



PHOTO: STAR

Dwelling houses lie mangled at storm-hit Kalati village in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar district. Nor'wester lashed the upazila town and three unions yesterday and the day before, damaging over 200 houses.

# Storm injures 15, damages 200 houses in Kulaura

*8 hurt, 21 houses damaged in B'baria*

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least 23 people were injured and over 220 houses damaged as nor'westers lashed Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar and Nabinagar upazila of Brahmanbaria yesterday and the day before.

In Kulaura, violent storms swept over the upazila town and three unions, injuring at least 15 people and damaging over 200 houses Monday afternoon and yesterday, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The first storm on Monday, accompanied with hails, uprooted scores of trees, electricity poles and damaged standing boro paddy on vast tracts of land.

Two hundred houses in 30 villages under Jaichandi, Brahmanbazar, Rantgaon and municipal areas were raged to the ground, locals said.

All the 15 injured of Rantgaon, Kabiraji and Ekadattapur villages have been admitted to local health complex.

A second storm hit the same areas next morning, causing further damages to crops and trees.

In Brahmanbaria, at least

eight people were injured and 21 houses damaged as a nor'wester swept over Khagatua village under Ratanpur union of Nabinagar upazila on Monday night.

The storm that started at 7:30pm lashed the area for over 15 minutes, reports our correspondent.

Contacted, Noor Muhammad Mazumder, the deputy commissioner of Brahmanbaria, said that a team started relief work yesterday morning.

Two people were killed as lightning struck them Kasba upazila at 9:30pm.

The deceased were identified as Md. Rana Mia, 16, son of Jahirul Islam of Rampur village and Aklima Akter, 8, daughter of Salim Mia of Kashipur village under the upazila.

Lightning also killed a man at Sahpur village under Titas upazila in Comilla on Monday.

The deceased was identified as Abdul Latif, 58.

Family sources said Latif went to work at a field adjacent to his house in the evening.

As he did not return home, the family members went to the field and recov-



PHOTO: STAR

Dead birds litter a place at the same village as the violent storm also affects the wildlife in the upazila.

ered his body around 9:00pm.

In Netrakona, a boy was killed and seven others were injured by lightning at Shidli-Chorpara village under Kalmakanda upazila yesterday morning, reports our correspondent.

The dead was identified as Soheli Mia, 12, son of Jahangir Hossen of village Shidli-Chorpara under Kalmakanda upazila.

Police and local people said, lightning struck Soheli Mia when he was going to a paddy field along with his

father and six other neighbours. Soheli died on the spot.

In Cox's Bazar, five people including two women were killed by lightning in four different upazilas of the district yesterday reports our correspondent.

The deceased were identified as Ershad Ullah, 22, of Moheshkhali upazila, Jamal Uddin, 45, of Chokoria, Shamsunnahar, 55, of Kutubdia and Shahena Akhtar, 24, and Liton, 18, of Sadar upazila.

## LITTLE RAIN IN DINAJPUR

# Boro, mango and litchi may be badly affected

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinajpur*

Irri-boro crops and growing mangoes and litchis are badly affected in the district due to lack of rain, according to the district officials of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

Moreover, farmers cannot irrigate their land properly due to frequent load shedding.

Farmers in the district fear a low production of rice, mango and litchi this year as Irri-boro fields are drying up while growing mangoes and litchis coming off the trees.

According to the district DAE officials, around 1.75 lakh hectares of land have been brought under Irri-boro farming in Dinajpur this year, setting a production target of 7 lakh tonnes.

The target may not be achieved this year for lack of rain and proper irrigation, the officials said. Md Anwarul Alam, deputy director of Dinajpur DAE, said Irri-boro farming is mostly depended on irrigation. "Smooth power supply can ensure good yield of Irri-boro," he added.

Farmers said they cannot irrigate their croplands properly as they face at least 12 to 15 hours load shedding everyday. According to the officials of Dinajpur Palli Bidyut Samity-1, they get only 20MW electricity everyday against the demand for at least 52MW.

During a recent visit to Khansama, Chirirbandar and Dinajpur Sadar upazilas, this correspondent saw many dried up paddy fields. Farmers told him that their croplands had dried up due to absence of rain and disruption in water supply for frequent load shedding.

Mango and litchi growers said a drought like situation has been prevailing in the district since February.

"Initially, we hoped a good yield of mango and litchi this season. Now we give up the hope as growing mangoes and litchis are coming off trees for lack of rain," said Md Abdur Rahim, a mango orchard owner in Khansama upazila.

According to the orchard owners, rain is a must at the end of March for mangoes and litchis to grow bigger. Unfortunately, the district saw no rain during the time, they added.

According to Dinajpur Met office, the rainfall recorded in February was only 9.88mm while the aver-

age rainfall for the month is 125mm. The district saw no rain in January, March and until April 16.

Horticulturist Saiful Arefin said he has advised the growers to sprinkle water on litchis and mangoes to help them grow bigger.



PHOTO: STAR

In absence of rain, mangoes fall off the trees before being matured at an orchard at Golahar village in Chirirbabdar upazila of Dinajpur, above, a dried up boro field at the village.

# Watermelons lie in fields as hartals deter buyers

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, *Patuakhali*

Watermelon growers in the district are selling the popular summer fruit for throwaway prices due to transport problem amid frequent hartal enforced by different political parties.

Tourism in picturesque sea beach Kuakata is also affected due to the situation.

During a visit to different areas of Kalapara upazila on Thursday, this correspondent saw huge quantity of ripe watermelon lying in fields as farmers cannot sell it due to lack of buyers.

Watermelon weighing over one kg is selling at Tk 5,000 to 10,000 per thousand in the wholesale markets.

"I cultivated watermelon on 40 acres of land this year and expected to get Tk 60 lakh to 70 lakh by selling it as buyers from different areas including Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi come here to buy the fruit in this season. But now the picture is different due to frequent hartal in the peak marketing time," said Gazi Asafuddin Soheli, a farmer of Dhankhali village under Kalapara upazila.

Nur Mohammad of Gongamoti under the same upazila spent Tk 60,000 to cultivate watermelon on 1.5 acres of land this year and expected to earn over Tk 1.5 lakh by selling it but now he is worried about recovery of the production cost.

"Watermelon is rotting in the field as we can't send it to

Dhaka and Chittagong by truck for sale due to hartal," he added.

Monir Hossain, a farmer of the same village, said, "Rent of truck also doubled due to the unrest. We paid Tk 15,000 to Tk 18,000 as rent per trip to Dhaka in last year but presently they are demanding Tk 35,000 to Tk 40,000. Now we are thinking to send watermelon by cargo or launch."

Many trucks were found lying idle at different spots on Patuakhali-Kalapara road.

"It now takes much longer time to reach Dhaka as we often have to keep vehicles at safer places in fear of arson by hartal supporters. And so, the rent has almost doubled.

Sometimes watermelon gets damaged on the road as it takes a couple of days to reach the destination," said Abdur Rahman, driver of a truck waiting at Dhankhali.

Bahadur of Champapur union under Kalapara upazila, who came to Patuakhali New Market to sell watermelon, said he cultivated the fruit on 2.5 acres of land at a cost of Tk 75,000 but now he would not get over 45,000 by selling the produce.

This season 35,218 acres of land has been brought under watermelon cultivation in the district and the expected yield is about five lakh tonnes, said sources of the Department of

Agriculture Extension in Patuakhali.

Meanwhile, Kuakata sea beach sees very small number of tourists due to frequent transport disruption for the last couple of weeks.

"Usually a large number of tourists come to Kuakata this season but the situation is frustrating now. We find it difficult to make timely payment of salary to our staff as the business is very dull," said Shafiqur Rahman Chand Mia, president of district hotel-motel owner's association, also president of Patuakhali Chamber of Commerce and Industry.



PHOTO: STAR

Growers leave their reaped watermelons at a field of Dhankhali village in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali as the district famous for large-scale cultivation of the popular summer fruit sees only a small number of wholesale buyers from other areas of the country due to transport problem amid frequent hartal during the last couple of weeks.

## AL activists set fire to houses of BNP men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Chapainawabganj*

Angry AL men set fire to five houses of BNP activists as the rival party men attacked an AL supporter injuring him seriously at Mobarokpur of Shibganj upazila yesterday.

The injured was identified as, Mohammad Chutu, 27, son of Azhar Ali of the village.

Sub Inspector Abdur Razzak of Shibganj police station and locals said, AL activist Chutu was spraying insecticide at a mango orchard in Mobarokpur.

All of a sudden, BNP activist Torikul Islam attacked him with sharp weapons and injured him seriously.

After a couple of hours, agitated supporters of AL set fire to five houses of BNP men including Torikul. They also vandalised over five houses of BNP supporters.

In Khulna, a nine-year-old boy was burnt to death in a fire in Dumuria upazila yesterday, reports our correspondent.

The boy, Sakibul, 9, was son of Humayun Kabir, of Noakati village in the upazila.

Police and locals said, Sakibul was playing cricket with his friends on a newly built road at Noakati village in the morning.

He was seriously burnt as he came in contact with burning pitch while looking for the ball which fell into a ditch beside the road.

# No bribe, no agri loan now Rakub rule, allege farmers

S DILIP ROY, *Lalmonirhat*

A section of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (Rakub) officials is allegedly taking bribes in return for agricultural loans to the farmers throughout the district.

Information on corruption in the Rakub started to emerge when on April 3 Khoyer Uddin, 45, a farmer from Dakkhin Sindurna of Hatibandha upazila died of a massive heart attack inside the bank after he was informed by officials that his agricultural loan of Tk 70,000 was already withdrawn from his account.

Fazlul Haque, the branch manager of Hatibandha town branch told this correspondent that they gave Khoyer Uddin's loan money to Zohir Uddin, a broker and a guarantor to the loan application. Asked, who gave him the authority to do so, the bank manager refused to reply. Sources said that the supervisor of the branch, Abdur Rahman, was also involved in the scam.

The death of the poor farmer has angered the entire community of farmers in the area.

Now the bank officials have involved the local political leaders and public representatives to settle the matter in order to avoid police involvement. Sources said that the officials have paid an unspecified amount of money to the leaders to prevent the family of the farmer from lodging complaint with police.

Whenever a farmer approaches Rakub he is confronted by a middleman assigned by the bank officials. The rate of bribe is prefixed. For every thousand Taka of loan the farmer has to pay a 'commission' of Tk 150-200, farmers alleged.

Mobarak Hossain, a farmer from Goddimari village said that the bank officials give agricultural loans only to those who can offer handsome commission to them.

Mozammel Haque, a farmer from Patikapara village said that he had applied for a loan of Tk 50,000 two months ago at Rakub Hatibandha branch but the bank was yet to disburse it.

"My fault is that I did not pay any commission to the bank officials", said Mozammel.

Romesh Chandra Roy, Mazibur Rahman,

Taher Ali, and many others from different villages of Hatibandha upazila expressed similar grievances as they were yet to get loans from Rakub ahead of boro cultivation.

Atoar Rahman, a farmer from Paruliya alleged that he had to pay a commission of Tk 5,000 for his loan of Tk 30 thousand.

Similar situation is quite common at all branches of Rakub in five upazilas of the district.

Meher Ali, a farmer of Gokunda in Sadar upazila alleged that he got a loan of Tk 20,000 more than two months after applying at Teesta branch of the bank.

"The branch manager and supervisor took Tk 2,000 against the loan amount through their assigned middleman Motiar Miah," he said.

Asgor Ali, a farmer from Chandrapur village in Kaliganj upazila alleged that he filled up an application form for a loan of Tk 50,000 at Chaparhat branch of the bank two months ago.

"As I refused to pay the commission, the branch manager and the supervisor did not sanction the loan," Asgor said.

President of Ekota Krishak Samity at Dowani village in Hatibandha upazila Mofizul Islam, 56, alleged that the lists given by the block supervisors of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) are not being followed while disbursing loan at all the branches.

"Anybody can get loan if he bribes the bank officials even if he is not a farmer," Islam said, adding that the middlemen are also extracting money from loan-seekers in the name of 'managing' bank officials.

Lalmonirhat District Zonal Manager of Rakub, Shamsur Rahman admitted that some unscrupulous bank officials secretly engage middlemen, who ensure the commission from the loan seekers.

"I am struggling alone to remove this corruption. I have already started an investigation into the death of the farmer," Rahman added.

Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner (DC), Habibur Rahman said he had already wrote to the higher authorities for necessary steps against the corrupt bank officials who are responsible for the death of farmer Khoyer Uddin.