



PHOTO: STAR

Newly introduced eco-friendly bagging method to protect mangoes from the attack of pests and fungus has already attracted the growers of Chapainawabganj district. The photo was taken from the Regional Horticulture Research Station in Chapainawabganj a few days ago.

# Eco-friendly bagging method to save mangoes from pests

## C'nawabganj growers adopting the newly introduced system

RABIUL HASAN, Chapainawabganj

Environment-friendly fruit bagging method, seen as an effective alternative to the use of chemical pesticides in mango orchards, interests the growers in the district famous for quality mango production.

A good number of mango farmers are using the method this season, following its successful implementation at Regional Horticulture Research Station in Chapainawabganj last year, said scientific officers of the station.

The alternative method appears as a blessing against the backdrop of random use of pesticides and fungicides that threaten ecological balance and public health, they said.

Bagging prevents pests, especially fruit flies, from reaching and dam-

aging the mangoes and prevents latex burns and fungal spots on the fruits.

Cheaper and safer, the method also gives a more reliable estimate of the projected harvest, they said.

"By protecting the mangoes from diseases and pests, the method will boost the production of high quality exportable mangoes. It will also provide physical protection from scratches and scars, making the mangoes spotless," said Dr Sorof Uddin, senior scientific officer of the research station.

When the mangoes reach 40 to 55 days, each fruit is bagged and remains so till the harvest. No additional pesticide sprays are needed once the bags are put on the fruits.

While mango growers usually spray pesticides 20 to 30 times in their orchards, they will need only

two to three times spraying of the items at the early stages of fruiting if bagging method is used.

All the leading mango-producing countries are using the environment-friendly process that also helps better yield, said Dr Shafiqul Islam, chief scientific officer of the research station.

Rabiul Islam, a resident of Sonar More in the town, said he procured 30 thousand specialised bags from China and sold it to the growers for Tk 4 or 5 each.

"Many other mango growers have expressed interest to get it but my stock has finished by now," he said.

Rafiqul Islam, an orchard owner of Palsha area of Sadar upazila, said he stopped spraying chemical pesticides after bagging the fruits for the first time this year.

Mangoes are the most important agricultural product in the area that has a long tradition of producing around 350 varieties of the fruit, said scientists and agriculture officials.

A large number of people are engaged in different jobs, from nursing to harvesting and packing, during the mango season every year.

There are 19 lakh mango trees on 24,260 hectares of land in the district and around 2.50 lakh tonnes of mangoes is expected to be produced this season, if weather remains favourable, said Saiful Islam, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension, Chapainawabganj.

The area of mango cultivation and the number of trees in the district see a gradual increase.

# Lovers of Moheshkhali betel

BY ANDREW EAGLE

Do you hear the harmonium start to turn its churning phrase? The folk song voice of late Shefali Ghosh isn't far off. On the subject of betel, Moheshkhali's paan, she's got something to say.

But first let's meet Jamal Hossein, 25, a betel seller in Gorakghata. A few shreds of areca nut with a dollop of builder's lime, chun, on the side: he keeps it simple. With adept fingers he folds the paan khili into its usual conical package. Hey presto! It's ready.

Abu Taher's already chewing. The 40-year-old Chittagong truck driver carts cement to Moheshkhali, six-hours each way. He knows to savour a paan before heading home. "You can't get paan like this elsewhere," he says. "The soil is honey; Moheshkhali's paan is sweet."

"If I come across a beautiful face; if I come across a new face... I'll make for him a Moheshkhali paan-khili to chew," sings Ghosh, the queen of Chittagonian folk music who started her career at age seven and was famed for dramatic on-stage presentation of songs. For her, Moheshkhali paan meant love.

But for 28-year-old Rokshana Aktar it's more about livelihood. At home in Choto Moheshkhali Union she mixes fertilizer and organises accounts for the family's paan garden, tasks she can complete without leaving home. "Harvest begins after one month," she knows. First the stick and straw barouj, the paan's shade house is constructed, often in tight valleys or on slopes of Moheshkhali's otherwise-difficult-to-farm hills.

"Insects are the biggest risk," she says. "If they attack the whole plant dies."

The days of winter to early spring are most profitable, when betel leaf supply is less and prices rise. During the monsoon months the opposite applies. Yet harvest runs all year. "To invest 1 lakh taka is to get 2 lakhs," Aktar knows.

As for its taste: "If you try it, you'll like it. Other betel is tart."

Four leaves make one gonta, 80 gontas make one birra and one birra sells for between 150 - 300 taka: the sums one needs to know in the betel game, at the paan market Tuesdays and Fridays in Boro Moheshkhali's Notun Bazar.

Mohammed Zakaria, 35, is often there, he says, explaining his barouj is the size of Jamal's tea shop. He also speculates. "I feel the weight," he says of choosing betel to buy in the hope of higher resale minutes later. "One birra can weigh a

kilogram though it's usually less than 400 grams."

"Moheshkhali paan tastes good because of the soil," he surmises.

Also in the tea shop is 37-year-old Sultan Mohammed Khan. A landlord, he leases out family land on a fifty-fifty share basis to salt producers and shrimp farmers. And he enjoys paan. "Moheshkhali's paan has heavy taste!"

Khan has travelled. He's been to all but 17 districts of Bangladesh, he claims, and in 1994 ventured as far as Kolkata book fair.

"Our paan is more nutritious and tastier," Khan opines. "In other districts it's bitter."

As for Indian paan he's less impressed. "It looks nice," he recalls, "but the taste isn't so good."

Meanwhile Jamal is explaining that not all Moheshkhali paan is the same. "The paan from older, hillside gardens is the best," he says, "Paan from newer gardens is slightly less tasty."

Ghosh's voice is fading now, her recorded song almost done. Yet, whether it's for livelihood or speculation; as a truck stop treat or for landlord's leisure; whether old hillside or new garden, in Moheshkhali's distinctively sweet paan flavour you might just find a hint of Ghosh's immortal tones, of love's serenade, thrown into the bargain.



PHOTO: STAR

The famous local variety betel is on sale at Natun Bazar in Boro Moheshkhali under Cox's Bazar district.



PHOTO: STAR

Students of Hapania Government Primary School in Atghoria upazila under Pabna district attend classes under the open sky as the schoolhouse developed cracks under the impact of the recent Himalayan earthquakes that also jolted most of the country.

## IMPACT OF RECENT EARTHQUAKES

# Classes hampered as 61 primary schools in Pabna damaged

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR  
TOPU, Pabna

The recent earthquakes damaged 61 primary schools in nine upazilas of the district, affecting classes of over 12 thousand children.

"Departmental inquiries, following the earthquakes on April 25 and 26 and May 12, found 61 out of 1124 primary school buildings in the district damaged. Of them, roofs of two buildings collapsed while cracks developed in others," said

Md Abdul Salam, district primary education officer.

"Classes of over 12 thousand students are affected due to the situation. We have managed temporary tin-sheds for eight schools while the students of other schools are attending classes either in the damaged buildings or in the school fields," he said.

"Most of the affected buildings were constructed in the 90s but they got damaged within 20 years. The government authorities are yet to allocate fund for

repair of the affected schools," he said.

Visiting Hapania Government Primary School in Atghoria upazila on Thursday, this correspondent found over 100 students reading under the open sky in the school ground.

"We are holding classes in the field for the last three weeks as cracks developed in the classrooms," said Md Abdus Salam, headmaster of the school.

Similar condition was found in Raghunathpur

Government Primary School in Atghoria upazila.

Fourteen schools in Pabna Sadar upazila, seven schools in Sujanagar upazila, eight in Chatmohar upazila, nine in Santhia upazila, two in Ishwardi upazila, five in Bera upazila, four in Faridpur upazila, eight in Atghoria upazila and four schools in Bhangura upazila under the district were damaged and declared risky, said sources at the District Primary Education Office.

## 2 housewives murdered for dowry

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Two housewives were killed allegedly by their husbands for dowry in Jessore and Netrakona districts on Tuesday.

Our Benapole correspondent reported that a woman was strangled allegedly by her husband for dowry at Lalitadah village in Jessore Sadar upazila.

The deceased was identified as Pervin Akhter, 23, wife of Harun-ur-Rashid of the village.

Pervin's father Mohammad Ali said Harun often tortured his daughter for Tk one lakh dowry since their marriage five years back.

On Tuesday evening, Harun and his family members strangled Pervin following an altercation over the issue, he alleged.

On information, police rushed to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to Jessore Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The victim's father filed a case with Kotwali Police Station against four people including Harun.

In Netrakona, a housewife was killed allegedly by her husband over dowry at Purba Malni Guchchhagram in Sadar upazila the same day, reports our correspondent.

The deceased was identified as Rahima Khatun, 19, wife of a hotel boy, Sagar of the area.

On Tuesday night, Sagar and his family members beat up Rahima mercilessly, leaving her dead on the spot and later hanged the body from a tree behind their house to pass it off as a suicide, she alleged.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

## 10 hurt as robbers open fire on villagers

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Noakhali

At least 10 people were injured as robbers opened fire on villagers at Lamchar Bazar in Ramganj upazila of Laxmipur district on Tuesday night.

The injured were admitted to Ramganj Upazila Health Complex with bullet injuries. Some of them were referred to Dhaka and Noakhali for better treatment.

Police and locals said a gang of 10/12 robbers arrived in the bazaar in a microbus at around 11:00pm. As locals tried to resist the robbers, they opened fire, leaving at least 10 people injured with bullets.

On information, police rushed to the spot, sensing the presence

of the law enforcers.

Police have been deployed at the bazaar, said Lokman Hossain, officer-in-charge of Ramganj Police Station.

In Jhenidah, robbers looted valuables worth about Tk 2 lakh from the house of a Saudi expatriate at Holidhani village in Sadar upazila early yesterday, reports our correspondent.

Police said a gang of 12/15 stormed the house of Rafikul Islam, 28, at around 1:30am and took away a tab, an air ticket and mobile phones.

Four family members were injured when they tried to resist the robbers.

Later, police in a drive arrested a trucker named Shariful Islam of the village for his alleged involvement in the incident, said OC

Biplob Kumar Nath of Sadar Police Station.

Our Manikganj correspondent adds: An alleged robber was beaten up at Balur Char village under Singair upazila early yesterday.

The victim was identified as Nurul Islam, 50, son of Javed Ali of Rajapur village in Bhuapur upazila of Tangail district.

Sub-inspector Shah Alam of Singair Police Station said a gang of robbers entered the house of one Selim Hossain of the village at around 3:00am. As the family members cried out for help, locals rushed in and caught Nurul while the rest managed to flee.

They beat up the robber mercilessly and later handed him over to the police.



PHOTO: STAR

The local administration arranges a public hearing from the torture victim Hindu community people of Paulpara in Aria union of Shajahanpur upazila under Bogra district on Tuesday. The main accused in the case for extortion and torture on the minority people on April 29, Morshed along with a few of his accomplices are now under arrest.