

RANGPUR DIVISION

Organic fertiliser spurs high yields for farmers

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Farmers in five districts under the Rangpur division – Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Rangpur, Gaibandha, and Nilphamari – are delighted as their winter vegetable yields have significantly increased after using vermicompost, following advice from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Vermicompost is an organic fertiliser made by composting cow dung, eggshells, vegetable scraps, used tea leaves, and rotting tree bark with the help of earthworms.

The DAE has long recommended that farmers use vermicompost for cultivating vegetables, as it enhances yields and improves soil health.

Azaharul Islam, 45, a farmer from Chawratari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, shared that he has been cultivating vegetables with organic fertilisers for the past four years.

"I produce some vermicompost at home and purchase the rest from the local

market. I have been achieving good crop yields while also improving soil fertility," he said.

Echoing him, Dhaniram Chandra Das, 65, a farmer from Mahipur village in Rangpur's Gangachhara upazila, said, "Earlier, I used chemical fertilisers before switching to vermicompost. This organic fertiliser is toxin-free, cost-effective, and provides better yields."

According to DAE sources, around 15,000 farmers across the five districts of the Rangpur division have been benefiting from producing, using, and selling vermicompost. Each farmer produces up to 10 tonnes of vermicompost annually at a cost of Tk 6-7 per kilogram, which is then sold for about Tk 12-13. Over the years, the use of vermicompost for vegetable cultivation has gained popularity, particularly among small and marginal farmers.

Sahera Banu, 55, from Thanahat village in Kurigram's Chilmari upazila, said she produces 300kg of vermicompost and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Workers transport crushed ice from this mill in the Harta Bazar area of Wazirpur upazila of Barishal. They take this ice to various fish markets. By working from the morning to evening, a worker can earn around Tk 20,000 per month. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: TITU DAS

Left destitute by Teesta, Rahima now struggling to survive

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Rahima Begum, 78, was married at the age of 15 to a prosperous man in Dhubani village on the Teesta shoal under Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila.

However, only four years later, her husband passed away before they could have a child.

Despite her family's repeated requests to remarry, she chose to stay in her husband's village, determined to spend the rest of her life there. She owned arable land where she cultivated paddy and raised cattle, earning enough to sustain herself and help others in the village.

That was before the Teesta River devoured all her land and homestead, leaving her destitute.

Now old, lonely, landless, and penniless, Rahima spends her days in starvation, largely dependent on assistance from others.

Her neighbours, who were once beneficiaries of her generosity, later built her a hut to live in and have been supporting her with food as much as they can. However, the hut has become dilapidated and nearly uninhabitable due to years of neglect.

"Rahima Begum became a widow without a child, and her relatives never came to look for her. Even though the government allocated houses to many landless people, Rahima couldn't get one for herself.

She can neither work nor move around much because of her age. There is no electricity in her hut. She once helped almost everyone in the village, but now she is in desperate need of help," said Amjad Hossain, 56, a neighbour.

"As neighbours, we try to do as much as we can to support her, but it's not always possible because of our busy schedules," he added.

"My hut has become rundown and could collapse completely any day. I have no money to repair it. I have been wearing the same saree all year because I can't afford a new one. I hardly manage to eat every day. On days when no one gives me food, I am forced to starve," Rahima said.

She has appealed to the government to provide her with a home to live in and some financial assistance to sustain her.

Dulal Hossain, acting upazila nirbahi officer of Hatibandha, said he would inquire about Rahima Begum's situation and arrange support from the upazila administration.



A treasure under threat of encroachment

Around 250 acres of Lawachhara National Park remain occupied

MINTU DESHWARA

The Lawachhara National Park has long been the victim of continuous encroachment over the years. According to local environmentalists, approximately 250 acres of the park is currently occupied, mostly by various local influential figures.

At the heart of the problem lies the fact that no proper boundary was ever established for the park. Without a comprehensive survey, the process of demarcation cannot be initiated. In the 28 years since the forest was first declared a national park, no survey has been conducted and as such there is no established boundary.

Adding to the woes, the Forest Department is rarely engaged in efforts to recover occupied land within the park.

The park, rich in diverse flora and fauna, is home to various endangered and rare species of wildlife, making it a popular destination for environmentalists, wild animal lovers, and tourists. Located in Kamalganj upazila of Moulvibazar, Lawachhara National Park spans 1,250 hectares and was designated as a national park in 1996.

The park is home to 167 species of trees, 246 species of birds, 20 species of mammals, 59 species of reptiles, and 22 species of amphibians.

Surrounding the park are villages and privately owned land. This is where some landowners have encroached onto the forest land – planting seasonal fruit trees and even constructing homes.

The village of Baghmara, for instance, is located about three kilometres from the park. The park is currently engaged in a legal dispute that involves hundreds of

residents living across 155 acres of forest land.

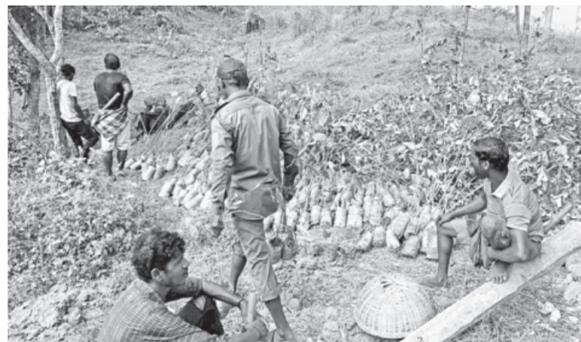
Shahidul Islam, Sreemangal Range Officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department, said, "There are public land right next to the park. However, without a survey I cannot even place a marker because the boundaries are undefined. A survey would clarify the park's borders."

On a positive note, recent efforts

former agriculture minister Abdus Shaheed, near the National Park's student dormitory – an attempt that had previously failed in 2018.

The Forest Department believes that further land remains under the control of various individuals, complicating additional recovery efforts.

On November 3, local Awami League leader Zenar Ahmed reportedly occupied approximately 4 acres of the Lawachhara forest.



Officials of the Wildlife and Nature Conservation Department are reclaiming this portion of land and removing the lemon trees that were planted there. Md Shah Alam, who planted the trees, claimed that he had leased this land from Awami League leader Zenar Ahmed, paying Tk 1,20,000 in advance for two years. PHOTO: STAR

by the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department successfully recovered six acres of land from two locations, both deep inside the park, thus needing no disputes over the boundary.

On September 22, one acre was reclaimed from an individual named Jamshed Mia in the Battali area.

Then, on September 15, around five acres were recovered from

Despite efforts to contact Zenar Ahmed, he could not be reached.

Md Shah Alam from Sreemangal upazila, claimed to have leased the land from Zenar Ahmed.

He said, "I have cultivated lemons here under a 5-year lease from Zenar Ahmed. I paid Tk 1,20,000 in advance for 2 years. The remainder will be paid as I sell the lemons, according to our lease agreement.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Cold wave hits north; more relief efforts needed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A sweeping cold wave has disrupted daily life in the northern region, with the lowest temperature recorded at 9.2 degrees Celsius in Panchagarh's Tentulia at 9:00am yesterday.

Yesterday, the temperature in Tentulia was recorded at 8.4 degrees Celsius.

The biting cold has taken a toll on the low-income population, significantly affecting their livelihoods and daily routines.

Julfa Bewa, a 60-year-old resident of Sonapatila village in Panchagarh's Boda upazila, described her struggle to cope with the chilling weather saying, "The cooler wind from the north makes it tough to carry on daily activities."

Even multiple layers of blankets fail to keep her warm, especially after sunset when the icy wind penetrates her thatched house.

Farm labourer Babul, 58, of Shahapara village, shared the difficulty in preparing Boro seedbeds amidst the freezing winds.

"This is the peak time for preparing seedbeds, but the icy wind makes it almost impossible to work in the fields," he said.

Day labourer Jotis Barman from Basiadebi village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila was found waiting for work at Thakurgaon intersection but lamented the lack of job opportunities due to the adverse weather.

"It's already 10:00am, but no one has hired me yet," he said.

Rafiqul Islam, a rickshaw-puller shared a similar plight, reporting a drop in daily income as people avoid venturing out unless absolutely necessary.

"Our earnings have been severely impacted because most people are staying indoors," he said.

Farmers are also struggling to protect their Rabi crops, including potatoes and vegetables, from diseases exacerbated by the cold.

The adverse weather has increased the demand for warm clothes, but relief efforts remain insufficient.

Jitendranath Roy, assistant officer at the Tetulia Weather Observatory Centre, said the cold wave is expected to persist for the next few days.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

3 more die of dengue

STAR REPORT

At least three dengue patients died and 316 others were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

Of the deaths, one was reported in Dhaka South City Corporation, and one each in Barishal and Khulna divisions.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, with the new deaths and cases, the total number of deaths rose to 548 while total number of cases rose to 98,508 of which 59,072 are from outside Dhaka.

Currently, 1,777 dengue patients are undergoing treatment, of which 1,080 are from outside Dhaka.

A total of 96,179 patients have been released till yesterday.



Even in the afternoon, heavy fog over the Kirtankhola river stops the sun, making it appear as if it is still dawn. As a result, cargo ships slow down to ensure they reach their destination safely. The photo was taken recently from the Doldopia Bridge. PHOTO: TITU DAS

JCD president slams anti-discrimination student leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chhatra Dal President Rakibul Islam Rakib yesterday criticised the anti-discrimination student movement for not doing enough to ensure justice for those accused of killing during the mass uprising.

Speaking at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in Mirpur yesterday, Rakib pointed out that despite the protests spearheaded by the movement over the past four months, no concrete steps have been taken to ensure accountability for Chhatra League leaders and activists involved in the killings.

"Their demands are limited to speeches. There has been no effort to ensure exemplary punishment for Chhatra League," Rakib said.

He stressed the need for accountability for the deaths of students and citizens during the uprising. "Those responsible for the killings must face trial, yet we see no progress on this front," he added.

Rakib also alleged that members of Chhatra League, a banned organisation, continue to occupy university dormitories despite public

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1