

FOOD PROCUREMENT DRIVE

Government target may fall short

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Nearly two months have gone since the government's food procurement drive began in Pabna and Sirajganj, but the two districts are far from the target this year.

Farmers and millers are showing no interest in supplying paddy and rice to the government depots because they are getting far better prices in the market.

This year, the government is paying Tk 28 for each kilo of paddy and Tk 42 for each kilo of rice.

The 103-day procurement drive began on November 17 last year and will continue till February 28 this year.

According to Pabna and Sirajganj food controllers' offices, they have set targets to purchase 12,786 tonnes of rice and 3,914 tonnes of paddy through 11 depots in Pabna, and 9,540 tonnes of rice and 3,977 tonnes of paddy through seven procurement centres in Sirajganj.

Although about two months have already gone by since the procurement drive started in the two districts, about 25 percent of the rice purchase targets have been fulfilled so far, said officials.

They said despite repeated calls, farmers are reluctant to come to the government depots, while most of the millers are not

interested to supply rice at the government fixed rate.

While talking to this correspondent, Pabna District Food Controller Tanvir Rahman said they were unable to buy a single bag of paddy even after two months of the procurement drive.

Moreover, after all these days they managed to purchase only 1,704 tonnes of rice, compared with the target of 12,786 tonnes, he said.

A total of only 92 millers have agreements with the district food office, and this is the major reason behind the uncertainty over fulfilling the rice procurement target in stipulated time this year, Tanvir added.

He said there are over 500 rice millers in the district, but most of them seemed reluctant to contact them. So, officials were planning to increase the supply limits of the listed millers.

Pabna District Rice Millers' Association President Idris Ali Bishwas said it is quite impossible to supply rice at the government fixed rate, as production cost of per kilo of rice is over Tk 43.

When asked why other millers went for the agreement, Idris said those who have auto-rice mills can easily supply the rice at

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A farmer tries to clear out Aman paddy from the remnants of his harvest, after drying the paddy out in the sun and clearing out the scraps. This photo was taken in Jhalakathi's Dopodiya Zero Point area recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Rab arrests death-row war criminal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Rapid Action Battalion arrested Md Nazmul Huda, 72, a death-row war crime convict who has been on the run for almost six years, from Bogura on Monday.

Confirming the information, squad commander Nazrul Islam of Rab-12 (Bogura) said a team of Rab-2 and Rab-12 arrested him from a relative's house near Chandhu stadium in Bogura's Khandar area, based on a tip-off that Nazmul had been hiding at the place for the last three months.

A had been filed against Nazmul with the International Crimes Tribunal-1 on charges of murder, abduction and rape. The tribunal subsequently found him guilty on all three accounts and handed him the death penalty. He had been hiding in disguise in different locations country ever since, "We've already sent him to the Tribunal-1 on Tuesday [yesterday] morning," added Nazrul.

PRAYER TIMING	
JANUARY 18	
Fajr	Zohr
5:30	12:45
Asr	Maghrib
4:15	5:40
Esha	JAMAAT
7:00	6:05
	1:15
	4:30
	5:44
	7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Topu's jute tea gaining popularity



Mohima Products, a venture by Zakir Hossain Topu from Tangail, has been manufacturing and selling jute-leaf tea for the last several years. The herbal drink is prepared fully organically from native (Deshal) jute leaves, which are then marketed in a powdered form commercially, in perfectly hygienic and modern tea bags, around the country.

PHOTO: STAR

MIRZA SHAKIL

In the 90s, Zakir Hossain Topu, a man from Tangail's Aag Elasin village, went to the US to study alternative medicine. After completing his education, he returned to his village and started working with different herbal items, including black cumin, trifolia (amloki, horitoki and bohera), and moringa.

Throughout this long period, the multifaceted use of jute was increasing day by day in Bangladesh. Its latest offshoot is jute leaf tea. The herbal drink has 30 percent more calories than spinach, and contains iron, vitamin C, vitamin D and anti-oxidants, according to scientists at Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI).

Topu started working with jute leaf in 2014. "I was interested in the herbs that our forefathers used as alternative medicines to fight various diseases," he said. "But then I came to know about the health benefits and prospects of 'green tea', which can be produced from jute leaf."

Topu then established the food and nutrition company Mohima Products, which has been processing and marketing jute-leaf tea for the last several years.

Topu said he has been preparing the herbal drink fully organically from native (Deshal) jute leaves. The powdered leaves are being marketed commercially in the form of perfectly hygienic and modern tea bags.

He sells the products at the Jute Diversification Promotion Centre (JDPC) of Dhaka, an autonomous government body responsible for the promotion and diversification of jute use in Bangladesh. His herbal teas are a regular feature at the fairs of JDPC. The specially made jute drinks can also be found in different shops and markets in Dhaka and Tangail.

Seema Bose Adahra, director of marketing of JDPC, said Topu's jute tea has also been sent as a gift to the guests at the Climate Summit in Glasgow, Scotland through Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"The jute-leaf drink has huge prospects

considering its health benefits. Government institutions, as well as high profile personnel, are also buying jute-leaf tea from us," she noted.

"However, the product needs more publicity. Its export possibilities are high," she added.

After visiting his Tangail factory recently, this correspondent saw several workers working in shifts. Jute is cultivated in a field near the factory. Some workers were seen collecting mature jute leaves. After sterilising the leaves, they are then dried under a shed at a specific temperature.

Finally, the dried leaves are put inside a machine to make the tea. They are then put inside tea bags, which are then packaged inside a larger packet. A packet costs Tk 300 and contains 30 tea bags.

"I work part-time in the factory and get a decent amount of money as wages," told Badhan, a tenth-grader studying at a local village.

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For two years now, after authorities removed hawkers from the footpaths and allotted a separate space for them to conduct business, auto-rickshaw owners have encroached the cleared space and turned it into an illegal stand. A market stands opposite to the spot, which makes gridlock a constant menace for the locality. This photo was taken in Sylhet's Surma Market area recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Ex-UP chairman jailed over embezzlement of Tk 47cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Cumilla court yesterday sent a former union parishad chairman to jail in connection with two cases filed over misappropriation of Tk 47 crore.

ACC Deputy Director Fazlul Haque arrested Jakir Hossain, former chairman of Pirjatrappur Union Parishad in Cumilla's Burichang upazila, yesterday and placed him before the Senior Special Judge's Court.

The ACC filed two cases against Jakir and seven others on May 10, 2022.

As per the case documents, Rana Builders got a contract to develop Port Connecting Road in Chattogram. Later, the company gave the project's subcontract to Jakir's company Jakir Enterprise.

The two companies took a loan of Tk 40 crore from United Commercial Bank's Cumilla branch for the project. Investigators later found that the loan was received using forged documents, and the bank officials were also involved in the process.

The total outstanding loan, including interests, now stands at Tk 46.32 crore.

Khoka's PS jailed for amassing Tk 1.5 crore

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent Monirul Islam Khan, personal secretary to former Dhaka City Corporation mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, to jail for illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 1.51 crore.

Al-Asad Md Asifuzzaman, judge of the Special Judge's Court-6 in Dhaka, handed down the sentence in presence of the convict at the courtroom.

The court also fined the convict Tk 84.80 lakh, in default of which, he would have to serve six more months in jail.

Meanwhile, the court acquitted the convict's wife Shahnaz Islam of charges as the allegations brought against her could not be proved.

Faruque Ahmed, assistant director of the Anti-Corruption Commission, filed a case against the couple with Ramna Police Station on January 3, 2019.

According to the case statement, on March 15, 2017, the ACC issued a notice asking Monirul and his wife to submit their wealth statements within 15 days.

The couple submitted their wealth statements to the ACC on April 13, 2017. After going through the statements, the ACC found that the couple had illegally earned wealth worth Tk 15,187,973.

Eight prosecution witnesses testified before the court during trial.

Monirul was also jailed for seven years in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case on October 29, 2018.

Public service bill placed in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Public Service (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was placed in parliament yesterday. The proposed law will force autonomous, legislative, and local government bodies to take clearance from the Finance Division over financial expenditures.

State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain placed the bill, which was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the public administration ministry for scrutiny.

The committee was asked to submit its report within 30 days.

Under the existing Public Service Act, 2018, Finance Division has authority over financial matters of government entities, officials, and employees. However, it isn't clear what jurisdiction the division has over the autonomous, legislative, and local government bodies.

However, under the proposed law, public universities, Election Commission, or local bodies like city corporations and union parishads will have to take the opinion of the Finance Division over their financial expenditures.

The revision will also make it mandatory for autonomous, legislative, and local government bodies to take clearance from the finance division.

DENGUE

12 more patients hospitalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 12 dengue patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till morning yesterday.

With the new cases, the total number of dengue cases this year rose to 424, according to DGHS.

Some 93 dengue patients, 50 from outside Dhaka, are still undergoing treatment across the country.

A total of 328 patients were released from hospitals. Of them, 170 were from outside Dhaka.