



## Water chestnut cultivation turns wetlands into profit

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Farmers in Jamalpur's Dewanganj upazila are turning fallow, waterlogged lands and marshes into productive fields by cultivating water chestnuts (*Eleocharis dulcis*).

As a result, neglected wetlands are becoming a steady source of income for many families.

Water chestnut is a grass-like sedge native to Asia, tropical Africa and Oceania. It grows in marshes, underwater or in mud, and is cultivated as an aquatic vegetable in many countries for its edible bulbs.

Dewanganj upazila, surrounded by rivers and vast wetlands, offers ideal conditions for its cultivation.



With production on the rise, a wholesale market has sprung up beside Dewanganj Railway Station, drawing traders from across the country. According to the market's leaseholder, 8 to 10 tonnes of water chestnuts are sold daily.

Data from the Dewanganj Upazila Agriculture Office show water chestnut has been cultivated on 39 hectares this season.

"I cultivated water chestnut on four bighas, spending Tk 7,000. I have already sold bulbs worth Tk 35,000 and expect to earn another Tk 35,000 from the remaining 25-26 maunds in the field," said Alfaz Hossain of Dalbari village.

In retail markets, ripe water chestnuts sell for Tk 30 and unripe ones for Tk 20 per kilogramme, while wholesale prices range from Tk 1,300 to Tk 1,400 per maund for ripe ones and Tk 500 to Tk 600 per maund for unripe bulbs.

The seasonal market runs from early October till late December.

"Water chestnuts can be cultivated in any waterlogged land or wetland. We are encouraging farmers to expand cultivation to make better use of fallow land in the upazila," said Ratan Mia, upazila agriculture officer in Dewanganj.



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Visitors enjoy boat rides amid blooming red water lilies in Dibir Haor (Shapla Beel) of Jaintapur upazila, Sylhet. Each winter, the haor attracts tourists as thousands of lilies cover the water against a backdrop of surrounding hills. The photo was taken recently.

## BARGUNA LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM

# Looted and left in ruins for over a year

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The Barguna Liberation War Museum, which was vandalised and looted on August 5 last year following the ouster of the Awami League government, now stands abandoned, empty and padlocked.

The museum once housed a collection of over 300 rare historical photographs, books and memorabilia from the Liberation War, including rifles, clothing, cooking pots and various wartime items used by freedom fighters.

It also displayed archaeological pieces from the centuries-old Shahi Mosque in Betagi, the historic Majidbaria Mosque in Mirzaganj, Patuakhali, and relics from the temple built by Parbati Ranjan Mukhopadhyay in Betagi's Kaunia area, as well as old radios and televisions. Among the museum's notable exhibits was a 48-foot-long whale skeleton recovered from Joyalbhanga in Taltali in 1990 and nearly a thousand metal and paper currencies from different countries.

Many of these items are still missing.

According to museum records, the war photographs were collected by local organisers since 1995 and displayed at various district-level national events. In 2013, a Liberation War gallery was set up in a room on the ground floor of Barguna District Shilpakala Academy. The gallery



formally became an institution in 2018, and on November 30, 2019, it was upgraded to a full-fledged museum, attracting regular visits from students and visitors on national days.

Chittaranjan Shil, trustee of the museum, journalist and cultural activist, said the initiative traces back to 1985-86, when local journalists and cultural activists began collecting photographs of the

Liberation War and organising exhibitions. "Over time, journalists, intellectuals, civil society groups, the local administration, Rover Scouts and Red Crescent volunteers supported the effort."

The attack on August 5 last year was described as "systematic vandalism" by an eyewitness who wished to remain anonymous. "The attackers smashed every glass-covered table and display unit, looted many artefacts and tore apart books and documents outside the building. Whatever remained, people took away as they wished," the eyewitness said.

Three days after the attack, members of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement visited the site in an attempt to salvage what was left.

Despite repeated calls from museum trustees and local civic groups, none of the stolen items have been returned.

Yousuf Mridha, convener of Barguna District Muktijoddha Sangsad, has also urged the district administration to restore the museum and recover the stolen items.

Taslima Akter, deputy commissioner of Barguna, could not be reached for comments despite repeated attempts via phone and WhatsApp.



## BUTTERFLY FAIR

# A day of colours at JU

STAR REPORT

The Zahir Raihan Auditorium premises at Jahangirnagar University turned vibrant yesterday as a daylong Butterfly Fair brought together hundreds of butterflies, vivid photographs, and nature enthusiasts.

By midday, the fairground was buzzing with excitement as visitors, especially children, marvelled at the fluttering wings around them.

"I didn't know butterflies could be so colourful. Seeing them all together feels magical," said Arshaad, a class III student at JU School and College.

Around 35 butterfly species, including the Striped Pierrot, Blue Tiger, and Painted Lady, were on display on the auditorium premises, JU Butterfly Park, and the Botanical Garden.

The event was organised by the university's Department of Zoology, with Cute as the title sponsor, under the theme "Urle Akashe Projapiti, Prokriti Paye Notun Goti".

"In 2013, JU recorded 110 butterfly species. Today that number stands at 70," said Prof Monwar Hossain, convener of the fair.

Rapid urban development around the campus has destroyed many of their habitats, he said.

Conservationist Auritro Sattar noted that the decline in butterfly and moth populations signals broader ecological distress.

"Shrubs and bushes that butterflies rely on are disappearing. These species are also extremely sensitive to particulate matter like PM10 and PM2.5 -- making their loss an indicator of severe air pollution," he said.

This year, wildlife expert Dr Ali Reza Khan received the Butterfly Award for his contributions to conservation. The Butterfly Young Enthusiast Award was jointly awarded to JU Zoology students Sabbir Ahmed Shahariar, Rabbi Tannoy, and Nure Afari.

Speaking at the programme, JU Vice Chancellor Prof Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan reflected on the irony of human interaction with nature. "The same people who appreciate and marvel at butterflies are also destroying their habitats. Every creature has the right to live, and butterflies remind us of our duty to protect nature," he added. The fair -- starting at 9:00am and closing at 4:00pm -- also featured puppetry, art competitions, quizzes, kite flying, photography, debates, and a butterfly identification contest, drawing enthusiastic participation from visitors of all ages.

## A massacre in Hariharpara

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Standing near the Buriganga, tears welling in his eyes, he pointed to the Jamuna Oil Depot -- once a killing ground where hundreds were shot dead by the occupation army.

The Daily Star visited Hariharpara village in October this year and spoke with several eyewitnesses of the massacre.

### THE HORROR BEGINS

Hariharpara village lies along the bank of the Buriganga in Enayetnagar union of Fatullah,



The memorial built in Fatullah in memory of the martyrs of the Hariharpara massacre.



Witness Md Solayman



Witness Bhola Miya

Narayanganj. By the river stood two industrial sites: the Pakistan National Oil Company (later Jamuna Oil Depot) and the Dhaka Vegetable Oil Mill (later Sena Edible Oil Industry).

With the help of local Bihari collaborators, the Pakistan army turned these facilities into torture cells and execution grounds after the black night of March 25, 1971, survivors said.

When the enemy invaded, most of the village's 3,000 residents fled in fear, with only a handful staying behind.

Inside the depot, soldiers set up cells where detainees were bound, beaten, and tortured.

At night, victims were taken to the riverbank.

During low tide, they were forced into knee-deep water with hands and feet tied; during high tide, they were taken to the jetty and shot, their bodies dumped into the current, according to locals who heard it from the Razakars and survivors who managed to escape by chance.

Some corpses would drift away, but others had to be dragged into mid-river the next morning. Locals were forced to do this inhumane task.

Bhola Miya recalls: "Every night at least 70 to 80 people were killed, sometimes hundreds. We had to throw the bodies into the river ourselves. Burial was impossible. Those that didn't drift away were eaten by animals."

Another villager, Mohammad Solayman, 80, adds: "The screams of women being raped would echo throughout the night. We couldn't sleep. Those who refused were shot and thrown into the river."

Residents of nearby

Fazilpur confirm that while oil shipments and production continued by day, nights were reserved for killing. Both the oil depot and oil mill were staffed largely by Bihari workers. Even months after victory, villagers found decomposed bodies floating in the river.

### INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Despite the scale of atrocity, Hariharpara remained largely forgotten. Resident Md Hanif says: "We knew of mass killings at places like Baktabali or Aliganj, but not of Hariharpara. The extent of slaughter here was unknown to many."

Yet the outside world did take notice. On January 10, 1972, the Washington Post published a story titled "The Killing at Hariharpara" by Lewis M Simons, who later went on to win a Pulitzer Prize for international reporting.

Based on his visit two days earlier, Simons wrote that at least 20,000 people were murdered here. He

described firing squads forcing bound Bangladeshis into the river, where gunfire and screams tore through the night until dawn.

"Beginning at sundown each evening the soldiers dragged the Bengalis, men and women, bound together to the Buriganga river front to be killed. While their executioners loomed above them on a wooden pier they were made to wade out into knee-deep water. Then the rifles opened up. And the firing and the screaming shattered the hot night air until dawn," he wrote.

Each morning village boatmen were forced to bring their high-powered craft into the bloody water and haul the bodies out to midstream, where they were cut loose to drift downriver, the report stated, adding, "Victims were brought to Hariharpara by truck from other villages from the nearby town of Narayanganj and from the East Pakistani capital of Dacca, eight miles to the north."

Their hands tied behind their backs, they were kept prisoners in a large river side warehouse of the Pakistan National Oil company until their time came to die, the report added.

The massacre continued until December 15, the eve of Pakistan's surrender.

A monument now stands at the Jamuna Oil Depot gate, depicting blindfolded civilians being shot by soldiers.

## One probe after another, still justice

FROM PAGE 3

teachers, officers, and staff remain unfinished even after a year.

JU Registrar ABM Azizur Rahman, member secretary of the committee investigating the 19 teachers, said they would need "three to four more months" to complete the report.

He said the committee probing staff members has submitted its primary report, which now awaits a syndicate decision, while the committee, which is investigating university officers, has yet to finish its work.

**OVER TK 39 LAKH SPENT** Each probe committee member receives Tk 1,000 per meeting. Documents from the JU comptroller's

office show that Tk 39,01,346 has been spent on sitting allowances for probe committees between September last year and this November.

Of this, Tk 11,92,041 was spent on committees investigating the involvement of teachers, students, officers and staffers in the July attacks.

The documents also show that 21 of the 39 committees -- many of which have not submitted their reports -- have already received sitting allowances.

Students allege the university frequently forms probe bodies only to delay or bury investigations without taking meaningful action.

Jucu General Secretary Mazharul Islam said reports

involving teachers are often delayed because many committee members "lack the intent to investigate properly", and some teachers sit on multiple committees, slowing the process further.

He said Jucu has been pushing for the submission of pending reports, especially those involving teachers and officials accused of abetting the violence during July uprising.

Jucu Vice President Abdur Rashid Jitu said probe bodies must be held accountable for delays.

Contacted, noted economist and former JU faculty member Prof Anu Muhammad said the administration must ensure the timely submission

of probe reports. "The investigations must be transparent, and actions should follow accordingly," he said.

JU VC Prof Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan said after the fall of the previous government, the university received an unusually high number of complaints covering irregularities of the past 54 years.

"We formed probe committees to address them, but the sheer volume has made it difficult for teachers to submit reports on time," he said.

## Khaleda's life

FROM PAGE 3

He further said that under Sheikh Hasina's misrule, Khaleda Zia was subjected to imprisonment, oppression, and various forms of persecution.

Due to continuous torture and abuse, her life is now in extreme danger, he added.

"I pray to Allah for her quick recovery," he also said.

He also paid tribute to the brave martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the blood-soaked anti-autocracy movement from 1982 to 1990 and prayed for the eternal peace of their souls.

## Looted heavy

FROM PAGE 3

2025, the adviser said, "Laws are made to serve the people. This law was enacted to ensure that the public can receive services."

"If there are any concerns [from the police], they may submit recommendations, and the home ministry will review those," he added.

## Bangladesh will never tolerate

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Dhaka's Pilkhana -- then the BDR headquarters -- they began their celebration of killing by murdering 57 patriotic, promising, skilled military officers over two days. And in 2024, they left heaps of bodies..."

He added, "It is a matter of pain that they even tried to use our proud armed forces. They tried to use the police officers and members, who are the protectors of people's lives, property, honour, and dignity -- in these misdeeds. They also tried to use the Border Guard. They did not allow a single institution of the state to stand properly. They destroyed the judiciary, kept the Anti-Corruption Commission under their control."

"We are not seeking the victory of any particular



Supporters of eight like-minded parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, gather at a divisional rally at Laldighi Maidan in Chattogram city yesterday. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

party; we are not seeking the victory of the 8-party alliance. We want the victory of the ambitions of 18 crore people of Bangladesh, and that aspiration will be realised through the rule of the holy Qur'an. And the trumpet of that victory will sound from here

(Chattogram)," he added.

Ameer of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Mamunul Haque, said, "Our clear statement is that Bangladesh will no longer run on a system where landlords take the shares and common people get the leftovers."