



A jujube grower tends his orchard at Uttar Saptana village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

# Lalmonirhat jujube growers upset over low prices

The fruit selling below production cost

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

In Lalmonirhat, over a thousand growers of jujube, a small fruit known locally as boroi, are upset over the low prices of the fruit this year. They have to sell the produce for less than the production cost in the local market, resulting in their losing interest in farming the fruit in future, growers said.

Now one kg of jujube is being sold at Tk 25-Tk 30 in the retail market, but the growers sell it at Tk 17-Tk 19 to middlemen. Last year, the price was Tk 30-Tk 32 per kg.

Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) sources said there are about 500 jujube orchards on 2,000 bighas of land in five upazilas of the district,

while there were only 200 three years ago. Farmers became interested in growing jujube because they used to get windfall profits from selling this fruit until this season, they added.

Shahidur Rahman, 50, a farmer at Karnapur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, said he and two other farmers of the village prepared a jujube orchard on eight bighas of land four years ago. "We were interested in farming jujube as we got good prices for the fruit over the last few years," he said.

Rafique Miah, 45, a jujube grower from Khorarpul village in the upazila, said they spent Tk 20-Tk 22 for producing one kg of jujube due to increases in labour costs and a rise in the prices of pesticides. "I

got only Tk 45 thousand from selling jujube from my two bighas of land, but last year I earned Tk 70 thousand from the same orchard," he said, adding that he is facing a loss this year.

Mohor Ali, 55, a farmer from Kakina village of Kaliganj upazila, said he prepared two orchards on 8 bighas of land for farming jujube, taking a loan from a local NGO, in the hope of earning a handsome profit from selling jujube this year, but his hopes were dashed. "I got only Tk 60 thousand this year, and I may get Tk one lakh more by selling all the jujubes in my two orchards, but I have spent Tk two lakh," he said.

Fruit trader Nasir Uddin, 48, at Mogholhat Gate in

Lalmonirhat town, said jujubes are being sold at low prices due to a huge supply but few customers. "We sent large quantity of jujubes to Dhaka last year, but we are not getting merchants from the capital this year," he said.

Another fruit trader Rashedul Islam of College Road in the town, said "We have loaned money to the jujube growers, but now we don't know how we will get back our investment," he added.

Enamul Haque, agriculture officer of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, said there is huge supply in the local market this year due to bumper production of jujube, so growers are getting lower prices for the fruit.



Students of Satura Government Primary School in Kotchandpur upazila under Jhenidah district attend classes under the open sky as their schoolhouse was declared abandoned three years ago.

# Classes disturbed as 9 school buildings unusable for 3 yrs

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Students of nine government primary schools in four of six Jhenidah's upazilas are facing trouble attending classes as school buildings were declared abandoned three years ago.

The schools are Bagutia government primary school under Sadar upazila, Dakatia primary school, Sheba Shangho primary school, Purba Rangierpota primary school, Arpara primary school, Jargram-Rautail primary school, Pruba-Basantapur primary school under Shailakupa upazila, Neamotpur primary school under Kaliganj upazila and Sarutia primary school under Kotchandpur upazila of the district.

Classes in these schools are being held in the open

and in makeshift huts. The students are compelled to attend classes regardless of harsh sun or wet weather.

Teachers said the number of students in these schools is decreasing because guardians are admitting their children to other schools. If this goes on, there will be no students in the affected schools next year.

Jhenidah District Primary Education Office sources said after the collapse of Rana Plaza an inquiry team consisting of officials of LGED and the Education Office visited different schools in the district. At the time they declared the nine school buildings abandoned. They were served notice not to take classes in the risky buildings.

Visiting Dakatia govern-

ment primary school, this correspondent found that the classes of Class III are being held on the school ground, and classes of Classes IV and V are being held in a makeshift hut.

Headmistress Momtaj Khatun said the school was established in 1974. A building consisting of four rooms was built in 1994/95 financial year. They held classes in that building until the enquiry team declared it abandoned on May, 12, 2013. Two years ago, the headmistress erected a makeshift structure consisting of three rooms, but it has already become dilapidated.

She added that there were 154 students in 2013, 108 in 2014 and only 87 in 2015. There is no sitting capacity in the school. She said chil-

dren will not take admission next year if a building is not built soon.

Headmaster Ruhuzzel Hossain of Sarutia government primary school under Kotchandpur upazila said the school was established in 1970 and a building was built in 1994-95 financial year. The students have been facing many problems since it was declared abandoned in 2013. Locals erected a tin shed, but it is already broken.

The UNOs of the upazilas concerned said they have submitted a letter to the authorities, and they expect new buildings will be sanctioned soon.

Md Ataur Rahman, district primary education officer of Jhenidah, said it will take some time to sanction the new buildings.

# Cattle trader shot dead by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shot dead a Bangladeshi cattle trader near Johorpur border in Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The deceased is Benjir Hossain, 22, son of Budhu Mia of Gaipara village in Shibganj upazila.

Lt Col Junaid Alam Khan, commanding officer (CO) of Chapainawabganj BGB 9 Battalion, said Benjir along with a group of cattle traders entered the Indian territory through the border point to bring cattle around 12:00am.

Sensing their presence, a patrol team of the Indian border guards from Chandnichawk camp opened fire on the cattle traders, leaving Benjir injured, the CO added.

Other cattle traders took bullet-hit Benjir to his Gaipara home, where he died around 3:00am.

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

# Minor boy burnt alive in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A minor boy was burnt alive in a fire in Phulbari upazila of Dinajpur yesterday evening.

The victim is Md Arif Hossain, 10, son of Hamidul Islam of Amrobari village in the upazila.

Locals said Hamidul Islam's house caught fire at around 5:30pm. Family members evacuated from the house, but Arif got stranded inside.

Locals doused the fire but Arif was burnt to death.

Mokarram Hossain, station officer of Phulbari upazila Fire Brigade and Civil Defence, said they got a message from the village but could not reach the spot on time as the road to the village was dug for repairing.

Hearing about the incident, Ehtesham Reza, upazila nirbahi officer of Phulbari, visited the spot along with police officials.

A pal of gloom descended on the village after the incident.

# 2 labourers die inhaling toxic gas in septic tank

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Two labourers died after inhaling toxic gas in a septic tank of a newly constructed building at Hospital Road near Mozahar Ali Cold Storage in Sherpur upazila under the district yesterday.

Police arrested owner of the building Abul Kalam Azad of the area in this connection.

The deceased are Zahurul Islam, 25, son of Shajahan Ali of Jajhor Bilnathor village, and Sagor Rahman, 20, son of Emdadul Haque of the upazila.

Police said the duo died while cleaning the septic tank of the building around 9:00am.

On information, the law enforcers rushed to the spot, recovered the bodies and sent them to a hospital morgue for autopsy.

# Six MMC students hurt in clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

At least six students of Mymensingh Medical College (MMC) were injured in a clash over holding of a programme of M-53 batch at town's Baghmara Medical Hostel on Tuesday night.

Following an altercation over the issue, two groups of students of the same batch attacked each other, leaving at least six from both sides injured.

# One jailed, roads to 24 sand ghats in Bhuapur off limits to trucks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A mobile court during a day-long drive on Tuesday closed several roads for movement of trucks to 24 sand ghats (collection centres) beside the Jamuna River in Bhuapur upazila under the district.

The court also jailed a sand trader for six months and fined him Tk 50,000 for lifting sand illegally.

"Amid complaints of illegal sand lifting on the banks of the Jamuna River in Bhuapur upazila,

the mobile court launched the drive to check possible damage of the Bangabandhu Bridge and the nearby cantonment," said Mohammad Kaiser Khasru, executive magistrate of the mobile court.

During the drive, a sand trader was awarded jail for six months and fine of Tk 50,000 for lifting sand illegally, he added.

Despite conducting drives by mobile courts on several occasions earlier, influential sand traders

have continued illegal sand lifting at Pati Chapra, Bali Ghat, Nengra Bazar, Mati Kata, Jikatala and Sirajkandi in the upazila, said sources in district administration.

Influential sand trader having political clout have been doing the illegal sand business very close to Bangabandhu Bridge for long, locals said, adding that groups of the sand traders engaged in clashes on different occasions over occupying the sand lifting stations.



A mobile court closes an earthen road leading to a sand lifting station on the Jamuna River in Bhuapur upazila under Tangail district yesterday. Inset, a good number of trucks used to regularly carry sand illegally extracted from the river near Bangabandhu Ridge.

# Trucker rescued five days into abduction

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A truck driver, abducted from Bogra town on February 6, was rescued from a place near Bogra-Shantahar rail track at Koicor under Sadar upazila yesterday.

The driver Abdul Khaleque, 50, hails from Dinajpur district and lives in Puran Bogra area of the

town. Police, quoting the victim's relatives, said 3/4 masked people swooped on Khaleque while he was unloading sand from his truck. They beat him mercilessly and took him away.

Bely Begum, wife of the victim, filed an abduction case with Sadar Police Station on March 1, accusing three people of the area.

Police conducted drives in several locations and rescued Khaleque from Koicor, police said.

Contacted, Aslam Ali, inspector (Inquiry) of Sadar Police Station, said the victim was admitted to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital.

Police are trying to arrest the three accused, the inspector added.

# GAIBANDHA SADAR UPAZILA Community clinics limping for shortage of docs, drugs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Patients in remote areas are deprived of medicare facilities as almost all of the 51 community clinics under Gaibandha Sadar upazila cannot provide adequate services for want of physicians, other manpower and life saving drugs.

In a recent visit to Hashem Bazar community clinic in Kholahati union in the upazila, this correspondent found that there was no patient in the clinic. Only a health care provider was present, but there were no other staff members available to look after the clinic.

Locals complained that a family welfare assistant and a health assistant rarely attend the clinic. Moreover, the clinic cannot supply life saving drugs in time to the poor and destitute patients. Solvent people take patients to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital, they added.

There is no night guard or sweeper, and the compound is filled with garbage and waste. There is no seating arrangement for patients

and no power supply to the clinic. The two toilets are unusable and a hand operated tube-well does not function properly.

Moinul Islam, a community healthcare provider, said the employees are reluctant to attend work as they are getting poor salaries.

Earlier, the authorities used to supply two cartons of life saving drugs every month, but now the drug supply has almost stopped. We sometimes receive medicines after four months, he added.

Patients said they are given the prescription and have to procure the medicine from outside.

The services of health complex employees are assessed under different projects, and they are yet to be included within the revenue budget after serving for over five years, said Moinul Islam.

Refuting the allegations, Dr Nimolendu Chowdhury, civil surgeon in Gaibandha, said the community clinics in remote areas are serving the poor people, and they will be equipped with modern technology in the near future.



Medical services at Hashem Bazar community clinic in Kholahati union under Gaibandha Sadar upazila are as awful as its physical appearance, like many others of the kind.