



PHOTO: STAR

It is hard to believe that these trees were full of mangoes till Friday last. An one-hour hailstorm early Saturday destroyed most of the mango orchards, shattering dreams of the growers. The photo was taken from Gorbari village in Sakhipur upazila of Tangail yesterday.

Hailstorm shatters dreams of Sakhipur mango growers

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Mango growers in Sakhipur upazila have incurred huge losses due to a devastating hailstorm in the area early Saturday.

Orchard owners in the upazila were expecting a bumper yield this season due to favourable weather and timely rain even a week ago.

The trees in the areas were full of mangoes till Friday last, but the hour-long hailstorm left nothing but a few leaves in most trees, locals said.

According to agriculture department officials in Sakhipur, around 500 growers cultivated different varieties of mangoes especially 'amropali' on 155 hectares of lands in the upazila this season.

The big chunk of hails, some weighing 1-2 kg, affected mango orchards on 75 hectares during the storm and rain.

Of those, mango orchards on 20 hectares were damaged fully while mangoes on 55 hectares damaged partially, agriculture officials said.

The worst affected orchards are in

Mohanandapur, Jiteswari, Toildhara, Gorbari, Surir Chala, Bagherbari, Indrajani, Kazirampur, Bailapur villages under Kakrajan union; Kalomegha, Talepabad, Atia Salonga, Rangamatia, Fuljhuri, Nagerchala, Beltoli villages under Kalomegha union and Kachua, Bashar Chala, Sarashia, Kadernagar villages under Kalia union.

Shankar Kumar, owner of a mango orchard at Mahanandapur in Kakrajan union, said the hailstorm destroyed his mango trees on 30 bighas of land fully.

"I was expecting a bumper yield and hoping to sell mangos worth Tk 15 lakh. But all my dreams have been shattered," he said.

Asaduzzaman Sentu, owner of another orchard at Toildhara village in Kakrajan union, said he had cultivated 'amropali' variety of mango on his 15 bighas.

"Now I will have to incur a loss of at least Tk 6 lakh as all the mangoes of my orchard have been destroyed by hails," he said.

"How can I survive as I have to repay loans?" a frustrated Sentu posed.

Not only Sankar and Sentu but also other growers like Titu Miah, Lokman

Hossain of Toildhara village; Lutfar Rahman of Basharchala village have expressed similar frustration.

Azharul Islam Siddique, upazila agriculture officer in Sakhipur, said he had visited the affected mango orchards at the villages to estimate the extent of damages.

At least 30 mango growers in three unions incurred total loss as their orchards had been fully damaged by the devastating hailstorm, he said.

"We have primarily estimated the loss at around Tk one crore," he added.

The agriculture officials in Sakhipur said not only mango but also banana orchards on 80 hectares and jackfruit orchards on 24 hectares in the areas were also badly damaged by the hailstorm.

Contacted, Mohammad Osman Khan, deputy director of Tangail Agriculture Extension Department, said he had directed the local agriculture officials to prepare the lists of affected fruit growers in the upazila so that they can get government help or compensation.



Criminals cut off and steal elephant tusks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Criminals cut off and stole the tusks of a pet elephant at Sagornal hill area in Kulaura upazila under the district on Wednesday.

"As usual, the elephant was grazing in Sagornal reserve forest on Wednesday. In the afternoon, when the mahout went to there bring the elephant home, he saw that the animal's tusks had been stolen," said Tofayel Ahmed, owner of the elephant.

Tofayel, a resident of Sagornal village, filed a case with Kulaura police station in this connection the next day.

"After losing the tusks, my elephant is not taking usual amounts of food and so, it is getting weak. Market price of the elephant is Tk 20 to 25 lakh.

A pair of tusks is sold for at least Tk 4 lakh as costly things are made from it," he said.

Tofayel is one of the licensees who can take part in auctions by forest department to sell matured trees and bamboos.

People like him, locally known as mohaldars, keep elephants for carrying timber and bamboo from the forest.

"Cutting off an elephant's tusks, which are important organs of the large creature, leads to its lack of vitality. Elephants never recover from such an wound and their life is shortened due to it," said Dr Md Shahid Ullah, district livestock officer of Moulvibazar.

Police is investigating the matter, said Md Azizur Rahman, the officer in charge of Kulaura police station.

SNIPPETS

Textbooks seized

UNB, Benapole

Police seized a huge number of textbooks meant for free distribution from a local market in Manirampur upazila of Jessore district yesterday morning. Police said Sawpna Rani, headmistress of Bijoyrampur Govt Primary School, sold out the books and other official documents to a person at the market. On information Upazila Executive Officer Zillur Rahman, Assistant Primary Education Officer Azgar Ali and police went to the market and seized the books and papers.

Youth murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Police on Saturday night recovered the body of a youth from a shop at Jirtoli Bazar under Begumganj upazila. The youth was identified as Golam Hossain Rana 26, son of Nur Nabi of village Bijoyrampur in the same upazila. Amirul Alam, officer in-charge of Begumganj police station said, on a secret information, police went to Jirtoli Bazar and raided Mohiuddin's grossary shop. There they found the body of Rana on the floor and arrested shopowner Mohiuddin along with a sharp knife. Rana was accused in at least 3 cases including for robbery and Mohiuddin also a listed criminal, the OC added.

Girl drowns in pond

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A four-year-old girl drowned in a pond at village Sreerampur in Kaliganj upazila yesterday. The victim was identified as Jesmin Ara, daughter of Abdur Rahman of the village. Quoting local people police said, while playing by the side of the pond of Sreerampur Dakkhin Para mosque in the morning, Jesmin fell in the pond and drowned. Local people found the body floating in the pond and recovered it in the afternoon.

'Notorious criminal' held

UNB, Benapole, Jessore

Police arrested notorious criminal "Galakata" Rafique from MM College area in the town on Saturday night. Rafiq is son of Abdul Jalil of Shastitala area of Jessore town. Police said a group of criminals led by Rafiq beat up a woman and snatched money from her on MM College compound. On information, police raided the area and arrested Rafiq. Police said Rafiq was wanted in a number of cases including for extortion, bomb blast and murder.

GROWING SUGARCANE CRISIS IN RANGPUR ZONE

Employees worried as all 5 mills count loss for years

MEHEDY HASAN, Rangpur

All the five sugar mills in Rangpur division have closed their production for this season without reaching the target due to shortage of sugarcane supply.

Authorities fixed a production target of 25,438 tonnes of sugar in the five sugar mills by crushing 3,57,000 tonnes of sugarcane in this season but they produced only 16,660 tonnes of sugar.

The sugar mills in Rangpur division incurred a total loss of Tk 1,200 crore during the last 20 years, said the mill sources.

The situation leaves over 5,500 officers and employees of the sugar mills worried about their future if the mills are to be laid off due to continued losses.

The five sugar mills started this season's production in early December last year.

Shyampur Sugar Mills in Rangpur began production on December 2 with a production target of 3,987 tonnes but it stopped production on January 12 this year after producing 2,355 tonnes of sugar. As a result, about Tk 10 crore has been added to the mills' earlier cumulative loss of Tk 160 crore.

Setabganj Sugar Mills in Setabganj upazila under Dinajpur district started

production on December 2 last year with a production target of 4,500 tonnes but authorities stopped production in mid-January after producing 3,740 tonnes.

Thakurgaon Sugar Mills started production with a production target of 6,300 tonnes of sugar on December 2 last year. But after producing 4,695 tonnes the mill stopped this season's production on February 7 this year.

Rangpur Sugar Mills at Mohimaganj in Gaibandha district and Panchagarh Sugar Mills also stopped production on January 6 and March 6. Both of them failed to achieve production target.

The mill authorities said they had to stop production to prevent further losses as they could not produce the expected sugar due to insufficient sugarcane supply.

Besides, this season's production rate is relatively low as most of the sugarcane contains less amounts of juice due to adverse weather condition.

Use of a huge amount of sugarcane in thousands of illegal crushing machines beside the sugar mills is also responsible for the situation, said sugar mill officials and locals.

"We got Tk 93.30 per maund of sugarcane at the gate of Shyampur Sugar

Mills. On the other hand, we earned Tk 200-250 per maund by selling the sugarcane to molasses producers. Molasses traders also help farmers with advance money for sugarcane cultivation," said Rahman Mondol, a sugarcane farmer at Nisbetganj under Rangpur Sadar upazila.

Authorities of sugar mills claimed they also offered the farmers incentives in the form of seed, fertiliser and technical support for farming sugarcane on more areas of land but there was hardly any response from farmers.

This year the farmers in Rangpur district cultivated sugarcane on about 2,000 hectares of land and the production stood at about 1 lakh 80 thousand tonnes, said the sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension.

Sugarcane production in the area is declining every year, they said.

Finding the price received from the sugar mills too inadequate, many farmers are opting for cultivating short duration rice and other crops while huge amount of sugarcane is used by a large number of 'illegal' crushing machines to produce molasses that brings more profit.

15 injured as BNP factions clash in Jhenidah

UNB, Jhenidah

At least 15 BNP activists were injured in a clash between the two rival groups of Kaliganj upazila BNP in the district Saturday.

Police and witnesses said, supporters of BNP leader former municipal poura mayor Mahbubur Rahman and Abdul Hamid organised a protest rally at Nimtola bus stand protesting disappearance of BNP organising secretary Ilias Ali.

Another group led by Kaliganj upazila BNP president and former MP Shahiduzzaman Beltu brought out a procession at the same time.

A clash ensued between the rival groups when they met at Nimtola leaving 15 people injured from both sides.

The injured were admitted to different clinics. Police arrested two BNP leaders -- Rimon and Tito from the spot.

Mohona TV district reporter Soheli Ahmed and Shomoy TV reporter Shahnewaz were also injured during the clash.



STAR: PHOTO

A worker dumping toxic bitumen in the Ichhamati River beside an under construction road in Pabna municipality on Saturday.

Toxic bitumen dumped in river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Pabna municipal authorities on Saturday dumped toxic bitumen, a black sticky road-surfacing material obtained from tar, in the Ichhamati River, violating environmental rules.

"We have dumped five containers of bitumen in the river beside an under construction road in Singa area in the municipality as it was not fit for use," said Ziaul Islam Polash, assistant engineer of Pabna municipality.

Isharat, Chand Ali and other workers at the site said the municipal authorities dumped the bitumen into the river despite a strong protest by local people.

Dumping poisonous chemical into river is a criminal offence. It pollutes water and

causes destruction to fish and other aquatic resources, said Md Saifullah Talukder, deputy director of the Department of Environment in Rajshahi division.

Earlier on the day, a team of Pabna municipality led by Mayor Kamrul Hassan Mintu visited the under construction road. During the visit, the team found that the contractor was using overheated bitumen in the road.

"We use bitumen, which is usually heated at 160 degrees Celsius. But we found the bitumen heated at a temperature of over 200 degrees Celsius was being used in the road," Engineer Polash said, adding that they have seized five containers of overheated bitumen from the spot and later dumped the substance into nearby Ichhamati River.

They now prefer trains to buses

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

People of five upazilas have opted for trains on Lalmonirhat-Burimari land port route in the last couple of months due to reasonable fare, triggering unusual drop in number of bus passengers.

Earlier, the passengers and commuters of the 84-kilometre route used to travel by road due to awful condition of rail compartments and time schedule.

Sources said, a few bus owners have already stopped their services on the route as most of the people prefer train to buses following the renovation of train and route.

According to sources at Lalmonirhat railway office, three pairs of passenger trains are now shuttling Lalmonirhat-Burimari route in the morning, at noon and night regularly.

Scores of people of Patgram, Hatibandha, Kaliganj and Aditmari upazilas go to all 11 stations everyday to enjoy the comfortable train journey, they said.

The stations are



PHOTO: STAR

Number of train passengers has increased in Lalmonirhat due to recent improvement in service, especially on Lalmonirhat-Burimari route.

Burimari, Patgram and Bawra under Patgram upazila, Barokhata, Hatibandha and Shaheed Borhan Nagar under Hatibandha upazila, Bhotmari, Tushbandar and Kakina under Kaliganj upazila and Namuri and Aditmari under Aditmari upazila.

Iftikhar Ahmed, a train passenger of the route, said he prefers train service to bus as he needs only Tk 25

for travelling from Burimari to Lalmonirhat by train. "For the same distance one has to pay Tk 140 to the buses," he said.

Shamim Al Shamim, a trader at Burimari land port, said the train service on the route plays a vital role in business sector as the traders can now easily travel to the district headquarters.

Lalmonirhat station master Abdur Rahman said, better train service has

become a matter of heartburn for the local bus owners and workers as they these days do not get sufficient passengers.

Burimari station master Moksed Ali alleged that a gang of bus workers attacked the railway officials at the station twice in the last 20 days over the issue.

"But the gang could not halt the train service due to its growing popularity and fear of the passengers", he added.

Contacted, Burimari Bus Sramik Union president Afzal Hossain refuted the allegation.

Bus owner Shariful Islam said, at least 33 passenger buses used to ply the route regularly. But now only 20 buses operate there, he said adding that a few bus owners recently stopped their services after incurring loss.

Divisional Railway Manager of Lalmonirhat West Zone Abdul Hye said the train service has gained popularity due to repairing of the rail line and low fare.

"The authorities have already taken a decision to run an intercity train on the route very soon," he added.