



Jute plants at a field at Roghunathpur village in Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah are about to die due to scorching heat and lack of rainwater.

# Jute plants in Jhenidah dying due to scanty rain

PHOTO: STAR

Upazila-wise, Jhenidah Sadar, Shailkupa, Harinakundo, Moheshpur, Kotchandpur and Kaliganj upazila have 3554, 2900, 3660, 3190, 3350 and 3666 hectares of land under jute cultivation this season. At least 30/40 millimetres of rainfall is needed for smooth growth of crops like jute and sugarcane but there is very little rain this month, Chuadanga weather office sources said.

Around 70,000 jute growers in the district are worried as scorching summer heat amid lack of sufficient rain badly affects the plants. Farmers cultivated jute on 20,320 hectares of land in six upazilas of the district against the target of 19,811 hectares this season, said sources at the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), Jhenidah.

"I have cultivated jute on three bighas of land spending Tk 33,000 this season. But the plants are about to die due to lack of rain water," said Younus Ali of Roghunathpur village under Kaliganj upazila. Hafizur Rahman of Chandpara village under Kotchandpur upazila said he has cultivated jute on 40 decimals at a cost of Tk 16,000 and had to borrow from an NGO for the purpose.

He is now worried about repayment of the loan as the jute plants are getting damaged due to scorching heat of the sun. Several others including Nurul Islam, Nazrul Islam, Alamgir Hossain are also in the same boat. Shah Mohammad Akramul Haq, deputy director of DAE in Jhenidah, said jute farmers will incur huge losses if it does not rain within a few days.

# Moheshkhali's money in the ground

ANDREW EAGLE

In the fields at Tajiakata of Moheshkhali's Kutubjom Union they're lifting water, bucket by bucket. The crisscross channels are hand dug to entice a little of the sea inland. Seawater is being lifted, litre by litre, to the first of four shallow tanks carved in the ground. Even in the morning the sun is fire, but then they're counting on evaporation. When labourers sweat, sweat is salty. It's a semi-lunar landscape, yellow and brown, treeless and arid. It's a shallow water-trough landscape of salt heaps. Leaving his nearby home at some minutes before 7:00am, Abdus Salam, 34, will soon be there. For eighteen years he's been harvesting salt. "Water collection is the most difficult task," he says. For Salam, salt is a livelihood; but salt is also much more.



PHOTO: STAR

Three people are harvesting salt from fields at Tajiakat of Moheshkhali's Kutubjom union. The island accounts for the majority of the salt produced for domestic consumption.

harbinger of coming freedom. Salt taxes also encouraged the French Revolution and paid for Columbus to sail to the New World. At a time when half of China's revenue came from salt, a Great Wall was made. At the centre of human civilisation you'll find salt. Aztec mythology meanwhile includes Huixtocihuatl, goddess of fertility who presided over salt and saltwater. In Hinduism, auspicious salt is used in housewarmings and weddings. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in a hadith recorded in Sunan Ibn Majah reportedly said, "Salt is the master of your food. God sent down four blessings from the sky: fire, water, iron and salt." But Salam's talk is not of this. He explains that older water will drain through adjoining, ever shallower troughs. He knows evaporation will take to its task. In the final polythene-lined tank after about a week, salt crystals awaiting collection shall sparkle, says he. Salt is

brilliance in its simplicity. He predicts merchants will buy direct from his field. He understands that if he needs to store salt when the monsoon arrives he can bury it, wrapped in polythene, underground. "There's money in the ground," say the people of Moheshkhali. Salt is also a budget. From 5 kanies of land leased for upwards of 40,000 taka Salam calculates that with two labourers employed he can produce 300 maunds of salt per kanie during the January to April season. He'll need 100 pounds of polythene for one kanie at 75 taka per pound. There are contingencies to account for: a falling price caused by transport disruption and late winter fogs that bring moisture to undo the sun's work in salt's disheartening dissolution. Moheshkhali produces the largest portion of salt to meet domestic demand. Salt farming of about 19,000 acres enlists some degree of participation from most of the island's three lac popu-

lation. Yet, ironically, the Bay of Bengal is best suited for salt. While averaging 3.5% salinity, the world's seas are not equally saline. Of open seas, the Red Sea is considered the saltiest at 4%, due to a lack of rain and river inflow, and because of its narrow connection to the less saline Indian Ocean. Enclosed water bodies can be much saltier still, like the Dead Sea with 34.2% salinity. The Yellow, Baltic and Black seas by contrast, like the Bay of Bengal, hold below-average salt content. Salam can't consider seawater but he does consider land. Sandy soils are not much good, where absorption is high. Suitable land produces salt more quickly, of higher quality. As the word 'salary' shares its Latin root with salt: either money to buy salt or payment in salt, it's easy to conclude that Salam has it right... Salt means food on a table and a family fed.

## Youth stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Criminals stabbed a young man to death in broad daylight in Jhoggari area of Bogra Sadar upazila yesterday. The deceased, Jahidur Rahman alias Jamjam, 25, son of Mujibur Rahman of Shikarpur village in the upazila, was a mechanic at a welding shop in the town. Quoting locals, police said a gang of 5/6 youths waylaid Jamjam while he was returning home from his in-law's house at Karnapur village in the upazila around 9:30am. They stabbed him indiscriminately and fled the scene, leaving him critically injured. Locals rescued Jamjam, took him to Bogra Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital. He died at the hospital around 10:00am. Contacted, Aslam Hossain, sub-inspector of Sadar Police Station, said the victim might have been killed over previous enmity.

## Pistol, bullets seized in Shibganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized a pistol, seven bullets and two magazines from Kotapara ghat area at Wahedpue village in Shibganj upazila of the district yesterday. None was arrested in this connection, said Major Minnat Ali, operation officer of BGB-9 Battalion. On secret information, the border guards raided the area and seized the firearm and bullets at 5:45am. The seized pistol and bullets were later handed over to Shibganj Police Station.

## Schoolboy electrocuted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A school boy was electrocuted in Sadar upazila of the district yesterday afternoon. The deceased was identified as Rohan Mian, 12, son of Abul Kashem Mian of Shilmandi village. He was a student of Class VI of Baghata Nur Aftab High School. Witnesses said Rohan, like every other day, attended classes in the morning. At around 11:30am, Rohan climbed a tree to catch a bird and came in contact with a live electric wire and fell to the ground. He died instantly. An unnatural death (UD) case was file with Narsingdi Sadar Police Station.

## Retd cop beaten to death in Rajbari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishitia

A retired police man was killed by unidentified criminals in Pangsha upazila of Rajbari district on Tuesday. The deceased, Pritesh Kumar Sarkar, 60, of Hosaindanga village was a writer at Pangsha Police Station. A gang of 4/5 unidentified people called Pritesh out of his house around 9:30pm and took him to a nearby field. They beat him up mercilessly with sticks and iron rod and left the scene, Abu Shama Iqbal Hayat, officer-in-charge of Pangsha Police Station, said, quoting victim's family members. Hearing screams, villagers went to the spot, rescued Pritesh and took him to Pangsha Upazila Health Complex. He was later shifted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital where he died around 11:30pm. Police are trying to unearth clue to the murder and arrest the killers, the

# Roadside trees felled by BCL men in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Roadside trees have been felled allegedly by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men at Kulaghat on Lalmonirhat-Fulbari Road and at Mogholhat on Mogholhat-Etapota road under Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila in the last three days. Locals said they did not dare protest against illegal felling of the trees, fearing harassment. A group of local BCL men felled at least eight big trees in Mogholhat area and at least three big trees in

Kulaghat area during the period, they said, adding that all the trees were live and had not been auctioned off. Seeking anonymity, an official of Lalmonirhat District Council said some people belonging to the ruling party cut down the roadside trees with the support of District Council administrator Advocate Matiur Rahman, but the district council had not held any auction for felling the trees. Contacted, one of the alleged tree fellers, Mizanur Rahman Mantu,

ex-president of Kulaghat union Chhatra League, said he cut down a roadside tree as he got the bid for Tk 27,000 a month back. "I felled the auctioned tree one month later because the District Council did not give me clearance in due time," he claimed. However, Mohammad Ali, acting chief executive officer of the District Council, said he was not aware of the matter as he joined the office a few days ago. He will look into it and then take necessary steps in this regard, he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Logs of a tree, allegedly felled by BCL men, lie on Lalmonirhat-Phulbari road at Kulaghat under Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

# Jubo League infighting leaves 10 injured in Sunamganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

At least 10 people were injured in a clash between two factions of Jubo League at Gunghiargaon bazar under Shalla upazila of Sunamganj district Tuesday evening. Two seriously injured people were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani

Medical College, while the rest to Shalla Health Complex and Sunamganj Sadar Hospital. Locals said the clash took place between the supporters of local Jubo League leaders Tokbir Miah and Md Habibur Rahman over control of the area. Both sides equipped with iron rods, hockey sticks,

bamboos and sharp weapons locked in the clash at the bazar around 7:30pm. Police dispersed the clashing groups, firing rubber bullets and tear gas shells. Md Jintul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shalla Police Station, said police have been deployed in the area to avert further clash.

# Grabber builds house on school playground

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A land grabber has occupied a portion of the ground of Harinabari Government Primary School in Palashbari upazila under the district and built a house there, creating hindrance to children's playing and other school events. "One morning two weeks ago, we saw that someone had erected a house on the school playground, but nobody dared protest the

illegal act," said Ashraf Mia, a local guardian. As the house is in the middle of the playground, students cannot play or perform physical exercise there, locals said. At present Headmaster Shadiduzzaman is struggling to conduct all the classes of the school alongside his official duties as two of the five teaching posts there are vacant, a teacher is on medical leave and another on maternity leave.

Contacted, the headmaster said, "Two weeks ago, someone erected a house on the school ground at night. I have informed the higher authorities, requesting steps to remove the illegal structure from the school ground." Admitting the matter, Palashbari Upazila Primary Education Officer Arif Ahmed said steps are being taken to remove the illegally built house from the school ground.



PHOTO: STAR

A house has been erected on the playground of Harinabari Government Primary School in Palashbari upazila of Gaibandha.