

Farmers in trouble as brick kiln units take over fertile land

ALIGARH, JULY 30/- Farmer Ghayasuddin needed Rs 30,000 to get his daughter married. But weighed down by three successive years of drought and mounting debts, he found it impossible to put the money aside for the wedding.

So, when a brick kiln unit offered to lease an acre of his land for three years, the farmer thought he had struck gold. When he was offered three times more than what he earned from his crops, he immediately gave his nod to the proposal.

The farmer at Kodyaganj Village in West Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh district was the first in his village to lease out fertile land to a brick kiln owner for Rs 45,000 a year.

Today he regrets the day he said yes. For what he didn't know was after the unit had dug out four feet of the top soil, the land was no longer as fertile as it used

to be. "The land I got back was less fertile. I tried to grow some crops but they were of poor quality and the yield was also low," Ghayasuddin said.

With a construction boom across India, brick-making is a lucrative business in Uttar Pradesh villages, with hundreds of furnaces baking millions of bricks day and night.

The story of Ghayasuddin turns the spotlight on many such hamlets in the region. Over 250 farmers in six villages - Kodyaganj, Sikanderpur, Akraab, Sakra, Gabhana, Dadaun and Palkhana - in Aligarh have leased out about 200 acres of land to around 100 brick kiln units in the last four years.

Some farmers said they were forced to do it because the prolonged drought had pushed them to the brink of starvation. "The proposal by the brick

kiln industries came when we were in desperate need of money. We were making Rs 12,000 per acre by growing crops and for the same acre we were paid Rs 45,000-60,000," said Imran Khan, a farmer from Sikanderpur who grows rice and wheat alternately on his field.

A few farmers said they were forced to lease out their land when their surrounding fields were dug out, leaving their field at a higher level, which led to their soil being washed off to the neighbouring quarried fields.

Those who still held on, found it increasingly difficult to irrigate their elevated land. Ramesh Singh, a resident of Palkhana village, said he was against leasing out his land to brick kiln units but had to yield to them when his crops started dying because water couldn't reach his raised land.

"On all three sides, there was quarried land, which made it impossible for water to reach my field. I know the degradation the quarrying will cause to my land, but I am helpless as my crops are dying either way," Singh said.

Singh leased out four acres of land to Kamal Udyog for three years for Rs 50,000 per acre per year. The owner of the industry, Kamal Agarwal, however stressed he was helping farmers of the area.

"Without our industries, farmers would have starved. We are paying them nearly three times of what they would have got by selling their crops. Moreover, each brick kiln industry gives employment to at least 50 labourers," Agarwal said.

The brick kiln industries operating in these six villages manufacture around 70-80 lakh bricks per month, he said.

Smoke emissions from brick kilns contribute 9 per cent of the total emissions in India, studies say.

"There is a huge environmental cost involved - from smoke emission and local air pollution to the loss of valuable top soil," said Khurram Ahmed, a social activist.

India, the second largest producer of bricks in the world after China, manufactures nearly 200 billion bricks a year, a 2015 CSE report said.

About 70 per cent of these bricks are produced in the Indo-Gangetic plains, which have one of the world's most fertile alluvial plains. Punjab State Council for Science and Technology said in a 2009 report.

"Brick fields are mostly situated on riverine fertile agricultural land as they need clayish, silty, loamy, clay loam or silt loam soil with good texture,"

Ahmed added.

After the brick kiln industries have excavated the top soil, farmers are forced to grow either rice or millet, crops that require more water. Because of water logging in their fields, they find it difficult to grow vegetables and other crops such as wheat and corn on their once fertile land. "Water logging in the quarried land is a common problem. Farmers are forced to grow crops that require excess water. In some cases, water logging makes it impossible for them to grow any other kind of crop," Ahmed said.

Building construction in India is estimated to grow at a rate of 6.6 per cent per year between 2005 and 2030 providing a steady demand for bricks. The brick making industry is utilising 2.5 crore tonnes of coal and other biomass fuels per year, government reports have said.

Brick kiln industries consumed 25,20,000 cubic metres soil during 1995-2010, said a 2015 report in the International Journal of Innovative Research Development. The industry has been closed in many big cities of India for polluting the environment, but has started mushrooming in the countryside.

Although the government is encouraging the use of eco-friendly fly ash bricks, it will be a while before red bricks are replaced because of lack of awareness about the harmful effects of brick kiln units on the environment, he said. The construction boom is feeding the brick kiln industries across the country but the cost being paid is too high. Shrinking of agricultural land is pushing us towards a doomning agrarian crisis and there is a dire need to switch to more environment-friendly options," Ahmed said. (PTI)



Kerala capital wore a deserted look on Sunday as the BJP called for a dawn-to-dusk hartal to protest against the killing of an RSS activist, allegedly by CPI(M) workers.

BJP indulging in 'political corruption': ex-CMAkhilesh

LUCKNOW, JULY 30/- Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav today alleged that the BJP was behaving in an undemocratic manner, by virtually keeping morality at bay.

"The BJP is exercising pressure on public representatives in the states of Bihar, Gujarat, Goa, Manipur and Uttar Pradesh to change their political parties. In UP, some ministers, including the Chief Minister, are yet to become MLAs. They should become MLAs after contesting the elections, and not by trying to make the sitting MLAs (Members of Legislative Council) resign. This is political corruption," he said.

The Samajwadi Party president also accused the BJP of having an "anti-people" and "anti-development" agenda, while also being against "socialism and secularism". Invoking party ideologue Ram Manohar Lohia, Akhilesh said he equated speaking lies and breaking promises with corruption.

"The BJP is encouraging political corruption in a big way. The BJP is trying to break the opposition legislators by alluring and pressuring them. This amounts to insult of the mandate of the people. The BJP is against socialism and secularism. We have to remain alert of the BJP's casteist and communal politics," he was quoted as saying in party statement.

He also hit out at the Yogi Adityanath government for "insulting" shikhamitras (ad-hoc teachers). The ad-hoc teachers had launched an agitation across the state on Thursday after the Supreme Court had upheld the Allahabad High Court verdict of September 2015 which had quashed their appointment as full-time teachers by the Akhilesh Yadav regime. (PTI)

Goa girl Aishwarya Rane gives 'wings of hope' to special kids

PANAJI, JULY 30/- She may be just 18, but Aishwarya Rane is fired by zeal to serve the society which has motivated her to work for intellectually and physically challenged children in Goa.

Rane, along with her like-minded friends, has started an NGO, 'Wings of Hope', to empower special kids and make a difference in their lives.

The NGO organised a special musical event on Friday last and the proceeds from the programme will be donated for treatment of children with physical disabilities and other social causes. Renowned Fado singer Sonia Shirasat and rapper Sabino Dias took part in the event here.

"The event generated Rs 17 lakh, of which Rs 12 lakh will be given to The Childcare Foundation (an NGO) for funding surgeries

of children who come from poor background.

The remaining Rs 5 lakh will be utilised to purchase buses for students of Sanjay Centre for Special Education School," said Rane.

The school in North Goa looks after the educational needs of special children.

"I started Wings of Hope with my friends to ensure equal opportunities for children with intellectual and physical disabilities in society," she said. "We have to accept that each one of us is different and it is this lack of sameness which makes the world a beautiful place," said Rane. During the event, students from Sanjay Centre for Special Education School, Taught to Teach music school and Sharada Mandir performed.

On the occasion, her book River of Emotions was also released by orthopaedic surgeon Ashok Johari.

TN Finance Minister hits out at actor Kamal Haasan

CHENNAI, JULY 30/- The ruling AIADMK (Amma) camp today continued to target veteran actor Kamal Haasan, with Finance Minister D Jayakumar asking him not to "pretend" that he was going to enter politics but indeed take the plunge.

The senior leader also sought to know what welfare activities the actor had done for the people of the state during the 2004 tsunami tragedy and the devastating floods of 2015.

"Politics is a bed of thorns. It should not be underestimated. Let him see the kind of difficulties in it by entering it. He should not pretend that he is entering politics," Jayakumar told reporters here.

"Have you (Haasan) done any welfare for the people through your fan clubs during tsunami or the floods," he asked.

Instead of acting, Haasan was "just uttering words" and the people of the state will realise it, the Minister said, and suggested the star should make his political plunge by January, apparently in 2018.

Ever since Kamal Haasan had made allegations of corruption in the government, he has been targeted by the ruling dispensation, with Chief Minister P Kalanidhrami himself asking the national award winning actor to take the political plunge to get proper response. Local Administration Minister SP Velumani had sought proof for Haasan's allegations and had asked if the actor was ready to furnish tax details of his films. The opposition including DMK have backed Haasan and urged the government to respond to his charges of corruption rather than targeting him. (PTI)

Abu Azmi gets threat calls, police file case

MUMBAI, JULY 30/- The family of Samajwadi Party leader Abu Azmi alleged that he received threat calls, police said today. Based on a complaint filed by his son, the police have registered a case against an unidentified person. The man, who claimed to be a member of a religious outfit, allegedly made phone calls to Azmi, an MLA from Maharashtra, four to five times over the past few days and threatened to kill him, police said. Acting on the complaint filed by the Maharashtra SP unit chief's son, Farhan Azmi, a case was filed under IPC sections dealing with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings, intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace" and other relevant provisions on Thursday, a senior police official said.

Farhan, in his complaint, which was also addressed to Mumbai Police Commissioner Dattatray Padsalgikar and Joint Commissioner of Police (law and order) Deven Bharti, alleged that the caller threatened to harm him and his family. He was under way to trace the caller, the police official added. (PTI)

Ensure welfare schemes reach people: Amit Shah tells party men

LUCKNOW, JULY 30/- The victory in Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections was the result of hard work of BJP workers and the government's aim is to take welfare-centric measures of the Centre to the people, which had been stagnated in the previous regimes, party president Amit Shah said today. Shah made the remarks while addressing the ministers of the UP government here.

At the meeting of the government and organisation held at the UP BJP office, it was pledged that various welfare-centric measures of the Centre and state government will be taken to the doorstep of the public, an official statement issued by the party said.

"The government is working to verify the BPL cards and this work has largely been completed. This will help in providing government ration to the deserving and actual beneficiaries. The government is committed for the betterment of people of Uttar Pradesh. The ministers in the government are also contributing in this regard," Shah said, according to the statement. At the meeting, a roadmap was also prepared for fulfilling the promises mentioned in the 'Sankalp Patra' (manifesto) at the earlier.

UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said, "Ministers have been made in-charge for various districts, and assigned with the responsibility of carrying out developmental activities in the district. This will also help in review of various schemes." (PTI)

Drug racket: Telugu actor Tanish Alladi to appear before SIT

HYDERABAD, JULY 30/- Telugu film actor Tanish Alladi is likely to appear before the special investigation team (SIT) of Tollywood's excise department as part of an ongoing probe into a high-end drug racket busted by it. He is among the 12 persons, including directors and actors from the Tollywood industry (popularly known as Tollywood), to be summoned by the SIT in connection with the case.

"Tanish Alladi is to appear before the SIT on July 31," a senior excise official said. The SIT sleuths yesterday grilled Chinnavasa Rao, who had earlier worked as driver with popular actor Ravi Teja. Teja was questioned for nearly nine hours on July 28. During the investigation into the drug racket that was busted on July 2, names of many members of the Tollywood film industry had cropped up, the SIT had said. Since July 19, the SIT has questioned filmmaker Puri Jagannadh, cinematographer Shivam K Naidu, actor P Subha Raju, Tarnu Kumar, P Navdeep and Ravi Teja, art director Dharmarao alias China, and actresses Charmi Kaur and Mumath Khan. The excise officials have so far arrested 20 people, including US citizen Dandu Anish, a former aerospace engineer who has worked with the NASA. Dutch national Mike Kamminga, and seven B Tech degree holders employed with multinational companies in Hyderabad. Under the racket, high-end drugs such as Isyergic acid, diethylamylmethamphetamine (DISD) and methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA) were being supplied.

The investigators suspect that the gang's clientele included nearly 1,000 customers, including students of various city-based schools and colleges, people associated with Tollywood, senior officials of MNCs and employees of IT firms in Cyberabad. The investigators have revealed disturbing facts about the use of drugs by schools and college students, a senior excise official said. Excise Minister T Padma Rao Goud earlier said the department had served notices to 13 IT companies and that suspected employees will be called for questioning after gathering sufficient proof.

Woman dies, son injured in firing

SHAHJAHANPUR (UP), JULY 30/- The mother of a village head was today shot dead while her son was seriously injured when some persons opened fire in the Dhukri Khurd village in Mirzapur area here, the police said. The incident took place when the village head Jitendra (35) was going to temple with mother Rambeti (70), they said. "Some persons fired at them. While Rambeti stood on the spot, Jitendra was injured and rushed to a hospital, where his condition was stated to be serious," a police official said. According to police officials, the incident was the fallout of old enmity. An FIR has been registered against some persons in the matter, they said. (PTI)

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The National Innovation Foundation - India (NIF) invites original technological ideas and innovations from children in school (up to class XII) or school drop outs up to the age of 17 years for Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE competition. The awards will be announced on October 15, the birthday of Bharat Ratna Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India. NIF will provide patent and incubation support to deserving entries. The entries (in any language) should reach NIF by August 31, 2017 through e-mail or post.

The entries may be sent to the following address:
Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE Competition 2017,
National Innovation Foundation-India, Grambharti, Amrapur, Gandhinagar-Mahudi Road, Gujarat-382650,
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