said, "We have always told the indigenous people but they did not agree. These pieces of land are gazetted and registered by the government. The indigenous people have encroached on the land and filed title suits from time to time."

Muhibul Islam Azad, chairman of Karmadha Union, said the complaints of the indigenous community are not baseless. "The rules of social forestry are largely broken. In the list of beneficiaries, local influentials have indeed been named followed by irregularities," he said.

Kulaura UNO Mahmudur Rahman Khandokar said, "If the indigenous community has any complaint in this regard

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Leased for fish farming, now a makeshift market

The sorry state of a 400-year-old pond

S DILIP ROY

Ghoshal Sarobar, a pond on the premises of the 400-year-old Tushbhandar Zamindar Bari in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila, was leased to a local resident for fish farming. He has, however, constructed over a hundred shops illegally by filling the pond's bank with earth.

The pond has now become smaller, and the surroundings have become chaotic. At this rate, the waterbody's heritage value will remain in name only.

In a recent visit, this correspondent saw that most of the shops are makeshift, while a few are permanent.

There are food outlets, tea stalls, barber shops, electronic stores and many other things at the illegally built "market".




Wastes produced from the place are disposed of in the pond every day, contaminating the historical waterbody.

Locals alleged that the upazila administration took the initiative to evict the illegal structures two years ago, but the drive was abruptly halted for unknown reasons. At the time, only three or four structures were evicted.

Kaliganj upazila administration, the pond's current owner, leased it out to one Rashed Khan for Tk 8 lakh for three years to farm fish. But the lessee is making Tk 3 to 4 lakh every month by collecting rent from illegal structures, according to sources.

According to the land office, the pond's area is 114 decimals (1.14 acres). However, Abdul Quader Mia, land assistant officer (acting) of Tushbhandar

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Dengue death toll **276**

Total number of patients **61,972**

501 still undergoing treatment

Number of recovered patients **61,195**

89 more hospitalised yesterday


SOURCE: DGHS

PRAYER TIMING

DECEMBER 25

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:25	12:45	3:45	5:24	7:00
JAMAAAT 6:00	1:15	4:00	5:27	7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



This concrete bridge over Khuraikhali canal in Netrakona's Madan upazila is of no use as there are no approach roads on either side of the structure.

PHOTO: STAR

A bridge to nowhere

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A concrete bridge, built on Khuraikhali Canal in Netrakona's Madan upazila, has been lying unused since its construction nearly a decade ago for lack of approach roads on either side.

As a result, thousands of inhabitants of 10 villages under Fatehpur and Tiyosree unions in the upazila have been still struggling a lot to reach their desired destinations.

Funded by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, the bridge on Dulatpur-Bareura road was built at a cost of over Tk 26 lakh, in 2012-2013 fiscal year, to ease communication for the people of the two unions in the haor area.

But due to lack of approach roads on either side, the bridge is of no use for local people, villagers alleged, adding that despite repeated pleas the authorities concerned did not take any necessary measures in all these years to mitigate their sufferings.

Locals said the bridge on Khuraikhali Canal has remained useless since the approach roads on both sides of the bridge were washed away by strong current the

following year of its inauguration.

Abul Hossain of Fatehpur village said, Dulatpur-Bareura road is the easiest way to reach Balali Bazar and Tiyosree Union Parishad (UP) from Bareura.

But in the rainy season, local people have to travel on boats to reach different villages under Tiyosree union, which is only five-kilometre from the upazila headquarters, he said.

While talking to this correspondent, Tiyosree UP Chairman Fakhar Uddin Ahmed said people of several villages under his union use the road every day.

A cross dam has been built along the Chiknir Haor and local people use the it as an alternative to reach their destinations, the UP chairman said.

It is very difficult for the farmers to carry their agricultural products to the nearby markets, which is also depriving them from getting fair prices of their produces, he added.

Contacted, Madan Upazila Project Implementation Officer (PIO) Shawkat Jamil said they were planning to repair the approach roads, with concrete blocks, to protect it from the onrush of waters and flash flood.