

# Fire destroys betel on 200 acres in 5 Kushtia villages

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Fire incidents destroyed betel on around 200 acres (nearly 600 bighas in local measure) of land in several remote villages of Daulatpur and Bheramara upazilas under Kushtia district on Thursday and Friday.

The incidents that also destroyed ripe wheat on large areas at the same locations caused damage to around Tk 17 crore belonging to over about 100 farmers.

The causes of the near simultaneous fire incidents are yet to be ascertained but the possibility of planned act to destroy the betel plantations cannot be ruled out, especially against the backdrop of recent torching of a number of betel plantations in Jhenidah and Barisal districts.

Fire fighters from Bheramara upazila rushed to the spots on Thursday and Friday but the fire across large areas was too widespread to be tamed with their limited equipment,

said Rafiqul Islam, team leader of the fire fighters.

A large number of locals along with the betel farmers also thronged the spots but they stood helpless before the blazing inferno, said villagers.

Several farmers set fire to burn off the remains after

harvesting wheat at several fields in Maricha, Bhagjote and Bhurka villages in Daulatpur upazila and Juniadah and Kuchiamora villages in Bheramara upazila on Thursday morning and Friday evening, locals said.

The fire spread fast due to

summer air, said betel leaf farmer Sihabul Islam, who cultivated betel on 4.29 acres of land at Juniadah in this season.

Locals said Arab Ali, a wheat farmer of Juniadah village, set fire to the waste of his wheat field on Thursday morning and it might have

caused the fire in adjacent betel plantations.

After failed attempt to contact Arab Ali, this correspondent talked to his brother.

"Setting fire to burn off waste at corn fields is a usual practice of farmers," he said.

Most of these betel leaf farmers are marginal and some of them took loan from local branches of Krishi Bank and other sources to cultivate betel.

Marginal farmers Hanif Mondol, Mizan Ali and Nadim Islam said they are worried about repaying their loan and maintaining families after losing betel leaf on five bighas of land at Juniadah.

A number of farmers also took lease the land from others paying advanced money. They also incur a huge loss.

"I took lease of three biaghs land with an advanced payment Tk 18,000. I incur a total loss," said Kabir Hossain of Kuchiamora.



PHOTO: STAR

One of the betel plantations destroyed by Thursday's devastating fire at Juniadah village in Bheramara upazila of Kushtia district.

# Bomb injured Meherpur councillor dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Councillor of Meherpur municipality Mizanur Rahman Ripon who was severely injured in a bomb attack a week ago, died at a hospital in Dhaka on Friday night.

Another councillor Abdullah Bin Hashem and three others injured in the same incident in Meherpur town on April, are still fighting for life.

Ripon was also general secretary of Meherpur municipality unit Jubo League.

Doctors and family sources said Ripon died at the intensive care unit of Apollo Hospitals in Dhaka at about 11:00 pm.

According to police, Ripon and Hashem were at Rajdhani Store, a cosmetics shop owned by Ripon at around 9:30pm when four people came there on two motorbikes and threw two bombs at them.

Besides the councillors, three employees of the shop-

- Nurul Islam, Nayan and Milon--also sustained injuries in the attack.

The injured were taken to Meherpur General Hospital where doctors sent Ripon and Nayan to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) as their condition deteriorated.

After two days of treat-

## Follow-up

ment, they were shifted to Apollo Hospitals in Dhaka.

Nayan is still at the Apollo Hospitals, while councillor Hashem, Nurul and Milon are being treated at different hospitals.

Meanwhile, police are yet to find any clue to the bomb attack.

A case was filed with Meherpur Sadar police station on April 2. Abdul Halim, father of Councillor Mizanur Rahman Ripon filed the case.

The accused in the case are president of Meherpur

district Awami League (AL) Golam Rasul, general secretary Kazi Miajan Ali, the incumbent mayor of the municipality Mutasim Billah Motu and general secretary of district unit Jubo League Abdullah Al Mamun Bipul.

Police arrested Bipul and another activist of the same unit Abdul Momin soon after the incident.

Later the complainant, however, withdrew the name of Golam Rasul and Kazi Miajan Ali from the case on April 3.

Police interrogated Bipul placing him on three days remand.

Contacted, sub-inspector (SI) Sabur of Meherpur Sadar police station, also investigation officer (IO) of the case, said a feud between Mizanur Rahman Ripon and Abdullah Al Mamun Bipul over borrowing money might be the reason behind the attack.

Bipul borrowed Tk20 lakh from Ripon years ago while they were partners of a construction work, he added.

# Theft of govt drugs sparks protest in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Police on Thursday arrested a woman with government allocated medicines for Hatibandha upazila health complex from Dowani in Hatibandha upazila.

Medicines including tablets, capsules and syrups worth about Tk20 thousand were also seized from the possession of the arrestee, Benazir Begum, 26, wife of Delowar Hossain, a resident of South Goddimari village of Hatibandha upazila in the district.

Meanwhile, locals brought out a procession at Hatibandha yesterday demanding probe into the theft and punishment to the real culprits.

On-duty police at Dalia Barrage caught the woman with the medicines when she was going to Dimla upazila of Nilphamari district for selling it, police said, adding that the woman said during interrogation that she took the items from her relative Sirazul Islam, store-

keeper of Hatibandha upazila health complex.

Referring to the arrestee, police said she and two other women had been conducting the illegal business for the last two years. Two-thirds of the money from illegal selling of the medicines goes to the storekeeper while the seller gets the rest, they added.

Denying the allegation, storekeeper Sirazul Islam said, "I don't know the woman and I never take a single medicine from the store for selling in the market."

Hatibandha police station officer in charge Enamul Karim said a case was lodged against the arrested woman and police is investigating the matter on the basis of her statement.

When contacted, Hatibandha Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Dr Bimol Kumar Roy said, "Police has informed me of the matter. My office will conduct an inquiry and take action if any hospital staff is found guilty."

# Office assistant beats up students at school!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Twelve students of Gudashimla High School at Sharifpur union under Sadar upazila were canned allegedly by an office assistant of the school on Wednesday.

Member of the school managing committee, also guardians' representative Habibur Rahman said office assistant Abdul Mannan severely beat up 12 students of class eight at the classroom violating code of conduct.

The injured students are

Shapla, Sharmin, Rumana, Yasmin, Lipi, Sanjida, Aklima, Shila, Homayun, Kabir, Tanvir and Jui.

Following the incident, guardians, students and locals jointly staged demonstration in front of the school and the students boycotted classes demanding punishment to the office assistant on Thursday.

Contacted, headmaster of the school Md. Abdul Majid Khan admitted it as an offence by Abdul Mannan.

The school authorities have already served a show

cause on Abdul Mannan asking why he should not be suspended from his job in case of no satisfactory reply within three days, said Abdul Majid.

He said Abdul Mannan was taking a class for shortage of teacher.

The students of adjoining class eight were gossiping in the classroom loudly. Being disturbed by noise he became agitated and canned the students, he added.

This correspondent tried several times to contact Abdul Mannan but every time his cellphone was found off.



PHOTO: STAR

Several female students of Dighapatia PN High School take treatment at Natore Sadar Hospital after they were affected by mass hysteria during school hours yesterday.

# Three kids drown

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Three kids drowned in ponds in Satkhira and Barisal on Friday and the day before.

A two-year-old boy drowned in a pond at village Mahmudpur in Tala upazila of Satkhira Friday afternoon, reports our correspondent.

The victim was identified as Babu, son of Ali Hossain of the village. Quoting local people police said Babu while playing by the side of the pond suddenly fell in it and drowned at about 5pm.

Later locals found the body floating in the pond at about 6:30pm.

In Barisal, two children drowned in a pond Thursday morning at Gorla Gava village in Uzirpur upazila, reports UNB.

The deceased were identified as Sifat, 5, son of Jamal Bepari and Lamia, 6, daughter of Kamal Bepari of the village. They were cousins.

Police and family sources said the two children remained missing since Thursday morning when they went out of their house for playing.

Their parents searched for them in different areas. They also made an announcement in this regard through loud speakers.

Later, locals found the bodies floating in a nearby pond on Friday morning and informed their parents who recovered the bodies.

# SNAPS AND SNIPPETS

## For banning mobile in class

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Students vandalised class room and headmaster's office at North Bengal Sugar Mill High School at Gopalpur under Lalpur upazila yesterday morning for banning cell phone in classroom. Police and local sources said, students of class-X went on rampage as the school management asked them not to carry or use mobile phone at the school. Gausul Alam, headmaster of the school said, "We did it for their better education. We also seized three mobile phones, a sharp knife and cigarettes from the students." As the school managing committee decided to hand over the mobiles and knife to the guardians, the students became very angry, he added.

## Robbers loot textile mill

UNB, Narsingdi

Robbers stormed into a textile mill at Asmandir Char village in Sadar upazila and looted valuables worth Tk50 lakh early yesterday. Hazi Kadam Ali, chairman of the Akand Textile Mill said, a gang of armed robbers numbering 30-40 swooped on the mill at about 2:00am. They took the night guards, supervisor and manager of the mill hostage at gunpoint and looted valuables including cloths and cotton worth Tk 50 lakh. Later, the robbers loaded the looted valuables on their two covered vans and fled away.

## 3 punished for stalking

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A mobile court in Joypurhat yesterday sentenced a youth to six months' jail and fined two others Tk3,000 each for stalking schoolgirls. Reza Ahmed, son of Younus Ali of Biswaspara village was jailed for six months. The court also fined him Tk2,000, in default, to suffer more two months in jail. The court fined Natu Mia, son of Ebadul Islam of Biswaspara village and Aminul Islam, son of Shukur Ali of Amtoli village of Joypurhat town Tk 3,000 each for the same offence. Sources said, locals of Joypurhat town caught the three youths yesterday afternoon while they were stalking schoolgirls and later handed them over to law enforcers.



PHOTO: STAR

Locals form a human chain on the bank of Meghna River in Baushia union of Gazaria upazila under Munshiganj district yesterday in protest against year-long sand lifting by a section of traders. Affected allegedly by the unscrupulous act, 40 bighas of land on the riverbank subsided yesterday morning, much to the grievance of the locals.

# Over 400 sacks OMS rice seized in 5 dists

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Police in separate drives seized over 400 sacks of rice meant for open market sale (OMS) in Gopalganj, Satkhira, Sirajganj, Khulna and Barisal districts on Friday and the day before.

At least 135 sacks of OMS rice were recovered from Dhorail village under Kashiani upazila of Gopalganj on Thursday, reports our correspondent.

Sub-inspector AHM Salauddin of Ramdia police camp said on secret information they raided the

house of Nur Islam of the village and recovered the rice.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, Nur Islam managed to flee the scene.

A case was filed with Kaliganj PS in Satkhira accusing two people including an OMS dealer on charge of selling OMS rice to a trader at Tarali Bazar in the upazila, reports our correspondent.

Bikash Chandra Das, a rice trader of the same bazar filed the case as the accused went to the complainant to sell 40 bags of OMS

rice on April 5 evening.

Police rushed to the spot and recovered the rice but the accused managed to flee.

In Sirajganj, on secret information police conducted a drive at Jhikra crossing on Bogra-Nagarbari highway in Ullapara upazila and arrested a truck driver with 196 sacks of OMS rice.

Driver Hafizur Rahman said Ullapara poura OMS rice dealers Aminul Huq and Moidan Ali gave him the rice to sell on the black market in Dhaka.

In Khulna, local people seized 24 sacks of OMS rice while being taken elsewhere from a rice dealer's shop at Baka bazaar in Paikgachha upazila Friday early hours.

Police said locals seized the rice while Bipul Pal, brother of OMS rice dealer Bimal Pal, was secretly removing the rice from the godown.

Bipul, sensing danger, managed to flee the scene.

In Barisal, Jalal Mollah, a rickshaw-van puller of

Agoiljhara upazila was held along with three sacks of OMS rice while he was selling them on the black market.

Following the confessional statement of Jalal, Dipangkar Biswas, upazila nirbahi officer, Mashiur Rahman, upazila food officer and other staff members of food department rushed to the shop of the OMS rice dealer Subrata and seized the stock register and other documents.

Later, they sealed off the shop as Subrata fled the scene.



PHOTO: STAR

A housewife at Manikganj uses firewood and earthen stove for cooking as gas supply to the district town has become too erratic and scanty to do the job.