

WATERMELON

# Bumper yield, good prices make farmers happy

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Watermelon farmers of different char (sandy land) areas of the district are happy with its bumper production and satisfactory price this year.

Growers are now selling the popular summer fruit in their fields and wholesalers from different areas including Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi are buying the item to carry it by trucks, cargo boats and launches.

Sixty-five thousand acres of land has been brought under watermelon cultivation in eight upazilas of the district this year, said sources of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Patuakhali.

Galachipa upazila sees the highest cultivation area of 15,500 acres of land, followed by Kalapara upazila with 13,500 acres.

The two upazilas along with Rangabali in the district are most suitable for watermelon cultivation due to fertile soil and availability of irrigation water, DAE officials said.

Visiting char areas of Rangabali upazila, this correspondent saw most of the fields full of watermelon and farmers busy harvesting and selling the fruit.

In this upazila, 8,046 acres of land has been brought under watermelon cultivation this year while the area was 4,510 acres in 2014 and 3,100 acres in 2013.

Earlier, most of the local farmers cultivated only paddy on their land but now they cultivate watermelon as an additional crop as it earns more money, local farmers said, adding that this year's total production may exceed 15 lakh tonnes.

"Sandy char areas with irrigation facilities from rivers and canals in the region are very much suitable for watermelon cultivation. We are interested to cultivate watermelon on our land as it is more profitable than paddy," said Abdul Hai, a farmer of Baher Char village under Rangabali upazila.

Ruhul Amin, another watermelon farmer of Koralia village under the same upazila, said, "I cultivated water-

melon on 15 acres of land and spent about Tk 2.5 lakh. I have already sold the fruit worth about Tk 4 lakh and hope to get Tk about 20 lakh by selling the rest."

Many day labourers are also happy as they can earn money by working in watermelon fields, instead of going to other places in search of work.

Md Lutfur Rahman, plant preservation officer of agriculture extension office in Rangabali, said watermelon cultivation started 10 to 12 years ago in this upazila and increasing number of farmers are now engaging in cultivating this summer fruit as soil, weather, and water are very suitable.

Cultivation of watermelon has spread in around 100 coastal islands in Rangabali, Galachipa, Kalapara, Dashmina, and Baufal upazilas under the district, he said.

"We are motivating the farmers, especially in char areas, to cultivate watermelon as it earns good profit," said Ashok Kumar Sharma, deputy director of DAE in Patuakhali.



Farmers load a truck with watermelons at their farmland at Baher Char in Rangabali upazila of Patuakhali.

PHOTO: STAR

CASES FOR VANDALISM, SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES

# UZ chairman, municipality mayor suspended

STAR COUNTRY DESK

The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives on Monday suspended Nazirpur Upazila Parishad chairman in Pirojpur and Shibganj municipality mayor in Chapainawabganj as both were charge-sheeted in the cases for vandalising vehicles and carrying out subversive activities.

Our Pirojpur correspondent reported that the ministry suspended Nazirpur Upazila Parishad Chairman Md Nazrul Islam Khan as a court here recently accepted the charge sheet against him.

Sources in the deputy commis-

sioner's office said they received the letter on Monday afternoon and sent copies of the letter to Nazirpur upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) and chairman Nazrul Islam Khan the same day.

Police arrested Nazrul Islam Khan, also the vice-president of the district unit of BNP, from the upazila headquarters on March 29 in connection with two cases for vandalising vehicles during road blockade programme in the upazila in January this year.

In Chapainawabganj, Mayor Samir Kabir Helim of Shibganj municipality was suspended on the day as charges pressed against him in a case for vandalism and subversive activities,

reports our correspondent.

A letter in this regard reached Chapainawabganj deputy commissioner's office on Monday afternoon.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mohammad Jahangir Kabir said Mayor Samir, also general secretary of Shibganj municipality unit of BNP, was wanted in a number of cases.

The ministry concerned suspended him as a court here recently accepted the charge sheet against him in one of the cases, the DC added.

Officer-in-Charge Moinul Islam of Shibganj Police Station said the cases were filed against the mayor last year. He has been absconding since filing of the case, the OC said.

# Jubo League leader shot in Laxmipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A local Jubo League leader was shot by unidentified criminals in Sadar upazila of Laxmipur district early yesterday.

Bullet-hit Ibrahim Hossain Babul, 37, assistant press secretary of Charshahi Union unit of Jubo League, was admitted to Sadar Hospital.

Family members said a gang spread bullets on Babul and left the scene immediately. They said Babul along with his wife came out of their house at around 1:30am as dogs started barking at the garden beside their house.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Humayun Kabir of Chandraganj Police Station said the incident might have taken place over establishing supremacy in the union.

# Medical student drowns in pond

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A student of Noakhali Abdul Malek Ukil Medical College in Begumganj upazila of the district drowned in a pond on the college campus yesterday.

The deceased, Ahsan Azad, 20, son of Abul Kalam of Motabi village in Sadar upazila of Feni, was a first-year student of MBBS.

Dr Bappa Ratan, vice-principal of the college, said some students were playing football at the college playground around 8:00am.

At one stage, the ball fell into the middle of the pond. Ahsan jumped into the pond to collect the ball but drowned.

Hearing screams of the playmates, locals rushed to the spot, rescued Ahsan and took him to the emergency unit of the hospital where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.



PHOTO: STAR

Landless women work at a peanut field at Char Kutirbari in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat district.

# Group farming in Teesta char areas changes their life

1,000 landless women in 40 groups engaged in growing different crops

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Around one thousand landless women belonging to 40 groups are now engaged in growing different crops on sandy char (landmass emerging from riverbed) areas of Teesta River basin villages in Aditmari and Kaliganj upazilas under the district, thanks to the initiative of different NGOs.

"After forming a producer group with 25 landless women a year ago, we got lease of one bigha of char land for Tk 2,000 a year. We worked hard to grow

crops and after meeting the production cost, each member got profit of Tk 15,000 to 18,000 from selling the produce every three months," said Rehana Begum, leader of the 'producer group' at Char Bhotmari in Kaliganj.

"Our earning helps to change our life. Now we are happy to arrange schooling for our children," said Nurjahan Begum, 43, a member of the producer group at Char Gobordhan village in Aditmari.

Mohammad Hossain, a land owner at Narsingh

village in the same upazila, said he leased his 20 bighas of char land to a producer group as it remained abandoned for years.

The group members are getting good yield of different crops, especially peanut, he said.

Mosaddeque Hossain Chowdhury, chairman of Mahishkhocha union parishad in Aditmari upazila, said the members of producer groups in the area are changing their life with earning from cultivation on char lands.

### Invitation to Participate in IDCOL Biogas Program

IDCOL is a public-private sector institution promoting economic development in Bangladesh by encouraging private sector investment in infrastructure, renewable energy and other eco-friendly sectors. IDCOL seeks applications from non-governmental organizations ("NGOs")/ micro-finance institutions ("MFIs")/ private entities working mainly in Chittagong and Sylhet divisions for selection as Partner Organizations (hereafter referred to as "POs") under its Biogas Program. To accelerate the dissemination of domestic biogas plants across Bangladesh for fulfilling basic energy requirements in the rural areas as well as maintaining the fertility of soil, IDCOL intends to select new POs from organizations mentioned above which have successful track records of doing business and/or micro credit operations, and are interested to participate in construction, maintenance and financing of biogas plants.

IDCOL has a target of financing 100,000 biogas plants by 2018 of which more than 37,700 plants have been constructed under the program up to March 2015. IDCOL will provide investment subsidy and technical assistance, as applicable, sourced for the KfW, the World Bank and other development partners to POs for implementation of the project.

Interested organizations are requested to download complete application package from <http://idcol.org/home/notice>. Application package may also be collected from IDCOL office at a cost of BDT 500 (non-refundable). Completed applications must be submitted to the address mentioned below before **4:00 p.m. on 13 May, 2015**.

Applications will be evaluated by an independent selection committee in accordance with the criteria described in the application package. Selected POs will be required to sign Participation Agreements with IDCOL. IDCOL reserves the right to accept or reject any application without assigning any reason.

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