



PHOTO: STAR

A woman stands in front of her storm-ravaged thatched house at Punnuti village under Chirirbandar upazila of Dinajpur yesterday.

# 7 killed as nor'wester lashes 4 districts

*Crops, houses damaged; trees uprooted*

STAR NATIONAL DESK

At least seven people were killed and over 90 others injured as nor'wester lashed country's four districts on Saturday night.

The storm-hit districts are Dinajpur, Tangail, Gaibandha and Sirajganj. Irri-boro crops and many dwelling hoses were damaged while several hundred trees uprooted in the affected areas of the districts, according to our correspondents.

In Dinajpur, nor'wester swept Phulbari, Parbatipur and Chirirbandar upazilas at around 8:00pm, leaving two people dead and at least 20 others injured.

The deceased were identified as Md Ruhul Amin 28, son Md Anisur Rahman of Hamidpur village under Parbatipur upazila, and Shahidul Islam, 50, son of Mozahar Ali of Arjunpur village under Sadar upazila.

Ruhul Amin died instantly as a big tree fell on his roadside shop at Melapara village. Shahidul Islam took shelter under a tree at Ambari on Dinajpur-Bogra highway during the storm. He was struck by lightning and died on the spot.

Sources in the three upazila administrations said the storm accompanied by hail and rain also damaged Irri-boro paddy, unripe mangoes, vegetables and other crops in the upazilas.

In Tangail, two children were killed and at least 20 others were injured during the storm that lashed 20 villages under Sadar upazila.

The dead are Morsheda Akhter, 11, daughter of Amirul Islam, and her cousin Mohammad Hasan Miah, 8, son of Kabel Miah of Rangachira village under Kakua union. Both were killed in a house collapse.

Sahera Begum, wife of Kabel Miah, was sleeping along with her son Hasan

and nice Morsheda in a room at their tin-shed house during the storm. Suddenly, the house collapsed, killing the two children and injuring three others, including Sahera, said Bodiuzzaman Faruque, Chairman of Kakua Union Parishad (UP).

The injured were admitted to Tangail General Hospital. The storm hit the upazila at around 8:30pm and lasted for one and a half hour. The affected villages are Kalikeotil, Rangachira, Gopalkeotil and Jhaogora under Kakua union, Morisha, Bilmoril, Paikmoril and Keokeotil under Baghil union, Omarpur, Dulbari, Kashinagar, Norshingapur, Maisha, Beguntal, under Hugra union, Malancha, Mirpur, Chowdhury Malancha, Baikshimul under Mogra union, Chawbaria, Goalpara, Bathuajani, Char Fotepur and Dorjipara under Dainna union.

Boro paddy and several hundred tin-roofed and thatched houses were damaged by the storm at the villages. Many trees and electric poles were uprooted, plunging the villages into darkness. Power supply in many affected areas could not be restored as of 6:00pm yesterday.

Uazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mallika Khatun visited the affected villages yesterday morning. She also gave Tk 10,000 to the parents of the two kids.

Contacted, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Anisur Rahman Miah said they are preparing a list of the storm-hit villagers to give them financial support to re-build their houses.

In Gaibandha, storm swept through four upazilas of the district on Friday night, leaving two people dead and 15 others injured.

Two people were killed by lightning and 15 others sustained injuries as high velocity of storm accompa-

nied with hails lashed four Upazilas in Gaibandha district Saturday night.

The dead are Sabina Begum, 35, of Jadugarah village under Gobindaganj upazila, and Helal Mia, 17, Dhanshara village of Pirganj Upazila. Both were killed by lightning during the storm.

Sabina, a housewife, was struck by lightning at her house while Helal Mia at Peererhat mela in Sadullapur Upazila.

The storm affected upazilas are Gaibandha Sadar, Sundarganj, Sadullapur, and Gobindaganj. A good number of tin-roofed and thatched houses were damaged by the storm in different areas of the upazilas.

The storm accompanied by rain and hail also damaged boro paddy, maize and other crops in affected areas. Power supply in the areas remained stopped for 17 hours as electric poles were uprooted. The power supply, however, was restored in most of the areas yesterday afternoon.

In Sirajganj, A woman was killed and at least 40 people were injured as a violent storm lashed different areas of the district on Saturday night, reports UNB.

The deceased could not be identified as of yesterday afternoon. The storm also damaged many houses and standing IRRI-Boro crops on vast tracts of land. A large number of trees were also uprooted in the storm-hit areas.

A 20-km-long traffic gridlock stretching from Koddarmore of the Bangabandhu Bridge west side link road to Chnadaikona of Dhaka-Bogra highway was created as a large number of trees fell on the road during the storm, causing sufferings to the passengers. Later, law enforcers removed the trees from the highway.

# A man's misdeeds, all under the banner of ruling party

A CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A union parishad (UP) chairman, under the banner of the ruling party, has unleashed a reign of land grabbing, tree felling and removing top soil from farmers' agricultural land to manufacture bricks in the remote village of Khetar Char, a predominantly Hindu village under Matibhanga UP of Nazirpur police station.

Widely known for his close association with the notorious criminal Ershad Shikder, who was hanged in May 2004 following a court verdict, Mozibor Rahman Shamim, Chairman of Shantoshpur UP and also local AL general secretary, forcibly occupied an agricultural plot on the adjacent UP of Matibhanga and has been running a brick kiln, Joy Bricks, on it for several years.

Villagers, showing copies, said they had written numerous complaints, drawing attention to Shamim's misdeeds, to the local police station, district administration and also to the Ministry of Home Affairs in Dhaka. The villagers also complained in writing to the nearest office of the Department of Environment (DoE) in Khulna. But Shamim's immunity from punishment seems endless.

Shamim is allegedly backed by a central leader of the party, villagers said. Allegations of land grabbing, illegal logging, possessing illegal firearms and intimidating villagers, especially among the Hindu population of the village, are widespread. To demonstrate his influence as an Awami League leader, Shamim displays a huge country boat, election symbol of the ruling party, on top of his kiln chimney.

Recently, Shamim and his men embarked on removing

huge volumes of fertile topsoil from adjacent agricultural land belonging to the villagers for manufacturing bricks. People are too scared to speak out against the musclem who leads a notorious gang in the area, villagers said.

The UP chairman of Matibhanga, Faisal Alam Ranju, said Shamim and his men had capitalised on the dispute arising from the demarcation of the two adjacent UPs across the River Baleshwar. He said that they discussed the matter at inter-district meetings of the administration but Shamim did not pay heed to any decisions made there.

"If he bought five kathas of land on this side of the river across his own UP, he would grab another ten kathas. There is no way of stopping him," said Ranju.

A visit by this correspondent to the area recently, revealed that several craters have been dug in the middle of the paddy fields to remove top soil for the brick kiln. Villagers said the level of dust and smog generated by the fumes of the chimney and plying of the trucks turn the area extremely smoggy, polluted and unhealthy.

Throughout the village, not a single man or woman talked in favour of Shamim. Motahter Hossain Molla, a victim of Shamim's high-handedness said a few years ago Shamim bought more than 4 acres of land from his brother Major (ret'd) Salek Molla. But after the death of Salek, Shamim extended his boundaries in all directions and continued digging top soil from others' land.

"Shamim cannot show any document for any other land he has grabbed over the years," Molla said.

Golapi Biswas, another victim, said that Shamim had grabbed their family land beside his brickfield.



PHOTO: STAR

Joy Bricks, built on 'forcibly occupied' agricultural land, continues to pollute the surroundings for years. The small chimney itself is enough to tell the tale.

"He also threatened us, saying if we do not voluntarily hand over more land, he will occupy it forcibly," Golapi said. "We are really worried about our future," Golapi added.

Rashmoy Biswas, son of Rituborno Biswas, said Shamim grabbed two bighas of their family agricultural land, which they had been cultivating for generations. Another villager, Hemaet Molla, said that his son-in-law was forced to transfer land documents of 11 kathas to Shamim.

Puloki Biswas, another victim, said Shamim had grabbed 13 acres of their family land. Puloki added that they could not even take their cattle for grazing to their own piece of ancestral land.

Mozibor Rahman Shamim refuted all allegations and said whatever he was doing in the area, he was doing it on his own land for which he has all the documents.

"The brick kiln has

brought employment opportunities in the area, I have clearance from the DoE for it," Shamim said. "If there is a complaint against me, let the person come forward, I will solve it. I invested crores of taka here, I have my men to look after my business as I am busy elsewhere," he said.

"The people who said I grabbed their land are lying. In fact, I bought the land from them for lakhs of taka."

The director of DoE Khulna office, Tarun Kumar Mandal, said that in 2011 his office demolished the brick kiln and fined Shamim Tk 50,000 for operating an illegal kiln. "Then he restored the kiln as per official specifications and then we were compelled to give him the required clearance," Mandal said. "But it is totally unacceptable that he should remove the top soil of agricultural land."

Amulloyo Ranjan Halder, chairman of Nazirpur upazila, said that in 2009 he along with the administra-

tion tried to resolve the demarcation problem in Char Baniari area.

"At the meeting with the administration we asked both the victims and Shamim and his men to show us land documents. The victims returned with land documents but Shamim never turned up with anything," Halder said. "This matter must be resolved immediately so that the rights of the poor land owners of the area are protected," Halder added.

Interestingly the local heads of administration, who are mostly newcomers, denied having any knowledge of the incidents in Matibhanga. Anol Chandra Das, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Pirojpur, Md Waliullah, upazila nirbahi officer of Nazirpur, Abdul Khalek Hawlader, officer in-charge (OC) of Nazirpur police station, when contacted, said they had no knowledge of Shamim's activities in Matibhanga.



A crater dug in the middle of a paddy field to remove topsoil for the brick kiln of the AL leader, right, the condition of the lone government road due to its mindless use by the vehicles of the brick kiln.

# 2 markets sealed off after detection of cracks

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Two markets in Joypurhat and Kushtia have been sealed off following detection of cracks in the buildings.

District administration in Joypurhat yesterday noon sealed off a market in the municipal area after the officials found cracks in the building, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

The entrance to 'New Market', belonging to the municipality authorities, in the heart of the town, was restricted at around 3:30pm after a three-member team, led by Anupam Barua, additional district magistrate (ADM) of Joypurhat, visited the spot.

The team included Abdul Aziz Mollah, Joypurhat Municipality mayor and Md Salauddin Ahmed, executive engineer of Joypurhat Public Works Department (PWD). The team members informed the local journalists that they found about 30 cracks at different points of the market building.

There are three four-storey buildings at the market having 125 shops and nearly 5,000 people are working there. The market was

built around 40 years ago on one acre land, said the Joypurhat municipality officials.

In Kushtia, local administration yesterday sealed off a six-storied market in the town following detection of cracks at different points of the building, reports our correspondent.

Sources said, some shop owners of Ibrahim Plaza on NS Road in the town saw cracks on a few pillars and walls of the building and informed it to the owner.

The panic-stricken shop owners went to the local administration as the building owner Zaved Akter showed no interest in the matter.

The building houses three government owned banks, two insurance companies, an institute and around 50 shops.

On information, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kushtia Syed Belal Hossain rushed to Ibrahim Plaza along with a team of fire brigade at about 5:30pm.

The DC ordered to seal off the building after a fire brigade team examined the cracks and suggested to stop all activities at the building till further examination.

A team of experts are expected to visit the spot today.

# Young couple, housewife 'commit suicide'

STAR NATIONAL DESK

A young couple and a housewife allegedly committed suicide in Habiganj and Chuadanga districts on Friday and Saturday.

A young man and a girl allegedly committed suicide by hanging themselves at Jirunda village in Lakhai upazila of Habiganj early Friday.

The deceased were identified as Sohel, 22, son of Abdul Awal, and Halima, 20, daughter of Azizul Hoque -- both residents of the village, reports UNB.

Officer in-charge (OC) Nazimuddin Chowdhury of Lakhai police station said Sohel and Halima had been in a romantic relationship for long, which their families did not accept.

As a sequel to it, the couple committed suicide by

hanging themselves from a tree at a graveyard in the dead of night on Thursday.

In Chuadanga, a housewife allegedly took her life by taking insecticide over a family feud in Sadar upazila on Saturday night.

The deceased, identified as Bilkis, 33, wife of Md Selim of Fakirpara village, took the poison at 9:00pm at one stage of quarrel with her husband's brother Rafique, reports a correspondent.

Quoting the victim's family, police said, Selim, who is residing in Dhaka, married Bilkis three years ago.

Family members of Selim used to quarrel with Bilkis on and often over trifling matters, police said.

Bilkis was rushed to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital in critical condition where she died at 11:00pm.



PHOTO: STAR

A tin-roofed house lies mangled at storm-hit Bagunia village under Sadar upazila of Gaibandha district yesterday.