



Growers bring huge quantity of okra to famous wholesale market Muladuli Haat in Pabna district but they are frustrated due to drastic price fall of the popular vegetable.

PHOTO: STAR

Okra yield high but price fall frustrates farmers

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR
TOPU, Pabna

Bumper yield of okra brought smiles to the farmers in the district, especially those in Ishwardi upazila, early summer but now they are disappointed due to the drastic price fall of the popular vegetable.

"In early summer a maund of okra sold for Tk 1500 to 1700 but now it is selling for only Tk 250 to 300 as bumper production has caused its drastic price fall," Aminur Rahman Babu, an okra farmer of

Muladuli village, also a wholesaler of Muladuli market, said during this correspondent's visit there on Saturday.

"Now 30 to 40 trucks loaded with okra are daily sent to different areas of the country from Muladuli market, as the supply has doubled due to bumper production," he said.

Five hundred hectares of land in Ishwardi upazila has been brought under okra cultivation this year with expectation to pro-

duce 5,500 tonnes but the yield may cross 7,000 tonnes as favourable weather has resulted in its bumper yield, said Md Khurshid Alam, upazila agriculture officer.

Visiting different areas in Ishwardi upazila, this correspondent found the okra farmers worried due to its poor market price.

Still they expect to make some profit due to high yield.

"Last year I cultivated okra on two bighas of land and earned a profit of Tk 20

thousand. This year I have cultivated it on five bighas and produced 380 maunds of vegetable. But now I cannot expect much profit as the bumper production this season has led to its drastic price fall," said Rabiul Alam, a farmer of Muladuli village.

Vegetable farmer and trader Aminur Rahman Babu has demanded that the authorities arrange preservation of locally produced vegetables to ensure fair prices for the growers.

Moheshkhali's Adinath: A prayer for Nepal

BY ANDREW EAGLE

Unique among Bangladeshi islands for its hilly terrain, Moheshkhali in Cox's Bazar is assumed to have separated from the mainland some centuries ago. It is recorded that Moheshkhali Channel, dividing island from mainland, first arose in 1559 as the result of a devastating cyclone coupled by a powerful earthquake.

Moheshkhali's hills are essentially the most seaward extension of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a part of a range linked through northeast India to the Himalayas; and it's not solely this geography, nor a history of earthquakes, that ultimately joins Moheshkhali to Nepal. There is a spiritual connection.

Atop Mainak Hill in Little Moheshkhali Union, with sweeping views across the interior, the channel and mainland, SreeSreeAdinath Temple has attracted pilgrims for centuries. It is said to be the site where Ravan, primary antagonist of the Ramayana, set down a sacred Shiva Linga stone he had promised Lord Shiva to carry uninterrupted from Kailash to Lanka in return for being granted immortality.

In Moheshkhali efforts failed him and the Shiva Linga remained there. But the story of the temples' beginning is not the origin of the connection with Nepal. Rather it stems from the experience of a solvent Moheshkhali Muslim named Noor Mohammad Shikdar.

Trouble began when one of Shikdar's cows suddenly stopped giving milk. At first he blamed his cowherd who in turn sought to discover the cause of the matter. The cowherd watched the cow one night, to find that during the dark hours it left the barn and made its way to the Shiva Linga where milk

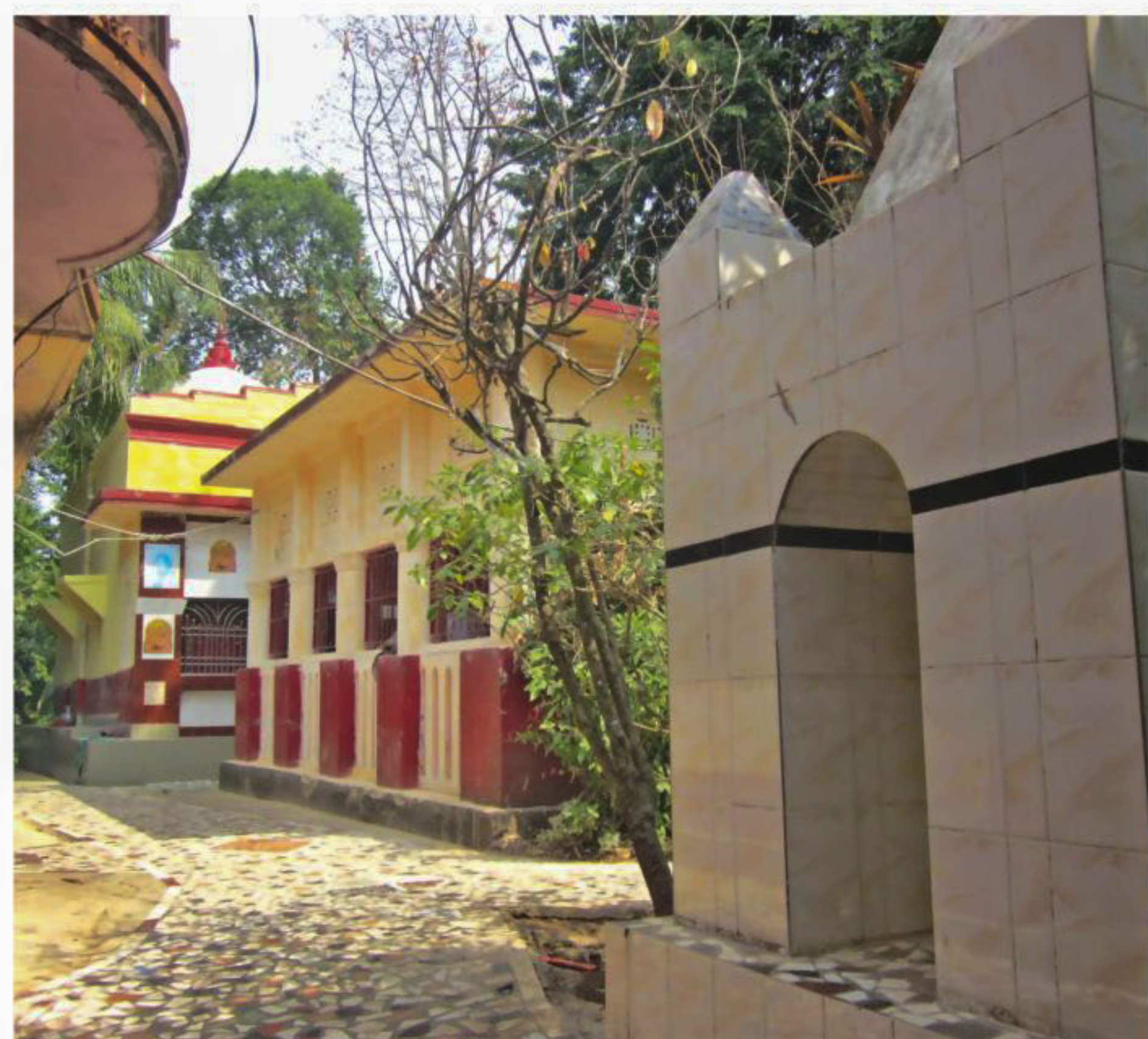


PHOTO: STAR

Adinath temple in Moheshkhali island of Cox's Bazar district is of special significance to the people of Nepal due to a spiritual connection widely believed by the Hindus.

began to instantaneously flow over the black stone. Only when the flow of milk stopped did the cow return to the cowshed.

Shikdar did not, however, believe the cowherd's narration of events; until he had a dream to tell Moheshkhali's Hindu zamindar landlord to build a temple at the site.

In a subsequent dream, in 1612, Shikdar was ordered to steal a protima statue of Lord Shiva from the Nepal State Temple to place on Mainak Hill. To complete the task he assigned one Naga Sannyasi who was, unfortunately, caught in the act. On the night before his trial however, the Sannyasi found favour with Lord Shiva who appeared before him, advising that he simply tell the truth and answer the judge's trial questions calmly.

On the following day the judge asked the colour of the protima. While the King of Nepal replied that the statue was a touchstone colour, the Sannyasi said it was white. As the latter answer was correct it was understood the Sannyasi had divine blessing in his task. As such, the Nepalese king asked forgiveness and on his own initiative arranged for the protima to be brought to Mainak and with due honour.

Since that time the Adinath Temple that has become an icon of Moheshkhali Island has been honoured by the Nepalese, with Nepal's government continuing the tradition of providing grants, including recently, according to locals, to construct the impressive jetty below the hill adjacent to the channel which provides

for easier temple access.

Pilgrims from near and far continue to seek out the temple every year, especially during the renowned two-week Shiva Choturadoshi festival each Falgun month, including pilgrims from Nepal. There it is common to tie string around tree branches in the temple grounds as a request for a blessing, with strings untied and puja performed once a divine blessing has been granted.

In recent days at Moheshkhali's Adinath it would be as well to offer a prayer for Nepal, to ask for the blessing of a speedy recovery from the recent earthquake devastation, at a Bangladeshi place that's spiritually connected to the Himalayan land. The strings of any such wish - let's hope they can be soon untied.

KOLA HIGH SCHOOL IN KALIGANJ OF JHENIDAH

Earthquake causes cracks in schoolhouse

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Jhenidah

The students of Kola High School in Kaliganj upazila under the district are attending classes under the trees on the adjacent ground as cracks have developed in the ceiling and pillars of the schoolhouse during the recent earthquakes.

The six-room building of the school was constructed during its establishment in 1961 with the initiative of the locals and 1200 students are currently enrolled there, sources said during this correspondent's visit to the school.

On March 14 last year, Kaliganj upazila engineer declared the building unusable due to its dilapidated condition but the school authorities continued conducting classes there due to lack of any alternative arrangement.

The recent earthquake caused cracks in the ceiling and pillar, making it all the more risky.

"I have arranged classes under the trees as the school building, with cracks on the ceiling and walls, remains highly vulnerable, especially if earthquake occurs again," said

Bijoy Biswas, headmaster of the school.

"I am now worried about smooth continuation of classes during the rainy season," he said.

Manowar Hossain

Mollah, upazila nirbahi officer of Kaliganj, said he has sent recommendations to the authorities concerned for construction of a new building for the school.



PHOTO: STAR

The recent earthquakes caused large cracks in the already dilapidated building of Kola High School in Kaliganj upazila under Jhenidah district, making it too risky to use.

Maulana Bhasani university in Tangail closed sine die

One killed as rival student groups clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Tangail

A student was killed and two others were injured in a clash between two rival groups on the Maulana Bhasani Science and Technology University campus yesterday.

The authorities declared the university closed for an indefinite period following the death of the student and asked the students to vacate the dormitories by 10:00am today.

The decision was taken in an urgent meeting chaired by Vice Chancellor Mohammad Alauddin at around 8:00pm, said Dr Khademul Islam, proctor of the university.

The deceased was identified as ASK Mosharrif, a

masters student of criminology and police science department, and a resident of Muktagachha in Mymensingh district.

The injured are Faisal Masud and Badhan, students of the university, said Pran Bandhu, sub-inspector of Tangail Model Police Station.

The clash took place between the two rival groups of students--one led by Monir and another by Mosharrif-- in the Cafeteria area at around 3:00pm over establishing supremacy on the campus. Two cocktails were also exploded during the incident.

The three sustained stab injuries during the clash, said campus sources.

They were admitted to

Tangail Medical College Hospital. Of them, Mosharrif and Masud were referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) in the capital as their condition deteriorated.

Being informed, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Mosharrif succumbed to his injuries on way to DMCH at 6:45pm, said the proctor.

Later, the law enforcers in a drive seized huge lethal weapons from three dormitories of the university.

Meanwhile, police arrested six young men following a clash between

two rival groups of youths in the district town on Tuesday night.

They also seized a foreign made pistol and four bullets from the spot, said SI Pran Bandhu.

The arrestees include Nahid and Munna of the area. Of them, Nahid was admitted to Tangail Medical College Hospital with bullet injuries.

The clash took place over establishing supremacy on Zila Sadar Road in the town, leaving two youths injured at around 10:30pm.

On information, police rushed to the spot and arrested six youths in connection with the incident.

Injured Nahid and Munna were admitted to the hospital, said police.

Toxic fumes from brick kiln damage paddy

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

Full grown paddies on nearly 100 acres of land have been damaged by the toxic gas emitted from a brick kiln in Chirirbandar upazila of the district.

According to the locals, a brick field named MSB Brick Field was set up at Dakkhin Nasratpur village in Chirirbandar upazila of Dinajpur four year ago. Since then, the brick kiln, which belongs to Md Mostafizur Rahman, has been emitting toxic gas.

Recently, the farmers of the area noticed that their paddy fields were burnt, and the yield of paddy had dropped significantly.

Kalachan, a farmer of the village, said he cultivated paddy on one bigha of land this year. But the paddy was damaged because of the toxic gas. Crop production is affected every year, but this year the situation is more critical, he added.

Toroni Kanto, another farmer, said nearly 10 tonnes of paddy have been damaged by the toxic gas. It has also affected production of other crops like mango, lychee, and vegetables.

"Every year I sell mango,

but this year I noticed that most mangoes had rotted on the trees because of the gas, which is sometimes difficult to inhale," said Kamala Kanta Roy of the same village.

Contacted, Biplob

Kumar Mohanta, an official in the Department of Agriculture Extension in Chirirbandar upazila, said he had visited the place recently. "The crops and seasonal fruits were damaged by the gas emitted by

the brick field," he said, adding that the affected area covers 100 acres approximately.

The official said he has informed his superior about the bad effect of the brick field.



PHOTO: STAR

Paddy gets damaged under the impact of a nearby brick kiln at Ghanatghar village in Chirirbandar upazila under Dinajpur district.