

# Lalmonirhat farmers expect bumper maize yield

**S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat**

Maize has been cultivated on large areas of land at five upazilas in Lalmonirhat this year, exceeding the target set by the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE). Farmers are highly interested in cultivating maize as it can be grown even on abandoned land, and also earns windfall profits, maize cultivators said. They are expecting a bumper maize yield and fair prices this year.

A DAE official said they targeted maize cultivation for 20,875 hectares, but the total area cultivated is 22,910 hectares, while it was 19,735 hectares last year. Lalmonirhat produces about one-third of the country's maize.

To discourage Lalmonirhat farmers from growing tobacco, different

banks and NGOs provide them agriculture loans on easy terms for farming maize and vegetables.

Badsha Miah Sarker, 65, a maize grower from Telipara village in Lalmonirhat Sadar's Mahendranagar union, said he has been cultivating maize for the last few years. "I have cultivated maize on 8 bighas of land," he said, hoping that he will get up to 300 maunds this year. "I spent around Tk 5,000 per bigha and hope to earn a minimum of Tk 800 per bigha," he added.

"It is easy to grow maize as it does not need much labour," said Badsha's wife Jesmina Akhter, 55. "I always work alongside my husband in our fields," she added.

Farmer Mamtaz Ali, 65, of Putimari Dola village in Lalmonirhat Sadar, said "We need to spend less money

on irrigation, labourers and fertilisers for maize cultivation than with other crops. I got 135 maunds of maize from 4 bigha last year, and cultivated this crop on six bighas this year. I am hoping to harvest up to 225 maunds this year," he said, adding that he sold one maund of maize for Tk 420 last year.

Mansur Ali, 55, of Paruliya village in Hatibandha upazila, said they have been earning windfall profits cultivating maize over the last few years, but suffered losses from paddy farming. "This crop is becoming the main crop in our village," he said, adding that middlemen pay in advance for purchasing maize.

Jahedul Islam, Lalmonirhat unit manager of NGO Muslim Aid Bangladesh, said, his organisation provides loans

on easy terms to the farmers for growing maize and vegetables. "We always discourage farmers from growing tobacco," he said.

Maize trader Lavlu Miah of BDR Hat Road in the town said he and other traders give advance payment to maize growers for purchasing their crop at fair prices during the harvesting season. "We send maize to different poultry factories countrywide," he said.

Safayet Hossain, deputy director of DAE in Lalmonirhat, said farmers will get bumper output of maize this year due to good seeds and favourable weather, and they will also get good prices. "Maize growers can earn some extra money by selling the maize stems as it is used as firewood, and also from maize conic as it is used for producing sugarcane," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

A farmer couple tend their maize field at Telipara village in Mahendranagar union in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

# 12,000 litres of diesel missing from Setabganj Sugar Mills

### 3 staff suspended, probe body formed

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur**

Three staff of Setabganj Sugar Mills in Bochaganj upazila under the district have been suspended for their alleged negligence in duty as 12,000 litres of diesel, and a good amount of mobil and grease were found missing from the mill store on March 24.

The sugar mill authorities formed a four-member committee headed by DGM

Al Imran to probe the incident. The probe body chief said he has found the allegation of missing of the items true.

The market value of the missing diesel is Tk 12 lakh and that of mobil and grease worth Tk 3 lakh, said officials, adding that these items are key elements to operate the sugar mill.

Store officers Manik Chandra Dhar and Modhusudhan Roy and

storekeeper Md Asaduzzaman of Setabganj Sugar Mill have been suspended temporarily as primary investigation by the mill authorities found their negligence.

On March 27, another store officer Dharendra Nath Roy sent a letter to SM Abdur Rashid, managing director of Setabganj Sugar Mills, informing that he found 12,000 litres out of 18,000 litres of diesel missing from the store on March

24, mill sources said. Grease and mobil worth Tk 3 lakh was also found missing, the letter also mentioned.

This correspondent tried several times to reach SM Abdur Rashid, who recently joined as managing director of Setabganj Sugar Mill through mobile, but he did not receive the phone.

Mill sources said several incidents of stealing inside the mill complex happened earlier.



PHOTO: STAR

Setabganj Sugar Mills in Bochaganj upazila under Dinajpur district.

# SECOND PHASE OF UP POLLS TODAY

## Strict security measures taken as hundreds of centres risky

STAR COUNTRY DESK

The authorities have made all out preparations, including adequate security measures, as the second phase of union parishad elections will be held in districts across the country today.

Meanwhile, a large number of polling centres have been identified as risky in view of different factors including pre-election violence, and relation among contestants.

All of the 110 polling centres in 11 unions of Hatibandha and one in Patgram upazila under Lalmonirhat district have been declared as risky, reports our correspondent.

The riskiest ones are in Bhelaguri, Saniazan, Fakipara and Nawdabansh unions of Hatibandha, said sources at Special Branch of police in the district.

As per requirement, law enforcers have been deployed at these centres to ensure security to enable people to cast their votes in a free, fair and peaceful atmosphere, said TM Mozahidul Islam, superintendent of police (SP) in Lalmonirhat.

A total of 501 candidates, including 44 for chairman post, 113 for reserved seats for women, and 344 for general ward member posts, will contest in today's polls in these unions where 1,50,092 voters, including 74,574 males and 75,518 females, will exercise their right to franchise, election office sources said.

**Our Dinajpur** Correspondent reports: The election to 35 UPs of five upazilas in the district will be held today.

Against the backdrop of several clashes between candidates during the election campaign, sufficient force have already taken control of the polling cen-



PHOTO: STAR

Election materials from Chandpur district election office are being despatched to different polling centres on the eve of today's union parishad election.

tres of upazilas to prevent any untoward incident, said Rurul Amin, SP of Dinajpur.

According to district Special Branch of police, 155 of 318 polling centres in five upazilas of Dinajpur are marked as vulnerable.

Of them, 20 centres are in Bochaganj, 30 in Kaharol, 30 in Phulbari, 28 in Birampur and 47 in Nawabganj upazila.

Dinajpur district election officials said 134 candidates are contesting for chairman posts in 35 UPs of five upazilas, 391 women are vying for reserved seats while 1,142 candidates are contesting for general ward members under the 35 unions.

The total number of voters in the area is 6,46,580, including 1,28,452 in Phulbari, 1,14,593 in Bochaganj,

1,65,108 in Nawabganj, 1,27,551 in Birampur and 1,10,913 in Kaharol upazila.

Our Munshiganj correspondent adds: Six hundred and seventy eight candidates including 64 for chairman posts are contesting in the election to 14 union parishads under Srinagar upazila and four unions in Sirajdikhan upazila under the district.

Sufficient security measures have been taken to ward off any unwanted incident as a hundred polling centres have been identified as 'more risky' and 56 others 'risky', out of a total 166 centres in the 18 unions.

In Tangail, the law enforcers have identified 84 out of 123 centres in 13 unions, including seven in Gopalpur upazila and six in Bhuapur

upazila under the district, as 'important', reports our correspondent.

Adequate forces have been deployed and the law enforcers will keep the 'important' centres under strict watch to hold the elections in a free, fair and peaceful manner, said Saleh Mohammed Tanvir, SP of Tangail.

Twenty-seven people are contesting for chairman posts in seven unions of Gopalpur. The number of contestants in general member posts is 222 and that for reserve posts for women is 64, said sources at the District Election Office.

In six unions of Bhuapur, 26 people are contesting for chairman posts, 180 for general ward member posts and 59 for women's reserved posts.

# BNP leader shot dead in Jessore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A BNP leader was shot dead by an unidentified gang at Barinagar Bazar in Jessore Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

The victim is Idris Ali, 46, joint secretary of Kashimpur union unit of BNP, and son of late Hashem Ali of Shyamnagar village in the upazila.

Police quoted locals as saying that a gang of three, riding a motorcycle, arrived at the bazar at around 7:30pm and opened fire on Idris while he was playing carom.

The gang members fled the scene, firing blank shots.

Local rescued bullet-hit Idris and took him to Jessore Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.



PHOTO: STAR

This bus belonging to Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation broke down on the Khulna-Barisal highway when its wheel became detached from the chassis, injuring several passengers yesterday. What example does it set when the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority responsible for certifying the fitness of vehicles allows such an obviously unfit bus owned by another public authority onto the road?

# Two siblings jailed for attempted murder

UNB, Jhalakathi

A court here on Tuesday sentenced two siblings to 15 years' imprisonment each for an attempt to kill their neighbour in Sadar upazila of the district in 2009.

The convicts are Mamun Sharif and Masud Sharif, sons of Manik Sharif of Sanjoypur village in the upazila.

Jhalakathi Chief Judicial Magistrate Mohammad Abu Shamim Azad also fined them Tk 21,000. In default, they are to suffer another 25 months in jail.

According to the prosecution, the two siblings hacked their neighbour Mahidul Islam Shikder following a previous enmity on June 10, 2009.

# SANTAHAR-LALMONIRHAT SECTION

## 15 rail stations shut down due to lack of manpower

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Railway authorities shut down 15 railway stations out of 31 under Santahar-Lalmonirhat section of western railway due to shortage of manpower during the last two years. Revenue earning has fallen drastically because of the shut down.

The authorities have not yet taken any initiative to recruit manpower, although locals have been agitating for reopening of the closed stations and four trains in this section.

When this correspondent visited Mohimaganj Railway Station in Gaibandha district, he found that the station was closed for the last one year. Locals said the station used to be jam-packed with passengers and goods as the Rangpur Sugar Mills are situated adjacent to the station, but now it looks like it has been abandoned.

Locals said arrival and departure of trains depend on the will of the loco-master, as there is no station master, no employee for hoisting signals, and only a single track is open.

Railway authorities closed down five single track stations -- Hasanganj, Kuptola, Salmara, Syed Ahmed College and Panchpir Mazar -- for want of adequate manpower at different times in 2014.

The authorities shutdown eleven more stations -- Mohendranagar, Anandanagar, Chowdhurani, Naldanga, Trimohoni, Badiakhali, Mohimaganj, Valurpara, Kahalu, Altafnagar and Nasratpur -- for the same reason in 2015.

Three months ago, the authorities reopened Trimohoni station after hiring a station master on contract basis. In many stations, retired station masters were hired on contract basis.

Contacted, Mostafizur Rahman, divisional traffic superintendent (DTS) of Lalmonirhat railway division, said, "Recruitment of manpower was suspended frequently due to filing of cases by temporary employees who want to have their jobs regularised. That problem has been solved and recruitment will start soon."