

# Rotting of betel leaves worries farmers

The disease is spreading fast in 3 Barisal upazilas

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barisal

A large number of betel plantations, locally known as 'paner baroj', are attacked with pata pochra rog (a disease that causes rotting of leaves), especially in Gournadi, Uzirpur and Agoiljhara upazilas under Barisal district.

Farmers in the area, known for extensive betel cultivation, are worried due to the situation.

"Dense fog, cold spell, less sunlight and high moisture cause rapid spread of the disease in the plantations," said Sukumar Das, a betel planter in Uzirpur.

Selim Shikder, Poresh Das, Krishan Natta, Shyamol Das and Tulu Boiddha, betel leaf planters of different areas in the district also expressed the same view.

"A fungus type virus consisting 'sclerotium' of the soil causes the disease and it spreads in the betel plantations mainly in damp weather," said Dr Md Enamul Hogue, an agriculture expert of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

"Dry weather with hot sunlight and sufficient flow of air is needed to combat the disease. Betel leaf planters should spray 1.5 or 2 gram VITAVEX or PROVEX-200 medicine mixed with one litre water on the betel plant on a katha of land," he said.



A betel plantation at Sholok in Uzirpur upazila of Barisal district sees rotting and falling of leaves under the impact of high moisture due to dense fog coupled with cold weather.

PHOTO: STAR

A source in the DAE Barisal zonal office said farmers of 400 villages out of 1,137 villages of the district used to cultivate betel even a few years ago.

During this correspondent's recent visit to different betel leaf plantations in Uzirpur, Gournadi and Agoiljhara upazilas, farmers said that about 50 per cent of more than 25,000 betel cultivators in the three upazilas have already left the

cultivation during the last decade.

The reasons behind the farmers' apathy to the betel cultivation include unfavourable weather, pest attack, shortage of capital, dearth of seeds and absence of proper preservation and marketing.

Sources said, DAE fixed a target to produce 2,000 tonnes of betel leaf per year but they failed to achieve it.

Average cost for produc-

tion of betel leaf per hectare of land is Tk 3 lakh while the yield is about five tonnes, several planters said, adding that if everything goes well, one can earn a profit of over Tk one lakh from per hectare.

Although betel plantation is generally profitable, most of the planters failed to earn profit due to widespread pest and virus attack during the last decade, they said.

## DINAJPUR MUTINY Hearing on charge framing begins

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Hearing on charge framing against 13 mutineers of BGB Dinajpur sector headquarters began at special court-13 yesterday.

The court, headed by Dinajpur Sector Commander Col Saleh Ahmad, recorded statements of 10 out of 17 prosecution witnesses.

Two other members of the court are Lt Col Mahfuz Alam and Major Masud.

Major Tareq Iftekharul Khan is the prosecutor of the case.

Court sources said eight of the accused yesterday confessed to their involvement in the mutiny at the sector headquarters on February 26 in 2009 and while the rest claimed innocence.

The special court, set up at Dinajpur sector headquarters, started trial of the 13 mutineers on November 27 last year. Junior Commanding Officer (JCO) Enamul Haque of the sector brought mutiny charges against the accused.

## CU teacher, staff fired

CU CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Chittagong University (CU) yesterday dismissed a teacher and an official from their jobs.

They are Mohammad Joyanal Abedin, a lecturer of computer science and engineering department, and Sayed Foyez Ullah, director (acting) of the university transport section.

The authorities took actions against the teacher and the official at a meeting of the syndicate with acting Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Mohammad Alauddin in the chair.

Syndicate member AKM Tofzal Huq told this correspondent that the university authorities terminated Joyanal as he has remained absent in the department since August 25, 2005.

The authorities had earlier issued a show-cause notice on Joyanal, but he didn't reply, the syndicate member added.

He further said Foyez Ullah was dismissed on charge of corruption.

# Youth held on charge of killing Imon for ransom

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Monday night arrested a youth on charge of abduction and murder of a five-year-old boy at Choithra village in Ghatail upazila.

Talking to the journalists yesterday, the arrestee, Mohammad Minhaz, 18, son of Bisha Miah of Choithra village, admitted to his involvement in the killing of Mohammad Azizur Rahman Imon, son of Abdus Salam of the same village.

During interrogation, Minhaz confessed to the law enforcers that he took Imon to a lonely place, strangled him with a piece of cloth and submerged the body in a pond, said Rab Company Commander Major Mahfuzul Haque.

The child went missing when he was playing in a field near his house on January 8.

A day after, a person called the victim's father over the cell phone and demanded Tk 4 lakh as ransom for Imon's release.

On January 30, locals recovered Imon's decomposed body, kept in a sack,



from a water body near his house and the victim's father on the same day filed a case with Ghatail Police Station accusing ten people in this regard.

Tracking mobile call lists, a team of Crime Prevention Company-3 of Rab-12, led by its Company Commander Maj Mahfuzul Haque and Squad Commander ASP Ashok Kumar Mondol, went to Dhotala Bazar in Ghatail upazila on Monday night and arrested Minhaz, Rab said.



PHOTO: STAR

Rab arrested Mohammad Minhaz on Monday on charge of abducting and killing 5-year-old Imon, above, for ransom in a village in Tangail a few days ago.

## HATIBANDHA OF LALMONIRHAT

# Unknown disease kills 4, attacks 19 in 24 hours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

An unknown disease killed four people and attacked 19 others in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat district in 24 hours till yesterday evening.

The deceased are Sabina, 3, daughter of Mokbul Hossain of Saniazan Char village, Sajjad Hossain, 3, son of Belal Hossain of Tongvanga village, Rajjak Miah, 32, son of Abbas Ali of Genduguri village under Hatibandha upazila, and Aronno Ghos, 8, son of Ashok Ghos of 'bus stand' area of Hatibandha town.

With high fever, they were taken to Hatibandha upazila health complex where Sabina died on Monday night.

Sajjad died after he was transferred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital yesterday morning while Rajjak Miah died on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital at noon.

The four victims first got fever and their temperature went up rapidly. At one stage, their bodies became cold and they died, family and health complex sources said.

"I am feeling fever and it is getting serious. My body is also becoming cold," Aronno Ghos said sometime before he died last night.

With similar symptoms, his sister Anonna Ghos, 4, and 17 others are undergoing treatment at Hatibandha upazila health complex.

Confirming the deaths to an unknown disease,

Hatibandha Upazila Health Officer Dr Golam Mohammad said, "It may be a viral disease. We have sent patients' blood to Dhaka for test. I have already informed my authority for taking pro-ventive initiative."

"We are waiting for laboratory test report from Dhaka that is likely to arrive by today [Tuesday] night," Lalmonirhat Civil Surgeon Dr Jahangir Alam Sarker said.

"The health department and district and upazila administrations are alert regarding the matter. Necessary steps can be taken after getting laboratory test report," said Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner Mokhlesur Rahman Sarker.

# Belal 'honoured' with wheelchair

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Physically challenged Belal Hossain, who defied all odds to become a successful farmer at his village home in Joypurhat district, has received a wheelchair, thanks to the initiative of Bangladesh Systems Change Advocacy Network (B-SCAN).

B-SCAN, a Dhaka-based non-profit organisation especially working for disabled people, in association with Rotary Club of Dhaka arranged it.

Joypurhat Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ashok Kumar Biswas handed over the wheelchair to Belal Hossain at his office yesterday noon.

Earlier at a programme in Dhaka Club, Lt Gen (ret) Harun Ar Rashid, president of Dhaka Rotary Club (Central), also a former army chief, handed over the wheelchair meant for Belal Hossain.

Salma Mahbub, general secretary of B-SCAN, was present at the programme.

As it was difficult for physically challenged Belal to come to Dhaka to receive the wheelchair, Md Rubel Ahmed received it on behalf of this correspondent who later arranged sending it to Joypurhat DC.

After getting the wheelchair that would help him move with ease, Belal thanked all concerned with a smiling face.

The National Page of The Daily Star on May 3 last year ran a story titled 'Physically challenged, he knows no defeat', describing Belal's success.

Belal, sixth of seven children of Rokeya Begum, was affected with polio when he was only one year old. He read up to class III at the local primary school but could not continue study after his father's death. He got about 20 decimal of paternal land and started farming.

With firm determination and perseverance, he became a successful farmer and set a laudable example for locals.



PHOTO: STAR

Belal Hossain has a ride on the wheelchair driven by his mother at Joypurhat yesterday.



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