

# Country sees bumper wheat yield this year

Cultivation area 20pc up, production rate 15pc higher

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

The country's wheat cultivation area as well as per hectare yield sees significant rise this year.

At least 5.53 lakh hectares of land in the country has been brought under wheat cultivation this year, showing a 20 per cent rise compared to 4.5 lakh hectares last year while the expected yield is 3.5

tonnes per hectare against last year's 3.03 tonnes, said sources of Wheat Research Centre (WRC) in Dinajpur.

But despite the good yield, growers are worried due to low market prices while the government authorities are yet to start their procurement drive with the stipulated rate of Tk 28 per kg.

During a recent visit to different markets in

Dinajpur, this correspondent found a maund of wheat selling for Tk 750 to 800, which is Tk 100 to 150 less than last year's.

Dr ZI Sarker, principal scientific officer of WRC in Dinajpur, said the centre so far developed 30 wheat varieties. Of them, Bari Gom-26 and Bari Gom-30 introduced last year are being widely used by farmers for their high yielding quality.

"With better care, it is possible to get five tonnes of wheat per hectare. The country's annual demand of wheat is 42 lakh tonnes but the average production is only 14 lakh tonnes. However, this year the yield would be around 19.4 lakh tonnes. It is possible to increase wheat production to meet the total demand, if fair price is ensured for farmers," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Growing wheat plants cover vast areas of land at Panchbari village in Dinajpur Sadar upazila that sees large-scale cultivation of the dry season crop this year.

## Where Santal wisdom shelters

BY ANDREW EAGLE

Beyond Sitakot in Dinajpur's Nawabganj the sal trees gather. Although unlikely locals believe Nawabganj National Park might be the last remnants of the forest where Sita of the Hindu epic Ramayana lived in exile.

From field and farmhouse, the cycle van finds the track into this darker, not-less-beautiful world. Beyond is Ashur Beel, a waterhole favoured for picnics, famed for migratory birds.

And suddenly in the forest are faces... not the middle-class motorcycle-riding ones of picnickers but curious, distinctly non-Bengali faces...

The national park keeps another history. Under its canopy, at its edges, Santal wisdom takes shelter.

In Gabriel Hemrom's leafy yard a little beyond the park boundary, in Alekuti village, women sit on the ground preparing date leaves for weaving. Another is busy with jungle potatoes, which are soaked in water for several days and eaten with molasses-like jaggery, known in Bangla as 'gur'.

Alekuti is home to forty Santal families. "Our ancestors are from Dumka," says forty-year-old Hemrom, father of three sons. "But we were all born here."

As in Bangladesh, Santhals are one of the most populous minority peoples in India. Mainly they live in Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Jharkhand. Dumka is a district in the last of these states. There are also Santals in Nepal.

The village's forested location reflects Santal tradition of forest clearing and subsistence farming. They are also famed hunters, with bow and arrow. But in Alekuti, along with some small-scale farming, most earn as they can through cycle-van riding or day labour. It isn't much of a living.

"For the poor, food is always a problem," says Hemrom.

In contrast to Alekuti's dire economic reality, in

India it's not uncommon for Santals to be city-dwellers working as doctors, engineers, public servants...

In Alekuti meanwhile are traces of the well-developed culture of which any Santal can be proud. Most visibly it's in the painted designs on the walls of their well-constructed mud-brick homes. By tradition Santals present history and daily life in wall paintings, although the Alekuti examples are modest.

"Those who can paint do so," says Hemrom.

The Austroasiatic Santhali language, of the Munda languages and distantly related to Khasi, Khmer and Vietnamese, is well-studied. Its unique script, called Ol Chiki and invented in 1925 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu, has thirty letters.

Santals have preserved their language well, but in Alekuti there are difficulties. "Our children used to study Santali at the mission schools in Dhanjuri and Patarghat," says Hemrom,

"but now they only learn at home. We use our own alphabet but it's explained in English." Including Bangla, Alekuti relies on three languages.

Hemrom estimates that like his, 50 - 70% of the village families converted to Christianity some thirty years ago. The small church is attended by visiting clergy.

The remainder observe the old religion, worshipping Marang buru or Bonga as supreme deity. It features a court of spirits to regulate aspects of the world, from whom blessings are sought through prayer and offering. There are evil spirits to be protected from.

Traditionally, Santal villages feature a sacred grove where spirits live and festivals occur. In Alekuti neighbours participate in rituals of both religions.

"We dance and sing in Santhali and Bangla," says Hemrom, "The children enjoy festivals the most."

In political history Santals can also take pride. In response to land grab-

bing and enslavement, on 30 June 1855 leaders Sidhu Murmu and Kanu Murmu mobilised 30,000 Santals to fight the British.

Caught by surprise, the Santal Rebellion met with some success, but ultimately bows and arrows proved no match for British guns. Battles were akin to massacres. Many Santals, including the two celebrated leaders, were killed; and subsequently the Nawab of Murshidabad used elephants to trample Santali huts.

More recently, the Santal community was instrumental in successfully advocating the creation of India's Jharkhand state, carved from southern Bihar in 2000. Statehood for Jharkhand would better represent the various minority peoples accounting for 28% of the state population, Santhals the largest group.

Yet Hemrom speaks of his heritage humbly. "Everybody likes his own culture," he says.

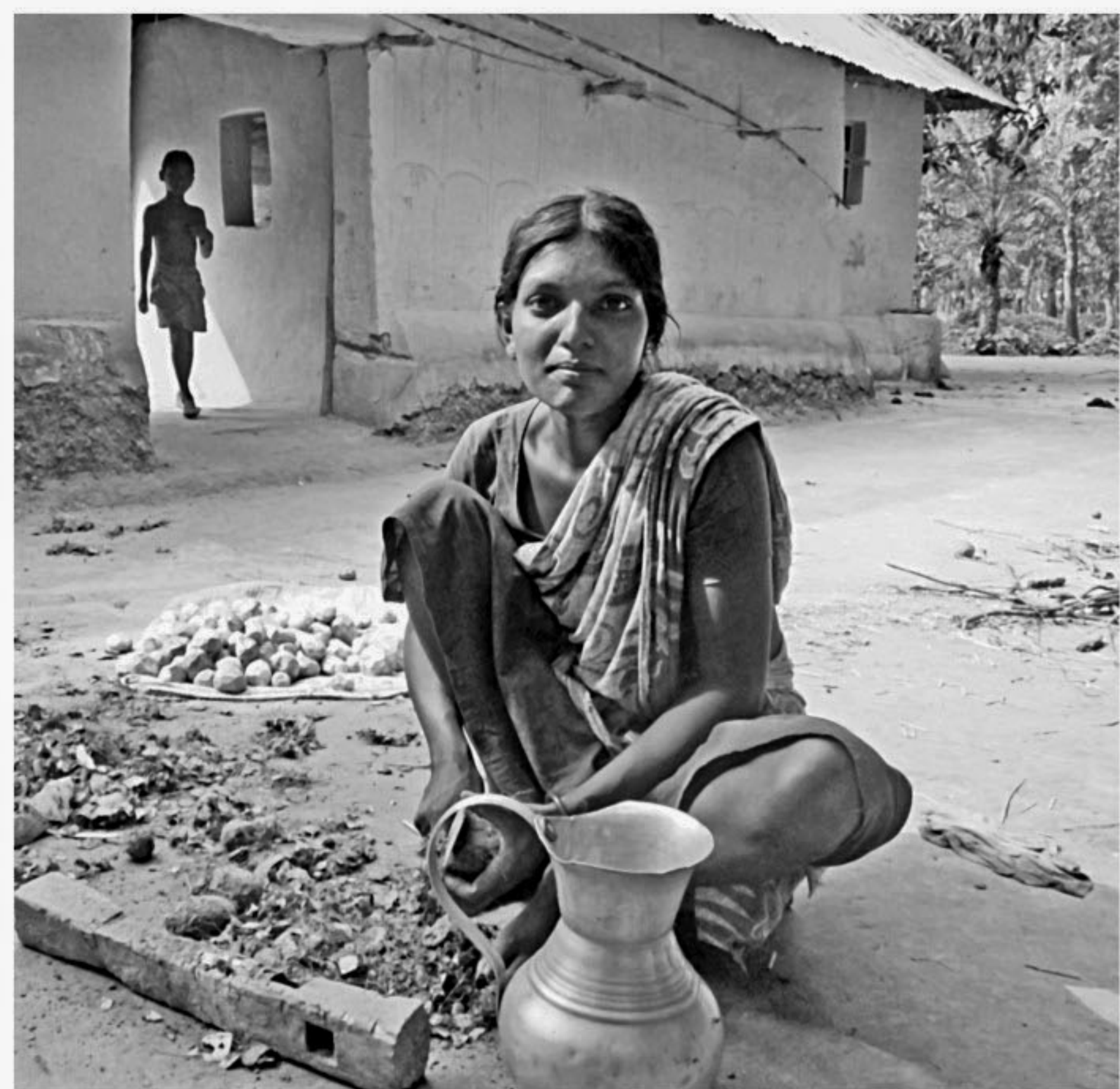


PHOTO: STAR

A Santal woman chops vegetables in the yard of her house in Nawabganj upazila under Dinajpur district.



PHOTO: STAR

Members of a house ravaged by yesterday's nor'wester at Kamalhat village in Kaliganj upazila under Jhenidah district do their household works under the open sky while a man repairs a damaged room of the house.

## Two killed, 35 hurt as storm lashes Sunamganj, Jhenidah

Crops on 9,000 acres of land, 120 houses damaged

STAR COUNTRY DESK

At least two people were killed and 35 others injured as nor'wester lashed Sunamganj and Jhenidah districts yesterday and the day before.

In Sunamganj, a storm coupled with hailstones hit Jamalganj, Derail, Dharmapasha and Tahirpur upazilas on Wednesday evening, leaving two people killed and 15 others injured, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.

The deceased are Ambar Ali, 55, of Hotamara village in Jamalganj upazila, and Ezazul Haque, 21, son of Jaha Alam of Natun Hati village in Tahirpur.

The seasonal storm dam-

aged crops on around 9,000 acres of land in Derail, Jamalganj, and Dharmapasha upazilas.

Witnesses said Ambar Ali died on the spot as a storm coupled with hails swept through Bochai embankment of Pakna haor in Jamalganj upazila when he was returning home from Dirai upazila at around 6:00pm. At least nine people were also injured during the storm.

The injured were admitted to the upazila health complex and different hospitals, said Maksudul Haque, acting agriculture officer of Jamalganj upazila.

The storm also damaged crops on 4,000 acres of land, he said.

On the other hand, a storm lashed areas in Tahirpur upazila, leaving Ezazul dead on the spot and five others injured in a paddy field, said Md Shahid Ullah, officer-in-charge of Tahirpur Police Station.

Standing crops on 5,000 acres of land were damaged by the storm, said Ranadhir Chowdhury, deputy agriculture officer of Dirai upazila.

Away in Jhenidah, a nor'wester swept through 10 villages in Kaliganj upazila early yesterday, leaving at least 20 people injured and damaging 120 houses, reports our correspondent.

The affected villages include Kharikadanga, Kamalhat, Ghoshpara, Kola,

Ramchandrapur, Talian, Rakra Bittipara, Khalkula and Daspara.

Of the injured, Maria Khatun, wife of Shafikul Islam of Ramchandrapur village, was admitted to the upazila health complex while the rest were given first aid.

Gopal Chandra Biswas, a farmer of Kamalhat village, said vegetables on his two bighas of land were damaged by the storm that lashed the area at around 4:00am.

The storm destroyed over 100 houses, crops on two hectares of land and uprooted a number of trees, said Mosharrif Hossain, agriculture officer of Kaliganj upazila.

## AL infighting leaves 4 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

At least four people were injured as two factions of Awami League Mohammadpur union unit under Senbag upazila clashed yesterday morning.

The injured are Abdur Rahim, 31, Md Salauddin, 32, Md Sohel, 28, and Rashid Ahmed, 36. Of them, Rahim and Salauddin received bullets. They were admitted to Senbag Upazila Health Complex.

Mostafa Kamal, officer-in-charge of Senbag Police Station, said the two factions--one led by AL union unit president Zia Uddin and the other by general secretary Abdul Haque--clashed over establishing supremacy in the union.

Both sides used sharp weapons and fired bullets during the clash that continued for half an hour.

On information, police rushed to the spot and dispersed the clashing groups. No one was arrested in connection with the incident as of filing of this report at 5:00pm yesterday.

## IU reopens tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Islamic University (IU) will reopen tomorrow after four months shutdown.

The university syndicate took the decision at an urgent meeting at the residence of the vice chancellor on the campus on Wednesday night.

VC Abdul Haikm Sarker presided over the meeting, said TM Lokman Hakim, proctor of the university.

According to the decision, the students' dormitories will open today.

On November 30 last year, the authorities shut the university amid student agitation over killing of a fellow student in a road accident on the campus.

Additional police have been deployed on the campus to avert any untoward incident, said the proctor.



PHOTO: STAR

The district administration in cooperation with the social welfare department and a few voluntary organisations brings out a procession in Panchagarh town yesterday marking World Autism Awareness Day yesterday.

## Housewife murdered for 'dowry' in Habiganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A housewife was killed by her husband allegedly for dowry at Halimpur village in Baniarchang upazila of Habiganj district on Wednesday night.

The victim is Jamila Khatun, 22, wife of Sadi

Mia, 26, of the village. Sadi married Jamila, daughter of Abdul Alim of the village, a year ago.

Alim said Sadi had been putting pressure on his daughter for dowry since their marriage.

Neighbours said Sadi and Jamila locked in an altercation over the issue at around 7:00pm. At one stage, he

stabbed Jamila and fled the scene. Jamila died on the spot.

On information, police went to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to Habiganj Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy, said Nirmalendu Chakraborty, officer-in-charge of Baniarchang Police Station.

### VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

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