

# Jackfruit yield aplenty, but scant profit for farmers

SHYKH SERAJ

Alongside the road from Bhaluka in Mymensingh to Tangail are many jackfruit orchards and, as at a few days ago, there were thousands of ripe jackfruits on the trees. Although the fruit is ready for harvest, growers are not proceeding due to low market prices.

I stopped at one village, Meduari, to speak to farmer Nurul Islam who has thirty-five jackfruit trees in his orchard. He believes there are at least a thousand jackfruits on his trees, which could give him a harvest that is double the size of last year's. Yet while last year he earned a tidy sum from selling his approximately 500 jackfruits, selling double that number this year will not even achieve the same.

"We're facing difficulties," says Islam. "The market price was Tk. 5 per jackfruit last year but now it's only Tk. 2."

Sirajul Islam is a local wholesaler who, like many, manages a pile of jackfruits on a nearby roadside, to be sold to traders for transportation to markets. "The price is much lower than in past years," he agrees, "I bought these jackfruits at different prices but now I can hardly sell them."

The scene was similarly dire at Tangail's Garo Bazaar where jackfruits arrive on vans and by cycle. While the market was full of jackfruit as to be expected, it seemed there were no traders or wholesalers to buy them. Eventually I found one, Chand Mahmud. "Have

you ever seen the market so depressed?" I asked.

"No," he said, "Never in my life." When asked the reason for the price fall, Mahmud suggests that due to fasting and the hot weather the public is not encouraged to buy.

Anecdotal, low prices may be due to oversupply with many new orchards having been planted, while householders now commonly grow jackfruit trees at home to supply family needs.

Also, while jackfruit was once staple fare, nowadays it is less so. One trader suggests only those who have migrated to Dhaka from other districts are fond of eating jackfruit.

Another local fruit grower Moniruddin has arrived at the market with 36 jackfruits on two cycles. The price of his crop will be Tk. 360, only Tk 10 each: quite astounding when one recalls the markets of Birmingham in the UK where jackfruits are sold by weight at prices unimaginable to our orchardists.

Indeed, a decade ago in England I asked a grocer from where they imported their jackfruits. "From Bangladesh," he replied, while a person beside us disputed the fact and suggested they came from Sri Lanka. When, with a heavy, large jackfruit in hand I asked another fruiterer he said, "It's from Malaysia and costs 60 pounds." Dear readers, that's over Tk. 7,000!

Sazzad, another local from Garo Bazaar offers an agreeable explanation for a

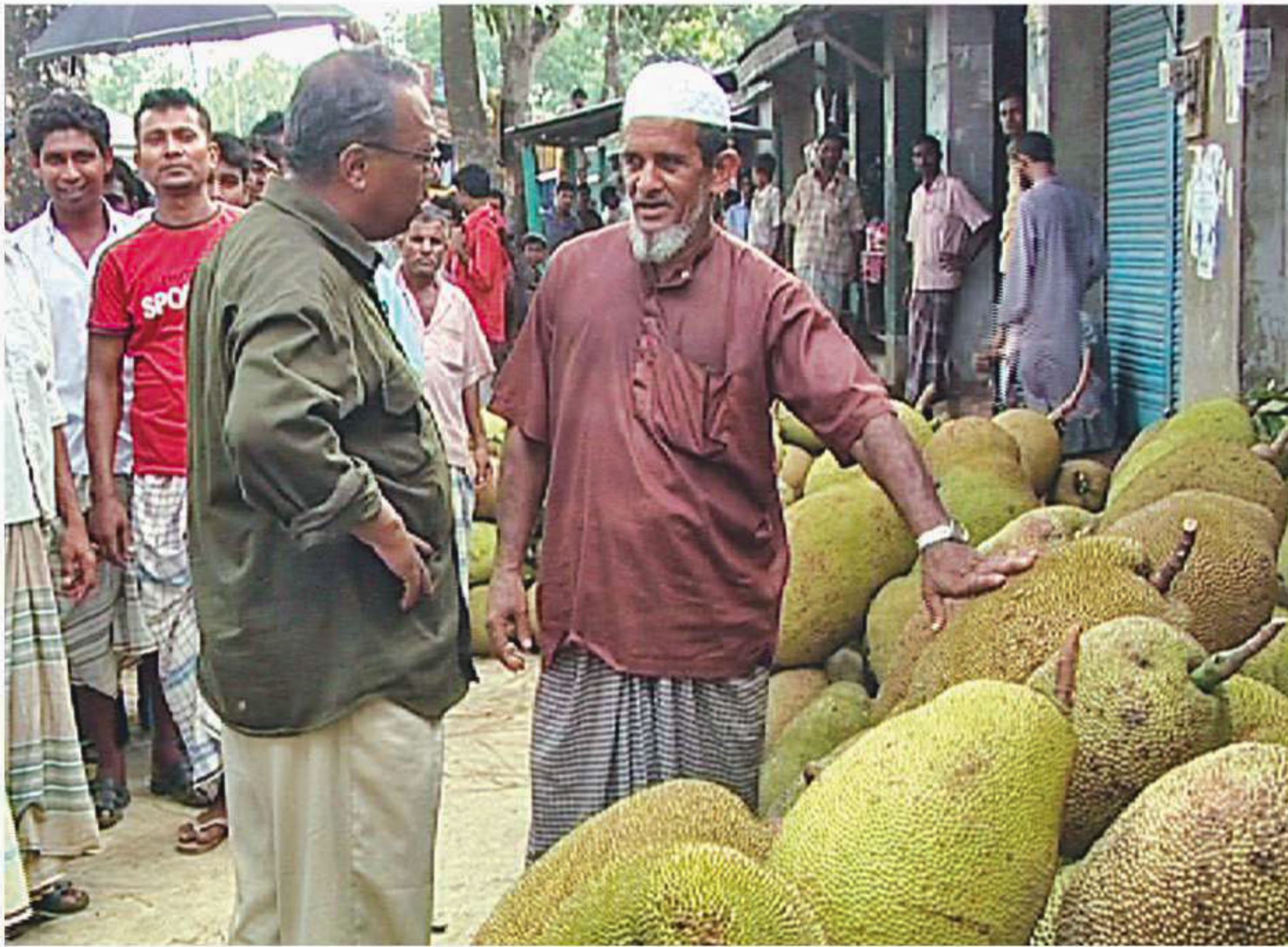


PHOTO: STAR

Media and agriculture development activist Shykh Seraj talks to a jackfruit trader at a village in Tangail district.

lack of buyers. "Some wholesalers inject chemicals in the fruit at the beginning of the season. When customers eat them they find no taste. It no longer appeals," he says. He also suggests that without preservation facilities available, a jackfruit processing plant would help.

In addition, according to Sazzad the body is heated when jackfruit is consumed and stomach acidity rises. He believes many are abstaining from jackfruit to avoid these symptoms.

In Madhupur's Mashimara village, another jackfruit growing area, the situation is similarly bleak. Farmer Abdur Rashid adds insect attack as a further hazard facing the industry. "We're facing diseases that leave holes in the body of the fruit and red juice to seep out following insect

attack."

Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer Ershad Ali names an insect called majra, the jackfruit borer, as the culprit. He says that with rain water can enter the insect holes and rot the fruit from inside. Diazinon and Verison insecticides prevent attack, he advises.

Jackfruit is our national fruit. It'd be nice to see it used more broadly in jelly, jam, drinks and candy; and properly kept in cold storage warehouses so the public can enjoy jackfruit year-round while at the same time, orchardists can again earn a decent livelihood.



Shykh Seraj is a Media and Agriculture Development Activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and recipient of Ekushey Padak, FAO A.H. Boerma Award and many other prestigious accolades. At Channel i, he is Director and Head of News. He is also Director and Host of the popular agro-documentary, "Hridoye Mati O Manush".

# Fishermen, traders happy as hilsa abundant in Bay

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Plenty of hilsa fish is being netted for the last several days in Patuakhali and Barguna districts, much to the happiness of fishermen and traders.

"Now we are very busy unloading trawlers coming from the Bay with hilsa for the first time in this season," said Abdus Salam, a fisherman of Bangladesh Fish Development Corporation at Pathorghata in Barguna

district during this correspondent's visit to the spot on Saturday.

"Earlier we were frustrated due to unavailability of hilsa for long but now all including fishermen, trawler owners, traders, transport workers are happy as they are getting the opportunity to earn ahead of Eid," said Md Humayun, a fisherman.

Md Salim Akon, owner of a trawler, said hilsa has become available as there

is heavy rainfall in the coastal areas for a couple of weeks.

"My fishermen caught around 9,000 hilsa fishes and it will be sold for Tk 18 lakh at the minimum," said Md Afzal, another trawler owner.

Buyers from different areas across the country including Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Bogra and others places are coming to fish landing stations in Patuakhali and Barguna

districts.

Now hilsa is selling for Tk 20,000 to 30,000 per maund, depending on its size.

Fishermen, traders, and transport workers are happy as they are getting plenty of hilsa for a few days, said Ansar Mollah, president of fish traders association in Mohipur, a famous fish landing station in Kalapara upazila under Patuakhali district.



PHOTO: STAR

Patharghata fish landing station in Barguna district buzzes with activities as trawlers with huge quantities of hilsa from the Bay are arriving there for the last several days. Inset, a fish warehouse at Patharghata.

## ACID ATTACK

### Couple suffer burn injuries in Comilla

UNB, Comilla

A man and his wife received serious burn injuries as criminals threw acid on them at Bhati Basania village in Homna upazila of the district early yesterday.

The injured are Parimal Chakraborty, 40, a jeweler, and his wife Bishnu Chakraborty, 32, of the village.

Locals said an unidentified gang stormed Parimal's house, breaking open the window and hurled acid on them around 1:30am as they were asleep.

Hearing screams, neighbours rushed in and took the couple to Homna Upazila Health Complex. The victims were later shifted to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Kamruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Homna Police Station, said they are trying to unearth due to the incident.

### Lightning kills 3 in Sunamganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Three people were killed by lightning at Rafinagar village under Dirai upazila of Sunamganj district yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Mizan, 30, son of Nohali of Rafinagar village, Mokaim, 25, son of Abdul Quadir, and Abdullah, 20, son of Firoz Ali, of Sadipur village.

Locals said the three were struck by thunderbolts while fishing at Nichhonpur and Noagaon haor areas at around 10:00am and died instantly.

## CLASH WITH BCL

### 19 Jamaat-Shibir men sued in Nilphamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Nineteen Jamaat and Shibir men were sued yesterday following a clash with the local activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League in Dimla upazila town of the district on Monday.

The upazila unit BCL filed the case with Dimla Police Station, said Officer-in-Charge Ruhul Amin Khan.

They also arrested an accused, Opiar Rahman, president of the upazila unit of Shibir, he said.

Police and locals said at least six people were injured in a clash between the activists of BCL and Shibir in the area on Monday noon.

The injured include BCL activists Saiful Islam, 25,

Faridul Islam, 23, Masud Rana, 24, and Faruk Hossain, 22.

The clash took place when Shibir activists attacked local BCL activists from a procession in the area, alleged Uttam Kumar Roy, general secretary of Dimla upazila unit of BCL.

They brought out a victory procession following release of Abdus Sattar, ameer of the upazila unit of Jamaat, an accused in arson case, he said.

Sattar was released on bail in the case on Monday after staying in the district jail for over two months.

Contacted, Jamaat upazila ameer Sattar refuted the allegation of attacking the BCL activists.

## BCL leader murdered in Rajbari, one held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kustia

Criminals killed a local leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in Goalanda upazila of Rajbari district on Monday night.

The deceased is Jahangir Hossain, 25, vice president of Goalanda municipality unit of BCL, and a resident of Keutilla village.

Police said a gang of 7/8 equipped with sharp weapons attacked Jahnagir in front of Kamrul Islam Degree College in the area, leaving him critically injured while he was returning home.

He was rushed to the

upazila health complex and then shifted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital as his condition deteriorated.

He succumbed to his injuries at the hospital around 11:30pm, said Nasir Ullah, officer-in-charge of Goalanda Police Station.

Police arrested one Manjur Alam Akash, organising secretary of the unit, for his alleged involvement in the killing, he said.

Jahangir might have been killed by his party rivals, said the OC, adding that police are raiding different areas to arrest the other accused.



PHOTO: STAR

Cattle farmers of Teesta River basin areas in Sundarganj upazila under Gaibandha district collect straw from distant areas as massive flooding caused fodder crisis during the ongoing monsoon.

## Fodder crisis acute in Teesta char areas

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Farmers of char lands in Teesta River basin under Sundarganj upazila are facing acute fodder shortage as their stock has been washed away by recent flood.

"It has become difficult to feed the cattle without fodder. Grazing fields in char lands are still under water and the grass has become rotten due to the

stagnant water," said Solaiman Ali, a resident of Tarapur char.

Farmers have to go by boat to distant areas for buying fodder at high price. A maund of straw costs Tk 300 including boat fare, while it was Tk 150 per maund earlier. Poor farmers cannot afford to buy fodder at high price, said local people.

"We are in a difficult situation because of the

additional expenditure for bringing fodder from distant areas," said Yusuf Ali, a straw trader of Sundarganj bazar.

In the rainy season it is not possible for cattle to graze in the fields because the lands go under water, said Nurul Mia of char Kapasia.

Because of high price of fodder many poor farmers are compelled to sell their cattle at low price, he added.

## Muktagachha UZ chairman suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The chairman of Muktagachha Upazila Parishad has been suspended as he is a charge-sheeted accused in a case filed with Muktagachha Police Station two years ago.

The case was filed against chairman Md Zakaria Harun under the Speedy Trial Act in 2013, said police.

Yesterday, Harun, secretary of the upazila unit of BNP and joint secretary of Mymensingh its (South) unit, received the

suspension letter, issued by Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) on June 30, said party sources.

The LGRD issued the order of his suspension after a Mymensingh court recently accepted the charge sheet submitted against Harun, said Upazila Nirbahi Officer Dr Umme Afsari Johra.

Contacted, Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Muktagachha Police Station, said Harun is an accused in four cases filed under the Speedy Trial Act and Special Powers Act.