



A Sex Pheromone Trap set at a bottle gourd field at Binnakuri village in Muktagachha upazila of Mymensingh.

PHOTO: STAR

Eco-friendly pest control a boon for veg farmers

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Farmers in a few remote villages of Muktagachha and Sadar upazilas of the district are now benefiting from an environment-friendly and less costly pest control device called Sex Pheromone Trap.

"I cultivated bottle gourd on 60 decimals of land last year and spent only Tk 500 for pest control using Sex Pheromone Trap whereas earlier pest control using chemical pesticides cost several

times higher," Ziaur Rahman, 35, a farmer of Binnakuri, said during this correspondent's visit to the remote village in Muktagachha upazila.

"I got better production and harvested the produce worth Tk 60 thousand," Ziaur said.

His neighbour Abdul Gafur said he and 22 farmers at the village are beneficiaries of the biotechnology and many others in the area are also interested to use the method.

Similar project is also running at Japarkanda in Austodhar union of Mymensingh Sadar, said Md Anwarul Islam, project manager of SEBA Limited, a co-facilitator of Katalyst that introduced Sex Pheromone Trap under its Integrated Pest Management project in Bangladesh a few years ago.

"We got a good profit using the method in vast cauliflower fields of Japarkanda this year," said Rashidul Islam, a farmer of the village.

Katalyst is co-founded by the UK Government, Swiss Development Cooperation and Danida, and its projects are implemented by Swisscontact under the Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh, said Nadia Pheromone, Katalyst's principal communications consultant.

A Sex Pheromone Trap emits the smell of insects' sex pheromones that attracts male or female insects, leading to their getting trapped and death, he said.



Growers keep huge quantities of tomatoes under a shed at Gaburia village in Dinajpur Sadar upazila to protect the highly perishable item from rotting due to direct exposure to sun amid the ongoing unusual heat.

PHOTO: STAR

Dinajpur tomato farmers feeling the heat

Sudden ripening and diseases undermine profits

KONGKON KARMAKER with ANDREW EAGLE

High temperatures through March and April in Dinajpur have seen the mercury rise to 4 degrees Celsius beyond average. While the stifling weather affects everyone, none are feeling the heat more than the district's tomato farmers.

"I cultivated tomatoes on 7 bighas of land," says Shishir Kumar Roy of Chirirbandar upazila. "The nearly 200 maund yield per bigha is good but I couldn't make any profit because the crop ripened suddenly, within the span of ten days."

For tomatoes, the unusually hot weather has brought on fast ripening, resulting in

a glut of tomatoes in the marketplace unmatched by demand.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) officials confirmed that the fast ripening is due to the abnormal heat. Moreover tomato plants are suffering from various diseases including leaf curling and wilting diseases, the latter commonly referred to locally as "heart attack".

"If a plant is attacked by one of these diseases, it dies fast," says Julquar Haider, the DAE's additional director for Dinajpur region.

With the twin incentives of fast ripening and saving the tomatoes of diseased plants the race is on for farmers to harvest. Many growers bring tomatoes to

market daily to get the most out of their crop.

Tomato trader Sumon Mia of Dhaka's Karwan Bazar says the usual season for collecting tomatoes from Dinajpur is April to May. "We start in Dinajpur," he says, "before moving on to districts like Panchagarh, usually by the end of May."

But this year nearby districts are also experiencing an early crop, with the market saturated. "The price was high at first," Sumon Mia adds, "but has dropped to Tk. 350 per 40 kilograms."

For farmers who have spent around Tk. 40,000 per bigha producing the crop, this is not good news. Nor can traders buy larger amounts for later.

"I can't buy beyond my current demand because tomatoes are highly perishable," says Saiful Islam, a trader from Chittagong.

"Tomato farmers are facing losses for the abnormal heat," says Mossadeque Hossain, president of Dinajpur's chamber of commerce. "Only if we have some rain will the situation improve." Along with many farmers, he regrets that there aren't any tomato preservation and processing facilities in Dinajpur.

According to the DAE, 2,844 hectares in Dinajpur district were planted with tomatoes this year, with a further 2,252 hectares of tomatoes grown in Panchagarh and 188 hectares in Thakurgaon.

HABIGANJ UP POLLS 17 AL rebel chairman aspirants suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Awami League (AL) has suspended 17 rebel candidates for the posts of chairman in 14 union parishads (UP) under Baniarchang upazila of Habiganj district.

The district unit took the decision in a meeting held on Tuesday night.

The rebel candidates are Khairul Bashar Suhel, Mohammad Ali, Monju Das, Tofail Ahmed, Delwar Hosain, Abu Mutalib, Yar Miah, Iqbal Ahmed Chowdhury, Nasir Uddin, Abdur Rouf, Enam Khan Chowdhury, Bashir Miah, Malu Chowdhury, Abdul Hakim, Iqbal Hosain, Shaikh Mushtakim and Afrazul Choudhury.

They are contesting the elections scheduled for April 23.

Advocate Abdul Mozi Khan, general secretary of the Habiganj unit of AL told this correspondent yesterday that the suspended AL men had submitted nomination papers, ignoring the party's instructions.

Diarrhoea affects 600 in Laxmipur

UNB, Laxmipur

At least 600 people, including children, were admitted to different clinics and hospitals after being affected with diarrhoea amid sweltering heat throughout the district in the last seven days.

Resident Medical Officer of Laxmipur Sadar Hospital Dr Md Anwar Hossain said 60-70 people suffering from diarrhoea were admitted to the hospital daily.

The doctor attributed the outbreak of the water-borne disease in the area to consumption of rotten food, unhygienic living conditions, polluted water and scorching heat.

The doctors and nurses of the hospital are working round-the-clock to check further spread of the disease, he added.

One killed, 5 hurt in clash over land dispute

UNB, Brahmanbaria

An elderly man was killed and five others were injured in a clash over land dispute at Kachua village in Nasiragar upazila of the district on Tuesday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Shahidullah, 55, a resident of the village.

Officer-in-Charge Abdul Quader of Nasiragar Police Station said two groups of people--one led by Akkas and the other by his nephew Shukkur--locked in an altercation over marking the boundary of a land at around 3:30pm.

At one stage, two groups attacked each other, leaving Shahidullah dead and five others injured.

Being informed, police went to the spot and dispersed the clashing groups. The injured were given first aid at a local hospital.

Yaba seized in Teknaf

UNB, Dhaka

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized 5,800 Yaba tablet from Khurer Mukh area in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

Lieutenant Colonel Abu Jar Al Zahid, commanding officer of BGB-2, said a team of the border guards, acting on a tip-off, conducted a raid at Baharchhara Ghat in the area and seized the Yaba tablet from a boat around 1:30am.

The market value of the seized Yaba tablets is Tk 17.40 crore, BGB commander said, adding that smugglers fled the scene, sensing the presence of BGB men.

Wheat blast affects 15,500 hectares of land in 5 dists

Crop worth Tk 130 crore damaged as the disease appears first time in the SW region

AMANUR AMAN, back from Chuadanga and Meherpur

Around 15,500 hectares of wheat fields have been infected with blast disease in south-western districts of Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah and Jessore this season, said sources of Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

The infection, detected for the first time in wheat fields of the districts, damaged crop worth Tk 130 crore, they said.

Sources of DAE's divisional office in Jessore said farmers cultivated wheat on 13,875 hectares of land in Meherpur, 16,710 hectares in Kushtia, 10,320 hectares in Jhenidah, 5,810 hectares in Chuadanga, and 4,400 hectares in Jessore.

But the disease affected wheat fields on 9640 hectares in Meherpur, 2563

hectares in Chuadanga, 1500 hectares in Jessore, 840 hectares in Jhenidah, and 320 hectares in Kushtia.

The disease also affected 700 hectares of wheat field in southern district Barisal, said sources of DAE.

BADC and DAE officials have already burnt wheat plants on 875 hectares of land in four government owned farms in Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah and Jessore districts following instructions from the agricultural ministry on Friday and Saturday, said Nur Mohammad, general manager of BADC.

A team of researchers led by Paritosh Kumar Malaker, chief scientific officer of Wheat Research Centre in Dinajpur, visited several affected fields in Meherpur, Chuadanga and Jhenidah on February 24.

After pathogen tests the scientists confirmed the disease as wheat blast.

"The infection was caused by *pyricularia grisea*

that might have grown due to unusual temperature fluctuation and continuous rain for days in the first week of February. It spread through air," said Paritosh Kumar Malaker, who has already submitted the report to the agriculture ministry.

Farmers of affected wheat fields said they at first noticed yellow and black spots on the leaves and sheaves of wheat.

Gradually, the spots spread on the whole plants, the sheaves and flowers turned yellow and white, and the plants dried up without producing any grain.

"I cultivated wheat on 16 bighas of land this year but got only one or two maunds of wheat against the expectation of 18-20 maunds per bigha as the blast disease affected the fields. Now I feel utterly helpless as my cultivation cost per bigha was Tk 6000-7000," said Bablu Mia of Ujalpur in Meherpur Sadar upazila.



A wheat field affected by blast disease in Meherpur.

PHOTO: STAR

Paddy processing makes roads risky for vehicles

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Mindless use of public roads for threshing paddy during the ongoing harvesting season is disrupting vehicular movement in different areas of the district.

"I have problems driving my vehicle un many places across Moulvibazar district as farmers process boro paddy. The drivers have to be very cautious and drive the vehicles slowly to avoid accidents," said Motin Miah, a driver from Bhui area under Juri upazila.

Mustafzur Rahman, a driver of Kulaura upazila, said he faces problems while driving to Ashurighat area as farmers process paddy on

the Kulaura-Borolekha road. "I have to lower the speed frequently due to the paddy left at different places on the road," he said.

Mohibur Rahman, 50, a farmer at Ishobpur area near Bikka Beel of Srimangal upazila, said he and many other local farmers use the road daily for processing paddy during this harvesting season. "Usually we do the work in the morning when there are not many heavy vehicles on the road," he said.

"We always use the highway for paddy processing at the time of harvest as many farmers, especially the marginal ones, have hardly any space for the purpose," said

Sarif Uddin of Khagteka village in Juri upazila.

Sanjit Kumar Deb, president of Moulvibazar District Transport Workers' Union, said around 2,000 vehicles including buses and trucks, move on different roads, especially the Moulvibazar-Borolekha and Moulvibazar-Srimangal-Kamalganj highways, in Moulvibazar district. Use of the roads for processing paddy causes serious problems for vehicular movement, he added.

Contacted, Utpal Samanta, executive engineer of Moulvibazar Roads & Highway Department, said they have told farmers to stop threshing paddy on the roads.



Paddy processing on roads poses risk for vehicles in different areas of Moulvibazar district. The photo was taken from Sylhet-Tamabil road in Sylhet Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR