
Fact finding report

Farmer commits suicide.
following heavy crop loss and
debt burden 2025

Date: May, 2025

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- The Fact-finding Mission Team members for their tireless efforts in information collection, interviews, analysis, and documentation.

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Disclaimer

This fact-finding report does not constitute a legal document and is not intended to serve as legal evidence or advice. Its sole purpose is to identify and elucidate key issues impacting farmers—namely, access to finance, control over seeds, availability of agricultural inputs, equitable pricing mechanisms, and bargaining power—through the examination of two specific cases. The challenges identified herein reflect systemic conditions within Bangladesh’s agricultural sector that have precipitated increased distress among farmers, thereby adversely affecting their livelihoods and impinging upon their fundamental rights, including the right to life, family integrity, and national food security. This report is compiled exclusively to highlight these critical concerns and to inform relevant stakeholders for the purposes of advocacy and policy consideration.

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Preamble

In the past few decades, amidst mild ups and downs, food production has generally increased. Even the price of food products has increased. But intriguingly, farmers have not received a share of this price increase. The financial picture of villages and the socio-economic status of farmers also do not reflect profit. The issues between production increase, price increase, and farmers not receiving their share of the price is a big puzzle. To understand the inconsistency between production situation and price, one must understand two stages of this process—one is the cultivation stage, the other is the post-harvest stage. Various reports focus on the post-harvest situation. But farmers are largely devastated at the cultivation stage, even before the harvest.

At the cultivation stage, farmers have to invest in several areas, such as purchasing seeds or seedlings, renting agricultural equipment, irrigation, buying fertilizers, pesticides, hiring labor, etc. Along with this, there is the cost of leasing land. To meet these costs, farmers take loans, and to immediately cover expenses or repay loans, they sell their crops as quickly as possible. They incur losses when selling crops. As a result, farmers cannot get out of the debt pressure. But the high market prices of these crops directly prove that the farmers' losses are turning into profits elsewhere. In this uncontrolled profit, not only the farmers' money is lost—state subsidies are also going. From farmers to middlemen, commission agents to retail markets, this is a huge chain, for which there is no effective control measure in Bangladesh yet. Thus, wealth is being transferred from the larger population to a small group, which is a structural violence.

Moreover, the larger farming community is not in a position to do anything else besides cultivation. Farming is also a minimum place of respect within their social spheres. In this context, farmers are adopting various strategies and means to maintain their cultivation. Through small and varied borrowings, they continue to build their profession and the country's food security, which is also a form of resistance in the agricultural sector.

In this process of farmer exploitation, systemic inequality is increasing. Not only do farmers suffer losses, but their life expectancy decreases, and their access to healthcare, education, entertainment, clean water, and better food also diminishes. Gradually, they lose inheritance of their social assets and control over the right to a decent life.

The distress faced by farmers has led to a tragic rise in suicides, with multiple cases reported in Bangladesh in early 2025, mirroring similar alarming trends in neighboring India. These suicides highlight the urgent need to address the underlying structural causes of farmer vulnerability and exclusion from political decision-making. Despite being the backbone of the economy, farmers are almost absent from the political decision-making process. In this context, awareness of this structural violence against farmers and taking steps to change it is now the only way to save farmers.

In this context, Bangladesh Food Security Network- KHANI, committed to promoting the right to food, farmers' rights, and social justice, through the Right to Food & Nutrition Campaign has undertaken a fact-finding mission. This mission investigates two recent farmer suicides to uncover the systemic factors contributing to such tragedies, aiming to inform policy and advocate for sustainable solutions that protect and empower farming communities.

This report is intended to raise awareness among policymakers, stakeholders, and the public about the structural causes of farmer distress and suicide, and to serve as an evidence-based resource to inform advocacy, policy formulation, and targeted interventions aimed at addressing systemic inequalities in the agricultural sector.

Background

Bangladesh's foundation is built on its fields, sustained by the relentless efforts of its farmers. Yet, these key contributors to our food security remain overlooked—facing unfair prices, market manipulation, and minimal institutional support. Despite strong harvests, rising input costs, natural disasters, and profit-hungry middlemen continue to push them toward loss and hardship. According to the Task Force on Economic Reforms, agriculture in Bangladesh faces several major constraints including limited market access, inadequate credit and capital availability, land scarcity and fragmentation, labor shortages, and insufficient machinery and technology. Smallholder farmers, who make up 70% of the farming community, face limited access to competitive markets due to poor rural infrastructure, resulting in high costs and annual post-harvest losses of around 25% of perishable goods. Price volatility is also a major challenge, with rice prices fluctuating between BDT 40 and 55 per kilogram in 2023, leading to unstable incomes and discouraging cultivation. Additionally, market failures related to safety, quality, and standards further hinder smallholders' ability to compete and secure fair returns.

These persistent challenges not only undermine the economic stability of farmers but also contribute to a growing crisis of despair and vulnerability within the agricultural community. Alarming, the incidence of farmer suicides in Bangladesh has risen significantly in recent years. Since January 2025, reports on different media indicate that 12 farmers have taken their own lives, with six of these cases directly linked to burdensome debt and the inability to secure profitable prices for their agricultural produce. The root causes of farmer suicides in Bangladesh are predominantly economic and systematic issue, including crop failures, low income, inadequate institutional support, and psychological stress arising from debt.

In this context, KHANI Bangladesh and its secretariat Participatory Research & Action Network- PRAAN. identified and investigated two cases of farmer suicide through field-level fact-finding missions to examine the root causes of farmer distress. The first fact-finding mission was conducted in Mujibnagar, Meherpur on 16–17 April 2025, and the second in Bagha, Rajshahi on 6 May 2025. These missions investigated the causes behind the suicides of two onion farmers, Saiful Sheikh, a 55-year-old from Bhoarpara village in Bagoan Union, Mujibnagar upazila, Meherpur, and Mir Ruhul Amin, a 60-year-old from Bagha upazila, Rajshahi.

The investigations included in-depth interviews with the bereaved families, community members, local leaders, and relevant local government authorities, alongside comprehensive field visits to document the lived realities of those most affected. A multidisciplinary team of 16 representatives from diverse sectors—including law, research, agriculture, media, human rights, community development, public health, and policy advocacy—joined the mission teams, contributing their expertise to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

Objective

The primary objective of this fact-finding mission was to investigate the tragic suicide of two onion farmer Saiful Sheikh and Mir Ruhul Amin and to understand the broader structural, economic, and policy-related factors contributing to such incidents among smallholder farmers in Bangladesh. Specifically, the mission sought to:

1. Document the Immediate Circumstances: Collect first-hand accounts from family members, neighbors, community members, relevant representatives from the local government to understand the financial, emotional, and institutional challenges that contributed to the deaths of Saiful Sheikh and Mir Ruhul Amin.
2. Analyze Structural Barriers: Examine the systemic issues affecting onion farmers in Meherpur and Rajshahi, including market failures, price volatility, input cost inflation, absence of storage infrastructure, lack of access to fair credit, and weak extension services.
3. Assess Institutional Response: Evaluate the roles and responses of local government authorities, agricultural officers, and support service providers in addressing farmers' needs, both before and after the incident.
4. Gather Community Demands and Recommendations: Engage with farmers, civil society actors, and stakeholders to identify urgent interventions and policy recommendations to prevent further tragedies and promote the dignity, rights, and security of such farmers.

Methodology

The fact-finding mission conducted by KHANI Bangladesh utilized a combination of qualitative research methods and journalistic investigation. Prior to conducting the field investigation, the KHANI Bangladesh fact-finding team reviewed various secondary sources, including newspaper articles, social media content, and academic papers related to the recent incidents of suicide as well as the current and past pattern of agrarian crisis.

At the outset of the investigation, the fact-finding team developed a structured fact-finding approach to guide the process. This plan outlined key methodological components, including the scope of the inquiry based on the mission's objective, the composition of the investigation team, and the approach to be taken in gathering and analyzing information.

The plan identified:

- Assess what was already known about the cases of Saiful Sheikh and Mir Ruhul Amin, including prior reports, media coverage, and preliminary data.
- Determine specific areas where information was lacking or insufficient, such as details on financial conditions, institutional responses, and community perspectives.
- Identify relevant stakeholders and sources for data collection, including family members, neighbors, local government officials, agricultural officers, and civil society representatives.
- Define the procedures and tools to be used, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews, ensuring a comprehensive and ethical approach to gathering evidence.

Given the unique nature and context of each case, the methodology was tailored to suit the specific circumstances. Due to challenging conditions, a limited mandate, time constraints, and the absence of enforcement authority, the fact-finding missions adopted their own proof thresholds—adjusted on a case-by-case basis—rather than adhering to the strict 'beyond reasonable doubt' standard used in judicial proceedings. In this mission, the investigation involved direct field visits and qualitative interviews with key stakeholders such as the deceased farmer's family, local agricultural input dealers like fertilizer and seed, the Upazila Agriculture Officer, and the Upazila Nirbahi Officer.

Due to the absence of formal documentation, such as loan papers or police reports, the mission relied on verbal testimonies, observations, and community-level narratives, which are first-hand, to understand the underlying causes of the suicide. The findings reflect a triangulation of perspectives from local actors and aim to capture the broader socio-economic conditions contributing to the incident. The missions strictly followed the principles and standards of fact-finding mission, including do no harm, independence, impartiality, and confidentiality.

Challenges

The fact-finding team made every effort to analyze all relevant information and develop a set of recommendations; however, certain unavoidable limitations persist due to the challenges encountered during the process:

1. **Emotional Sensitivity of the Family:** In the immediate aftermath of the incident both families were in a state of emotional distress, which made it difficult to conduct prolonged or repeated interviews. Some information may have remained unspoken due to grief or trauma.
2. **Lack of Official Documentation:** In the case of Late Saiful Sheikh, the investigation was hindered by the absence of an official post-mortem report, which limited the ability to medically verify the exact cause of death. Additionally, no formal documentation of Saiful Sheikh's debts could be obtained during the investigation. According to the family, Saiful personally managed all financial records. His wife, who is physically challenged, his elderly mother, who is unable to oversee such matters, and his daughter being a student resides at home intermittently, were not in a position to retrieve or maintain those documents following his death.

In the case of Late Mir Ruhul Amin, the lending microfinance institutions from whom he had borrowed money reportedly retrieved loan documentation shortly after the incident. These lenders subsequently waived the outstanding debts, making it impossible for the investigation team to access records that might have confirmed the magnitude of financial pressure he was under prior to his death.

3. **Limited Time for In-Depth Inquiry:** The team had a short window, for the field visit. Given the gravity of the issue and the wide range of structural challenges, more time would have allowed for deeper engagement with a broader set of stakeholders.
4. **Limited Access to Data and Records:** Access to official data on onion procurement, pricing trends, agricultural input subsidies, and farmer suicide statistics was limited at both the district and national levels, constraining the team's ability to substantiate systemic issues with quantitative evidence. Moreover, data on informal credit, despite its widespread use among farmers—is virtually absent from official databases, further hindering comprehensive analysis.
5. **Underreporting of Farmer Distress:** Financial distress among farmers is common but often ignored due to lack of awareness and attention. Such struggles are rarely recognized until they lead to suicide, and are frequently dismissed as mental illness or "craziness." This stigma skews testimonies, obscuring the true causes and leaving many cases unreported and misunderstood.

Formation of the Fact-Finding Team

The fact-finding missions were organized under the leadership of KHANI Bangladesh, Participatory Research & Action Network- PRAAN and supported by its allied organizations and civil society representatives. Two separate delegations visited Meherpur and Rajshahi districts to investigate the cases.

Meherpur Delegation (Led by KHANI Vice-Chair)

1. Rezaul Karim Siddique- Vice-Chair at KHANI Bangladesh
2. Md. Musfiqur Rahman Sabbir- Operational Chief at INCIDIN Bangladesh
1. Pavel Partha, Director- Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge- BARCIK
3. Gouranga Nandy- Media Professional & Researcher
4. Saiful Masum- Staff Reporter, Ajker Patrika
5. Amit Ranjan Dey- Deputy Manager, Right to Food and Livelihood, ActionAid Bangladesh
6. Umme Salma- Programme Coordinator, Participatory Research & Action Network- PRAAN
7. Ahmed Eshtiak, Research & MEAL Officer, PRAAN
8. Shanjida Kawser Ritu, Media & Communication Officer, PRAAN

Rajshahi (Bagha) Delegation (Led by KHANI)

1. Pavel Partha- Director, Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge- BARCIK
2. Selim Arfi- Joint Convener, Krishak Dal, Rajshahi District Committee
3. Mominul Islam Babu- News Editor, Daily Sonali Sangbad
4. Lalon Uddin- Bagha Correspondent, Daily Kaler Kontho
5. Alima Khatun Lima- Organizing Secretary, Mahila Parishad, Rajshahi District Committee
6. Rashed Ripon- Director, Paribartan
7. Soma Hasan- Program Officer at Paribartan
8. Pankaj Karmakar- Field Worker at Paribartan



Brief Introduction of the Incidents

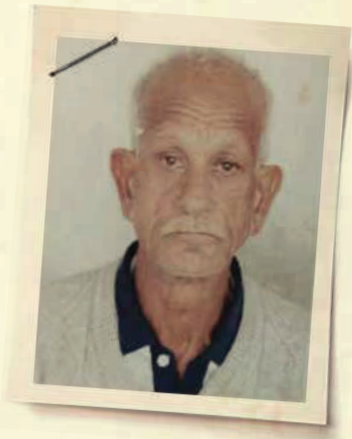
Case 01

Location: Mujibnagar, Meherpur, Khulna
Date of the Incident: March 27, 2025
Date of the visit: April 16th to April 17th, 2025
Case No: Unnatural Death case (UD case) filed at Mujibnagar Police Station under Case No. 4, dated 27/03/2025

Saiful Sheikh (55) an onion farmer in Meherpur's Mujibnagar upazila died by suicide after reportedly consuming pesticide in his field. He was a resident of Bhorpara village under Bagoan Union.

According to family members and police sources, Saiful Sheikh depended on agriculture for his livelihood and was in distress due to multiple debts and the inability to secure a fair price for his onions that would cover his cultivation costs or help repay his loans. He ingested pesticide in his onion field around 11:00 AM on March 26, 2025 (Wednesday). He was initially admitted to Meherpur Sadar Hospital and later referred to Kushtia General Hospital as his condition worsened. He passed away on March 27 morning at approximately 10:30 AM while undergoing treatment.

Case 02



Location: Baousa Union, Bagha, Rajshahi
Date of the Incident: April 14, 2025
Date of the Visit: 6 June, 2025
Case No: Unnatural Death (UD) case filed at Ishwardi Railway Police Station under Case No. 9, dated 14/04/2025.

Onion farmer Mir Ruhul Amin, 60, from Mathpara village of Baousa Union in Bagha Upazila, Rajshahi, tragically committed suicide on April 14th by jumping under a train at the Arani railway station, Bagha.

According to the family, Ruhul Amin depended on agriculture, farming on his own, and leased land. He had taken loans from three NGOs and was also involved in the "dadon" (advance/loan with high interest or crop repayment) system.

Discussion and Findings

Mujibnagar, located in the southwestern region of Bangladesh, and Bagha, situated in the northwestern part of the country, are both predominantly agrarian areas. According to the Agriculture Census 2019, 125715 persons are engaged in agricultural work in Meherpur district; for Rajshahi district 492194 persons are engaged in agricultural work. In both regions, agriculture serves as the primary source of livelihood, with onion cultivation being a major and key economic activity. These tragic deaths expose the deep-rooted human rights challenges faced by smallholder farmers in Bangladesh, including the denial of their rights to livelihood, food security, and social protection. The fact-finding team's field observations, interviews, and analysis highlight multiple deep-rooted structural challenges as below:

1. Exploitative market system and absence of fair pricing
2. Debt burden and financial entrapment
3. High input cost and dependency on substandard seeds
4. Absence of storage and infrastructure support
5. Oppression of the informal money lending system

1. Exploitative Market System and Absence of Fair Pricing

Onion farmers both in Mujibnagar and Bagha are systemically deprived of fair prices. Despite heavy investment in seeds, labor, pesticides, and lack of storage facilities, farmers are persuaded to sell their produce on the field at prices well below production costs. Saiful Sheikh invested BDT 1.5 lakh for the cultivation but managed to earn only BDT 58,000 after selling the onion which is insufficient even to repay his debt. A fellow farmer, Mushfiqur Rahman, suffered a loss of BDT 3.5 lakh despite producing 1,120 maunds of onions.

Ruhul Amin also failed to yield the expected economic return by onion farming. He harvested around 25 maunds of onions, but the market price was extremely low at the time of harvest though prices increased later. This misalignment between harvest and market conditions, and lacking power of negotiation or compete for the profitable return left him unable to sell at a profitable rate and undermined his ability to recover the costs of cultivation, let alone repay his debts.



2. Debt Burden and Financial Entrapment

Access to credit and lack of capital is a key problem lying here. Most farmers interviewed were trapped in debt cycles due to high production costs and limited access to affordable institutional credit. Saiful borrowed from both local microfinance institution and local fertilizer shops, ending up with unpayable debts. Other farmers from Bagha also shared similar experiences, borrowing to invest in farming but failing to recover costs.

Interviews with the community reveal that accessing bank loans is challenging due to complex documentation, stringent collateral requirements such as proof of land ownership, and a lack of proper guidance. As a result, many farmers become dependent on informal lenders and microcredit institutions, which often exacerbate their financial distress. Although microfinance loans are relatively more accessible than bank loans, they frequently come with high interest rates as high as 27% annually and exploitative repayment schedules which make this unsuitable for the seasonal patterns of farm credit demand and farm returns. Similarly, other informal lending channels impose even higher interest rates, further deepening farmers' financial burdens.

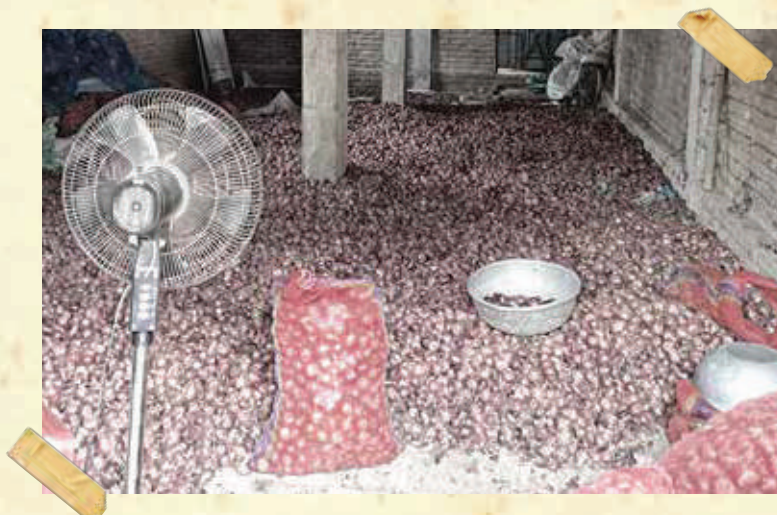
The situation was found to be more severe in Bagha. Ruhul Amin had taken loans from three microfinance institutions around BDT 150,000. Only one third of the total loan has been repaid by him. Additionally, he took loan from local "dadon" system, an informal predatory form of advance lending. Ruhul Amin had taken both types of dadon: one where the harvest is taken as repayment, and another where interest is calculated at a staggering rate of BDT 10,000 per month for every lakh borrowed.

The combination of formal microcredit and informal debt created a layered financial trap from which there was no apparent escape. In the absence of repayment capacity, the social and psychological cost becomes unbearable.

3. High Input Cost and Dependency on Substandard Seeds

Another recurring finding from the field investigation is the farmers' lack of control over agricultural inputs. In the case of Meherpur the popular variety onion in that area is Sukh Sagar which is often smuggled from India and to farmers sold without quality assurance, leading to substandard yields. The farmers lack proper training and extension services to manage them. This variety also requires high fungicide and fertilizer input.

Input costs for onion cultivation in the Bagha-Charghat belt are also exceedingly high, ranging from BDT 60,000 to 70,000 per bigha primarily due to expensive seeds and fertilizers. Dealers and pesticide vendors from Meherpur confirmed that up to 20% - 30% of farmers are deceived due to fake or poor-quality seeds, which directly contribute to crop failure and financial losses.



4. Absence of Storage and Infrastructure Support

Ruhul Amin's final activities before his death buying polythene sheets suggested a desperate effort to store his harvested onions and avoid selling at a loss. However, the fact that he had to make such arrangements himself reflects the chronic lack of proper post-harvest storage infrastructure for perishable crops like onions in those areas. The problem of lack of storage facilities also stands as a major structural deficiency in Meherpur district which severely undermines the economic stability of smallholder farmers. In the absence of such facilities, farmers are forced into immediate post-harvest sales, regardless of prevailing market prices.

In Meherpur, there is no central or dedicated marketplace for farmers to sell their produce; instead, wholesalers and middlemen directly visit the fields, and farmers are compelled to accept whatever price is offered on the spot as they lack the price information to bargain with the buyers. This situation creates a buyers' market or oligopsony market where wholesalers and middlemen dictate prices with little to no bargaining power and autonomy from the farmers side.

The consequences of this infrastructural gap were tragically illustrated in the case of Saiful Sheikh who was had to sell his onions at only BDT 600 per maund, but prices surged to BDT 2,000 per maund just weeks after his death. A similar pattern was observed in the case of Ruhul Amin. Had cold storage been available, both could have preserved their produce and sold it later at a more favorable price.

5. Oppression on of the informal money lending system

The "dadon" system is embedded in the socio-political fabric of the Bagha. These informal moneylenders, referred to as "dadon mohajans," operate with impunity, often with political backing. They own the largest houses in the area and are known to pressure indebted farmers into selling produce prematurely or at unfair prices. Ruhul Amin had taken loan two types of dadon: one where the harvest is taken as repayment, and another where interest is calculated at a staggering rate of BDT 10,000 per month for every lakh borrowed.

To cope with rising cultivation costs, farmers often turn to informal moneylenders or advance-based systems like dadon. These loans come with high interest rates and rigid repayment terms. Under pressure to repay, farmers are forced to harvest and sell their crops early—before market prices peak. Without bargaining power or price protection, they sell at low rates to middlemen. Meanwhile, these intermediaries hoard the produce and later sell it at double or triple the price. The same farmers, along with consumers, are then compelled to buy back food at inflated rates. This exploitative cycle traps farmers in recurring debt and worsens food insecurity, highlighting the structural oppression embedded in informal lending systems.

It was found that in Bagha even family members now avoid giving loans without charging interest, showing the normalization of exploitative financial relationships in rural areas. In many cases, farmers are compelled to migrate or abandon their homes to escape debt collectors.



The Aftermath: Deepening Vulnerability and Insecurity of the Families

After the death of Saiful Sheikh's his family fall into acute and multidimensional hardship. As the sole breadwinner, his sudden death has left three women facing daily uncertainty and hunger.

Though Saiful Sheikh's physically disabled wife receives a disability allowance and his elderly mother receives a widow's allowance these are insufficient to cover even her basic sustenance as majority of the portion are spent behind medicine. This situation exposes the structural inadequacy of the existing social safety net in Bangladesh, which are meager, and often difficult to access for the most vulnerable.

Saiful Sheikh's daughter, Rojefa—a postgraduate student—now bears the responsibility of supporting the family. She earns a modest income by tutoring a few local students, but it is barely enough to meet essential needs such as food, medicine, and education. The family is trapped in a cycle of deprivation, with every aspect of survival—nutrition, healthcare, education, and housing—under constant threat. With limited cultivable land and no access to capital or farming resources, their chances of recovery remain bleak. Existing debts continue to weigh heavily on them, compounding their hardship. As a household led entirely by women with limited knowledge of agriculture, land rights, credit systems, or market dynamics, their vulnerability is further heightened.

Ruhul Amin's family is also currently facing severe vulnerabilities following his tragic death. With the loss of their primary breadwinner, the family is left in a state of financial insecurity, burdened by the exploitative "dadon" moneylenders. They have no stable source of income to repay these debts, making their future livelihood uncertain. The emotional toll is also profound, as his family is grappling with grief and mental trauma, exacerbated by false and hurtful rumors circulating on social media mentioning the death as family issue.

Opinions of Key Personnel

The fact-finding team engaged with several key stakeholders and officials in both areas. Their perspectives on the incidents are summarized below:

Family Members of Saiful Sheikh

An in-depth interview was conducted with Saiful Sheikh's daughter, Rojefa Khatun, along with his wife Sona Bhanu and mother Romesa Khatun, who provided critical insights into the severe financial strain and psychological distress that ultimately led to his suicide. According to Rojefa, her father had borrowed BDT 1.5 lakh to cultivate onions but earned only BDT 58,000 from the harvest. The loan was taken from a microfinance. In addition, he was indebted to the local fertilizer shop owner and a nearby grocery store.

Burdened by mounting debt and the low market price of his produce, Saiful fell into deep emotional distress. Rojefa recounted:

"The debt and low crop prices became too much for him. My father always encouraged me to keep studying. But just a few days before he took poison, he said he might not be able to support my education anymore. He was really upset and told us about the losses. But we never thought it would push him to end his life."

She further added that just two weeks after her fathers' death, onion prices surged dramatically—nearly tripling—from BDT 600 to BDT 2,000 per maund.

"If farmers like my father are driven to take their own lives, who will feed the nation?" she stated.

Saiful's mother recounted the day he ingested poison, stating, "He had been working in the field all day. When he came home in the evening, he started vomiting and suddenly collapsed. There was a terrible smell coming from the vomit. After I kept asking, my son finally told me he had taken poison. We rushed him to the hospital, but we couldn't save him." She shared that her son decided to cultivate onions again after a long break, hoping to make a profit. Now, however, he is gone, leaving the family in deep loss.

Her daughter Rojefa also spoke about the family's struggle to make ends meet, saying, "My mother gets a disability allowance, and my grandmother gets a widow's allowance, but it all goes into buying medicine. There's nothing left for anything else. I can't sleep at night—I keep thinking about how I'll manage to feed them both!". Rojefa's grandmother, deeply concerned about their future, said, "We don't have any earning members now. How will we bear the cost of the family?"

Palash Mondal, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Mujibnagar Upazila

Palash Mondal highlighted the lack of onion storage facilities in Mujibnagar as a significant challenge faced by smallholder farmers. He referred to a human chain organized by the local farmers in Meherpur just a few weeks prior to the suicide incident. During the demonstration, farmers demanded several urgent measures, including: ensuring fair prices for onions, halting onion imports for the next three months, introducing a minimum price for onions, establishing cold storage facilities, and ensuring access to essential agricultural inputs—such as fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds—at fair and affordable prices.



While interviewing, after 20 days of the tragic incident, Mr. Palash Mondal said with regret that the administration has not been visited the family till then. “It should have been handled with more empathy and urgency,” he added.

He visited Saiful Sheikh’s house along with KHANI team on the following day of the interview and provided cash immediate support through the Social Welfare Fund to meet the immediate needs of the family. He promised to work with authorities to waive Saiful’s microcredit loan from the microfinance institution, and to arrange an educational scholarship for his daughter from district administration. He promised the family will also get a wheel chair for the wife of Saiful Sheikh and will receive monthly rice under the VGF program and agricultural inputs to support them if they are interested in continuing farming.

Mizanur Rahman, Officer-In-Charge (OC), Mujibnagar Thana

Regarding the police investigation, OC Mizanur Rahman claimed, “An Unnatural Death (UD) case has been filed on this death. We have collected necessary documents from the hospital. Upon official request by the late Saiful’s family, the post-mortem was skipped. However, we confirmed the death as suicide based on the papers we got from the hospital”.

Monirul Islam, Local Journalist, Meherpur

As like many others, Monirul Islam also pointed out that if there were local storage facilities for crops like onions, farmers would not feel compelled to sell immediately post-harvest which also could reduce the dominance of middleman. “The pressure to repay loans forces many farmers to harvest prematurely,” he said. Additionally, he noted that politically motivated agricultural loans exploit marginal farmers and discourage them from reaching for official help.

MD. Wajed Ali Khan, Pesticide Dealer, Meherpur

MD. Wajed Ali Khan said that most seeds like popular Shukh Sagar onion come from informal Indian sources, and 20–30% of farmers are misled by poor-quality seeds that cost BDT 6,000–12,000 per kg per bigha. Farmers also have limited knowledge or control over what variety they grow, often following trends or peer advice, which causes market oversaturation and falling prices.

<p>A representative from Department of Agricultural Extension, Meherpur [who requested anonymity]</p>	
<p>The interviewee highlighted significant challenges faced by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in providing effective guidance on optimal crop selection and target quantities. Farmers, lacking timely and actionable advice, tend to base their cultivation decisions primarily on previous years' profit margins rather than expert recommendations. This pattern was evident this year, as many farmers—including the late Saiful Sheikh—chose to cultivate onions after a gap of six to seven years, motivated by the high profits observed in the previous season. Saiful's mother corroborated that he was inspired to return to onion farming solely by the prospect of increased earnings.</p> <p>However, such profit-driven decisions across the farming community led to overproduction, which in turn saturated the market. As a result, farmers were compelled to sell their crops at depressed prices, often under the influence of wholesalers who exploit these market conditions. This cycle of reactive cultivation, market oversupply, and price manipulation underscores the urgent need for more robust extension services and market regulation to protect farmers from recurring financial losses.</p> <p>Furthermore, with only three Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officers assigned per union, the DAE's limited manpower makes it difficult to reach all farmers effectively. Additionally, political influence sometimes forcefully affects the distribution of subsidized inputs, favoring large-scale farmers over marginal ones. As a result, farmers are often reluctant to seek advice from the DAE. They rely heavily on neighboring farmers or fertilizer and pesticide dealers, which increases their vulnerability to crop failure.</p>	
<p>Musa Karim, Farmer, Mujibnagar, Meherpur</p>	
<p>Musa Karim noted that many farmers are shifting from rice cultivation to vegetable farming due to rising costs of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, limited access to affordable loans, and low crop prices. He explained: "At the start of the season, we usually take loans to cover expenses like labor, seeds, fertilizers, and other farming needs. Getting a bank loan is tough—you need a guarantor, land documents, and lots of paperwork that most of us don't even understand. Microcredit is easier because they come to us and the process is also simpler. But the weekly repayments and high interest rates are a big burden, especially since we only earn cash when we harvest. It gets even harder when prices in the market fall. Most of us don't even know about the government's incentives for farmers, and even if there are any, political favoritism means small farmers like us rarely get them."</p>	
<p>Mushfiqur Rahman, Farmer, Mujibnagar, Meherpur</p>	
<p>Onion farmer Mushfiqur Rahman from Mujibnagar, reported losing BDT 3,50,000 after harvesting 1,120 maunds of onions from eight bighas, due to the absence of storage facilities in Meherpur district. Due to the absence of cold storage farmers are forced to sell immediately after harvest at low prices or risk losing the crop to rot. To reduce costs, Mushfiqur first cultivates bananas on the same land before switching to onions. He said that most onion seeds are smuggled from India and are often poor in quality, leading to lower yields and greater risk.</p>	

Mariam Begum Mina, wife of Ruhul Amin, Bagha, Rajshahi
<p>Mariam Begum Mina stated that her husband primarily worked on their own land this year and also leased additional land to cultivate onions. He had taken loans of 50,000 taka each from three different microfinance institutions and had already repaid one of these loans. She explained, “We harvested about 25 maunds of onions, but the prices were low when he harvested them, even though they increased later.” She added, “He was under a lot of pressure because he could only repay 50,000 taka out of the total 150,000 taka loan.”</p>
Mir Abdul Majid, brother of Ruhul Amin, Bagha, Rajshahi
<p>Mir Abdul Majid said on the top of microfinance loan, his brother took loan from ‘dadon’ also both before and after the onion. According to him, there are two kinds of ‘dadon’ around that area. One is where they take the crops instead of money, based on their terms. The other is with interest, ten thousand Taka a month for every lakh borrowed. Ruhul had taken both kinds and was in pressure to repay the loans.</p>
Ashraf Ali Molin, the former chairman of Baousa Union; Bagha, Rajshahi
<p>According to Ashraf Ali Molin, Ruhul Amin belonged to a respected family in the area, with a son and a daughter. He was deeply concerned about the significant losses he faced in onion cultivation this year, as well as the burden of current and previous loans from multiple sources. These financial pressures likely contributed to his tragic decision.</p>
Shafiqullah Sultan, Bagha Upazila Agriculture Officer, Bagha, Rajshahi
<p>Shafiqullah Sultan explained that there were likely multiple factors contributing to Ruhul Amin’s suicide, extending beyond just challenges related to cultivation. He highlighted that Ruhul Amin was struggling with a heavy burden of longstanding debts from various sources. This financial pressure, combined with other possible personal and economic stresses, may have played a significant role in driving him to take such a tragic step.</p>
Lalon Uddin, the Bagha correspondent of Kaler Kontho, Bagha, Rajshahi
<p>According to Lalon Uddin, the Charghat and Bagha areas are heavily influenced by dadon mohajans, local moneylenders who operate with the backing of various political parties. Many of the large houses, or dalans, in the region are owned by these lenders. He explained, “People facing financial crises are forced to borrow from informal sources to repay existing loans, trapping them deeper in a cycle of debt. This dadon system has caused serious social problems, including strained family relationships.”</p>



The Right to Food under International and National Law: The Case of Saiful Sheikh and Ruhul Amin

The Case of Saiful Sheikh and Ruhul Amin highlights serious violations of the right to food principles. The right to food is recognized under international law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966), and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP, 2018), all emphasizing the right to adequate food, fair income, and food sovereignty. The Constitution of Bangladesh also mandates the state's responsibility to provide necessities and improve public health, including food security.

However, the implementation of these policies is weak, leaving farmers like Saiful and Ruhul without institutional protections such as agricultural price commission to regulate agricultural prices in Bangladesh to ensure fair returns for farmers, stabilize the market, minimum support price system, crop insurance, or accessible market infrastructure. Their lack of economic accessibility to food and livelihood security contravenes Bangladesh's constitutional and international obligations. Their death, caused by market exploitation and inadequate state protection, exposes systemic failures in fulfilling farmers' rights and highlights the human cost of state inaction.

Furthermore, the UN's Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights emphasizes the need for access to food, productive resources, and social policies, but the cases illustrate the absence of such protection. These principles call for disaggregated mapping, a human rights-based strategy, early-warning systems, and agrarian reforms, all of which were missing both cases.

The death Saiful Sheikh and Ruhul Amin are stark reminder that food security must be understood not only from the consumer's perspective but also from the standpoint of farmers'/producers rights. Without reforms, such as minimum prices, rural infrastructure, mental health support, and protections against market manipulation, the right to food will remain unattainable for many in rural Bangladesh. Their case underscores the need to align national policies with human rights obligations to ensure food producers live and work with dignity.

Relevant Legal Provision and Gaps in Farmer Protection

The death of Saiful Sheikh and Ruhul amin highlights several important legal provisions in Bangladesh. Article 32 of the Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, while Article 15 mandates the provision of necessities like food, shelter, and medical care. Saiful's financial distress reflects a failure to uphold these constitutional promises, particularly regarding the protection of vulnerable farmers' livelihoods.

The Agricultural Produce Markets Regulation Act, 1964, aims to regulate markets and protect farmers from exploitation, but weak enforcement has allowed middlemen to dominate, leading to unfair pricing for farmers like Saiful. The Agricultural Marketing Act, 2018, was introduced to improve market linkages and reduce middlemen's influence, but small farmers still face significant barriers.

Regarding mental health, the Mental Health Act, 2018, recognizes mental health as a public health issue and advocates for community-based services, but rural farmers have limited to no access to psychological support. Saiful's case demonstrates the harmful effects of mental health neglect.

From Ruhul Amin's perspective, the legal system likely felt distant and ineffective in addressing his issues. The Money-Lenders Act, 1933, is a colonial-era law that aims to control moneylending. However, its effectiveness in regulating the informal "dadon" system, with its often-complex crop-sharing or exorbitant interest arrangements, is questionable in the current context. Enforcement in rural areas is also likely a significant challenge. From a farmer's perspective, this act may not provide adequate safeguards against the high interest rates and coercive practices associated with "dadon." The "dadon" system, operates largely outside effective legal regulation. Economically disadvantaged individuals struggle significantly to repay their loans because repayment, including interest, begins shortly after disbursement. Consequently, it becomes nearly impossible for micro-credit borrowers to achieve meaningful economic improvement under these conditions. There is a significant gap in laws designed to protect farmers from such exploitative practices. Farmers are often compelled to accept these terms due to a lack of access to formal, affordable credit.

In terms of price stabilization, although the government sometimes announces a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops like paddy, there is no law ensuring MSP or procurement for crops like onions, leaving farmers vulnerable to price volatility. Bangladesh's agricultural support laws remain weak and inconsistent compared to other countries. The Contract Act, 1872, provides some protection against exploitative agreements, but farmers often operate under informal, unregulated terms, exposing them to unfair practices.

On the international front, Bangladesh has endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), which emphasizes fair prices, market access, and protection against exploitation, creating a moral obligation to improve conditions for farmers like Saiful.

Demand from The Community

During the fact-finding mission in Mujibnagar and Bagha upazila farmers and local stakeholders highlighted several urgent demands to address the vulnerabilities in the agricultural sector.

One of the primary concerns is the need for cold storage facilities. Farmers pointed out that the absence of such facilities forces them to sell their produce immediately after harvest, often at distress prices dictated by middlemen. They also conducted human chain with demands including establishing cold storage facility. Such arrangements would allow them to preserve crops like onions, reduce post-harvest losses, and wait for better market conditions to secure fairer prices.

Another critical issue raised is the complexity of agricultural loan disbursement. Farmers face lengthy procedures, excessive documentation, and long waiting periods when applying for loans from formal banks. This discourages them from seeking formal credit, leaving them reliant on predatory moneylenders. The community urges that the loan process be simplified, farmer-friendly, and that low-interest loans be made more accessible, especially during planting and harvesting seasons.

The demand for dedicated farmers' marketplaces was also emphasized. Farmers seek direct access to consumers to avoid exploitation by middlemen. These marketplaces would ensure better bargaining power, fair pricing, and transparency, strengthen rural economies and allow farmers to capture a greater share of the value chain.

Access to quality seeds was another pressing issue. Farmers reported purchasing low-quality seeds from unregulated markets, which resulted in poor yields. They called for the timely and affordable distribution of certified seeds, with monitoring mechanisms to prevent substandard products from circulating.

Lastly, the community demanded the expansion and inclusivity of social safety net programs. Many farmers who face financial disasters are excluded due to bureaucratic inefficiencies or local favoritism. They urge that social protection schemes be broadened and made more inclusive to support all farmers in need.

Direct measures taken so far

Although no support can fully compensate the families of Saiful Sheikh and Mir Ruhul Amin, the government has taken some immediate steps to assist them. Officials from Mujibnagar and Bagha Upazilas expressed commitment to easing the families' burdens, particularly by addressing outstanding loans and providing basic aid. However, initial support was limited, highlighting the need to sensitize administration for more timely and effective responses.

In Mujibnagar, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) provided financial assistance from the Social Welfare Fund, pledged to waive Saiful's loans, promised for educational scholarship for his daughter, and enrolling the family in the Vulnerable Group Feeding program. Agricultural support with seeds and fertilizers was also promised. The UNO personally visited the family, offering condolences and encouragement.

In Bagha, the UNO gave Ruhul Amin's family emergency aid and rice, while the Upazila Agriculture Officer contributed additional funds. Plans were announced to build an onion storage facility in the village, and steps to address Ruhul Amin's loans are under consideration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The tragic death of Saiful Sheikh and Mir Ruhul Amin stands as a stark reminder of the systemic vulnerabilities faced by smallholder farmers in Bangladesh and the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to uphold the right to food as a fundamental human right. Their case is not an isolated incident but a reflection of a broader structural failure where farmers, despite being the backbone of national food security, rural development and poverty alleviation, this 45% labour force are left without the economic, institutional, and psychological support necessary to live and work with dignity.

The fact-finding team initially sought to understand why the farmer took his own life. However, upon returning, a deeper question emerged: **Why have we failed to offer hope and a sustainable future to the very farmers who feed us? When farmers suffer losses, they pay the ultimate price—so who truly benefits when there is profit?**

Observing the situation, the Fact-finding team concludes with a set of recommendations:

- 1. Establishment of an Agricultural Price Commission:** Establish an independent commission to safeguard farmers' rights, monitor pricing, inputs, and credit, and hold relevant authorities accountable. This body would be responsible for assessing production costs, recommending fair prices, and monitoring market trends to protect farmers from price manipulation and exploitation by middlemen.
- 2. Minimum Support Price:** Establish a Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism to protect farmers from price volatility and ensure fair and stable pricing for agricultural products. The government should implement transparent MSP policies that guarantee farmers receive remunerative prices, thereby reducing distress and preventing exploitation in the marketplace.
- 3. Storage and Infrastructure Support:** The government should invest in the development of adequate storage facilities and rural infrastructure to prevent distress sales and post-harvest losses. Improved access to local storage, cold chains, and transportation will enhance farmers' bargaining power, allowing them to hold their produce and sell at fair prices.
- 4. Regulating Agricultural Inputs:** The government must regulate inputs and provide access to certified seeds and affordable pesticides for the farmers.
- 5. Access to Institutional Credit:** Facilitate affordable institutional credit to reduce farmers' reliance on exploitative informal lenders and empower their financial stability. Smart agriculture cards must be distributed transparently to ensure that genuine farmers can directly access government and private bank loans, subsidies, and special incentives.
- 6. Regulate Predatory Lending:** Regulate and prohibit the predatory "dadon" lending system by enforcing a complete ban under the relevant laws in Bangladesh. The "dadon" practice, historically exploitative and illegal without proper licensing, facilitates illicit financial flows and money laundering, violating legal provisions. The government must criminalize and dismantle this system by imposing strict penalties, and holding moneylenders accountable to protect farmers from exploitation and financial abuse.

২৭.০৩.২০২৫ খ্রি. তারিখ ঢাকা পোস্ট পত্রিকায় “পেঁয়াজের লোকসান খেয়ে পেঁয়াজ ক্ষেতেই কৃষকের বিধপান” শিরোনামে প্রকাশিত খবরের বিষয়ে প্রতিবেদন প্রেরণ।



গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
উপপরিচালকের কার্যালয়
কৃষি সম্প্রসারণ অধিদপ্তর
মেহেরপুর

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তারিখ : ০২.০৪.২০২৫ খ্রি.

বরাবর

মহাপরিচালক
কৃষি সম্প্রসারণ অধিদপ্তর
খামারবাড়ি, ঢাকা

বিষয়: ২৭.০৩.২০২৫ খ্রি. তারিখ ঢাকা পোস্ট পত্রিকায় “পেঁয়াজের লোকসান খেয়ে পেঁয়াজ ক্ষেতেই কৃষকের বিধপান” শিরোনামে প্রকাশিত খবরের বিষয়ে প্রতিবেদন প্রেরণ।

উপর্যুক্ত বিষয়ের প্রেক্ষিতে আপনার সদয় অবগতি ও প্রয়োজনীয় ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণের জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, অন্য নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারী উপজেলা কৃষি অফিসার, জনাব মো: আব্দুল মোমিন মুজিবনগর, মেহেরপুর ও উপজেলা কৃষি অফিসার, জনাব মো: মনিরুজ্জামান, মেহেরপুর সদরসহ আত্মস্বাক্ষরকারী পেঁয়াজ চাষী মো: সাইফুল শেখ, পিতা মৃত: দুলাল শেখ, গ্রাম: ভবরপাড়া, মুজিবনগর এর বাড়িতে সরেজমিনে উপস্থিত হয়ে তার মৃত্যুর কারণ জানার চেষ্টা করি। উপস্থিত তার মেয়ে মোছা: রোজিকা খাতুন, স্ত্রী সোনাভানু ও তার মা রমোছা খাতুনসহ গ্রামের চাষী মো: আলিবদ্দিন শেখ, পিতা: শেখ মোহাম্মদ, গ্রাম: ভবরপাড়া এবং চাষী সন্তয় দফাদার, পিতা: সোনা দফাদার গ্রাম: ভবরপাড়া উপস্থিত ছিলেন। মৃত: সাইফুল শেখ তার নিজস্ব ১ বিঘা এবং বর্গা নেওয়া ১ বিঘাসহ মোট ২ বিঘা জমিতে পেঁয়াজ চাষ করেন। গত ২৫.০৩.২০২৫ খ্রি. তারিখ পেঁয়াজ উত্তোলন করে দুই বিঘা জমিতে মোট ৫৮,০০০/- (উত্তোলন খরচ বাদে) টাকায় বিক্রয় করেন। উপস্থিত আত্মীয়স্বজন এবং প্রতিবেশী কৃষকের ভাষ্যমতে ২ বিঘা জমিতে পেঁয়াজ চাষ করতে প্রায় ১,২০,০০০/- টাকা খরচ হয়। এ ছাড়াও তিনি পেঁয়াজ চাষ করার জন্য ১ বিঘা জমি ৩০,০০০/- টাকায় বর্গা নেন, আশা এনজিও থেকে ২০,০০০/- টাকা কৃষক নেন, সারের দোকানে ১৬,০০০/- টাকা ও মুন্দির দোকানে ১৫,০০০/- টাকা কৃষক করেন। পেঁয়াজ চাষ করতে গিয়ে তিনি তার ক্ষতি ৬২,০০০/- টাকাসহ মোট ১,৪৩,০০০/- টাকা কণ্ঠস্থ হওয়ায় অতিরিক্ত হতাশাগ্রস্ত হয়ে পড়েন। এছাড়া তার একটি মেয়ে মাষ্টার্সে পড়াশোনা ও স্ত্রী পক্ষাঘাতগ্রস্ত চলাচলে অক্ষম তাই এ সকল চাপ নিতে না পারায় আত্মহত্যার পথ বেঁচে নেন। গত ২৬.০৩.২০২৫ খ্রি. তারিখ বিধপান করেন, পরবর্তীতে কুষ্টিয়া জেনারেল হাসপাতালে ২৭.০৩.২০২৫ খ্রি. বেলা আনুমানিক ১০.০০ ঘটিকায় মৃত্যুবরণ করেন। উল্লেখ্য যে, ঐ একই ধরনের সংবাদ গত ৩০.০৩.২০২৫ খ্রি. তারিখ সমকাল পত্রিকাসহ বেশ কয়েকটি পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত হয়।


(বিজয় কৃষ্ণ হালদার)

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