

Protecting farmers from lightning

SHYKH SERAJ

Dear readers, perhaps you may remember Haru Ghosh from Manik Bhandopadhyay's novel 'Putulnacher Itikatha'. He was standing under a colossal banyan tree and lightning struck him. If he didn't stand right under the tree, rather 10-12 feet away, he probably could be alive. Haru stood right under the tree to save himself from the thunderbolt. But, he was undone.

Similarly, many of us who live in the rural areas stand under the tree for shelter without being able to find any household in time of such lightning strikes. However, this kind of shelter-seeking increases the risk of unwanted death.

Recently, the rate of death by lightning strikes has exponentially increased. A research conducted by Bangladesh Agricultural University claims the number of death caused by thunders has increased in the last eight years, reaching 1800 in total; this is the all time highest death rate caused by lightning strikes. There is no technology to record the number of thunder strikes in our country. According to Indian Weather Office and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, 2400 lightning strikes take place on average in Bangladesh every year. Disaster Forum's report says that 205 people in 2017, 245 in 2016, 186 in 2015, 210 in 2014, 285 in 2013, 301 in 2012 and 179 in 2011 died due to lightning strike. And



Monir Hossain (in the middle with the writer) shows his lightning protection device at Dhamrai in Dhaka.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, *Swadhinata Puroshkar* and *Ekushey Padak*, respectively. He is an Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, *Hridoye Mati O Manush*.



Scientists say that scarcity of palm tree is one of the main reasons for the increase of thunderbolt-related deaths. Before, thunderbolts used to fall on palm tree or some other big trees. Lightning is a kind of electricity. So the thunderbolt used to go down to the ground through the tree, as you all know.

Days ago, I went to Faringa village in Dhamrai, Dhaka. Surprisingly, I noticed that lightning is a subject of panic, quite naturally, to the people of the village. I heard that many farmers lost their lives due to lightning. Even domestic animals lost their lives on field. I talked to a farmer called Peyar Ali. He said his brother Iman Ali died by lightning. During the thunderstorm, four people, including Iman Ali, were under the same umbrella. Three got injured but Iman Ali died. This may seem a mystery to many. If four were together then how did only one die? Local young engineer, Md Monir Hossain explained the reason. Iman Ali was the one holding the umbrella. The handle of the umbrella was made of metal. And Iman Ali was barefooted. Because of which the electricity flowed through it. Iman Ali died as the whole of the electricity caused by the thunder entered through his body.

Losing loved ones due to lightning strikes is not only Peyar Ali's pain, Shamsul Alam, Yakub Ali, Sharifunnessa and many more also have the same sorrow. They said after burying the body of the deceased, they have to suffer another torment. Earlier several bodies of people who died by lightning got stolen. It is necessary to guard the body staying up all night. Hearing these tragedies of farmers and average people, I

reached a vast green farm land. A young engineer Monir Hossain who works with PWD, started a programme to control thunderbolts in Faringa village. He has been conducting many research and experiments. I went to Faringa village mainly to see his activities. I also intended to observe how much aware farmers are of lightning. After reaching, I saw Monir Hossain conducting a lightning awareness workshop with farmers. He talked to farmers, simply explaining the scientific aspects of lightning to the farmers. When a farmer works on a vast land, he is usually of the tallest height (if there is no large tree or house around). And a farmer normally has a metal equipment in his hand. That is why farmers get killed by thunder strikes. Monir Hossain has created a lightning strike insulation system to protect the farmers from lightning. He has put an iron bar on a 30-foot-long bamboo and placed something of a silver plate or a lid on it. An aluminium wire is pulled from there and is connected with a rod on the ground. That's how the earthing is done. Monir says a copper wire would work better. But copper wires are expensive and are likely to be stolen. So, he advises using aluminium wires. This earthing connection on a 30-foot-long bamboo will be able to protect everyone from thunder bolts in 30 feet area, says engineer Monir Hossain. He measures electricity protection level to show whether his installed system is working well enough. He says if the level is below 10 ohm, then the farmers are safe. The farmer will be able to carry out the management to everywhere he works. These were quite acceptable to farmers and

people of the village. They also believe that they will be able to organise such arrangement in the field. Dr Md Shamim Hassan Bhuiyan, climate change consultant from ADB, closely observed Monir Hossain's project after I showed him the video footage on my return. Shamim Hassan thanks Monir Hossain for undertaking such a project for the sake of farmers. He said Monir Hossain's system will be somewhat helpful if it is refined a bit. But there is no alternative to farmers' awareness. He says, counting the time between lightning and thunder will allow one to understand if the thunder is coming near. If the time between each thunder gradually decreases, that would mean the thunder is coming nearer to the farmer. Then he has to take shelter. While going to work in the field, farmers should carry a wooden or plastic tool with them. It is safe to wear rubber shoes on foot. And if the time between each thunder increases gradually, that would mean the thunder is going away from the farmer. Let's talk to Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology's Associate Professor Yasir Arafat about Monir Hossain's on-field lightning prevention system. He says that Monir's initiative is very scientific. But complete security cannot be ensured through it. He also asks the farmers to be aware of lightning strikes. In this case he mentions the 30:30 formula. If the sound of lightning is heard after 30 seconds of seeing it, that would mean thunders are nearby. Then, the farmer must take shelter at a safe place and wait there for thirty minutes. If you take shelter under a big tree, you must be 10

to 12 feet away from the root of the tree. A technology for collectively protecting people from a sudden natural disaster like lightning hasn't arrived yet in the world. Although thunder is a cause of loss, it has beneficial sides too. Science says the whole source of nitrogen or protein in the ground is nitric acid which is made by lightning and rain. According to many biologists around the world, lightning also contributed to create the first-ever protoplasm. Thus, there is no alternative to being aware for enjoying the benefits of lightning strikes. Farmers and average people are to be taught the methods of protecting themselves from lightning strikes. Especially, it is highly dangerous for farmers who work in open fields. And so, they must consider the protection measures before going to the field during the period of thunderstorms. If farmers are a little aware, they can avoid the risk of losing life even in hostile environment. People involved should think about a comprehensive system of effective security for lightning. In this case, the primary initiative of the young engineer is praiseworthy. However, it is a must to research on Monir's new innovation at a higher level. It is very important to invent a refined and a more appropriate method that will be convenient for a farmer at field level or any people at risk of lightning strike anywhere in the country. I would conclude by saying in this age of climate change, it is every farmer's duty to ensure his own safety being utmost careful and aware of the risks around him. As farmers are also a part of nature, they should understand nature better than anyone else.

Newly-wed girl killed for 'dowry'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A newly-wed college girl was killed allegedly by her dowry-greedy husband 19 days after their marriage at Nehalpur village in Monirampur upazila of Jessore early yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Laboni Das, 20, wife of Pares Das of the same village.

Laboni, a second year student of political science at Monirampur College, was married to Pares, son of Gour Das, 19 days ago. Pares is a final year student of Bangla at Jessore Government MM College.

The victim's mother Lipika Das said Pares and his family members started torturing her daughter Laboni for dowry immediately after the marriage.

She said they strangled her daughter.

Nehalpur police outpost in-charge Khairul Bashar said it would be ascertained whether Laboni was murdered or not after receiving the autopsy report.

LAND DISPUTE Son also dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A youth, who was injured in a clash over land dispute in Nandail upazila on Sunday, succumbed to his injuries at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) on Tuesday.

The deceased was Masud Bhuiyan, 30, of Ghazikhali village.

Masud and his father Firoz Bhuiyan, 60, were allegedly beaten and hacked over land dispute by Firoz's younger brother Milon Bhuiyan and his sons on Sunday, said Nandail Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Kamrul Islam Miah, quoting victim's family members and local people.

Firoz and Masud were immediately rushed to Nandail Upazila Health Complex where the doctors declared Firoz dead, the OC said.

Masud, who sustained critical injuries on his head and chest, was later shifted to MMCH, where he died on Tuesday.

Police sent the body to MMCH morgue for autopsy.

Sumon Bhuiyan, son of deceased Firoz, lodged a case accusing nine people including Milon. However, no one was arrested as of filing of this report.

Unsold sacrificial animals now burden for farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Drastic fall in prices of sacrificial animals in the last couple of days before Eid-ul-Azha stunned the several thousand cattle farmers, traders and farm owners in the district who reared those animals.

"We're in a great dilemma as a giant ox or bull needs food costing at least Tk 200 daily, and if we feed the unsold cattle as per requirement for longer period it will increase our loss, but if we don't supply their fodder they will lose weight, which will also make us losers," said cattle farmer Mohabbat Hossain of Kisamater char village in Dimla upazila.

Cattle trader Solaiman Ali of Keshba village in Kishoreganj upazila bought eight medium and big-sized cows and oxen from marginal farmers and took them to a big cattle market in Nilphamari on August 19, where buyers tried to persuade him to sell each cattle at Tk 90,000 to Tk 95,000 which he refused.

"In order to get higher profit, I took them to another famous market, Dhela Piner Haat in Sadar upazila, on August 21, but there I experienced a bolt from the blue as buyers were unwilling to pay more than Tk 65,000 for the same cattle," he lamented.

Solaiman somehow managed to sell four medium-sized cows at purchase price, but four big-sized oxen remained unsold as he was likely to incur loss of Tk 25,000 to Tk 30,000 per animal if the offered prices were accepted.

He also had to pay additional Tk 600 against each cattle as transport cost.

"Cattle farmers and traders brought at least 20,000 cattle to our market, but of them only 15%-16% have been sold

and the rest were taken back as owners did not want to incur heavy loss, which is highest in the last 30 years," said Mahabul Islam, lessee of Nilphamari cattle market.

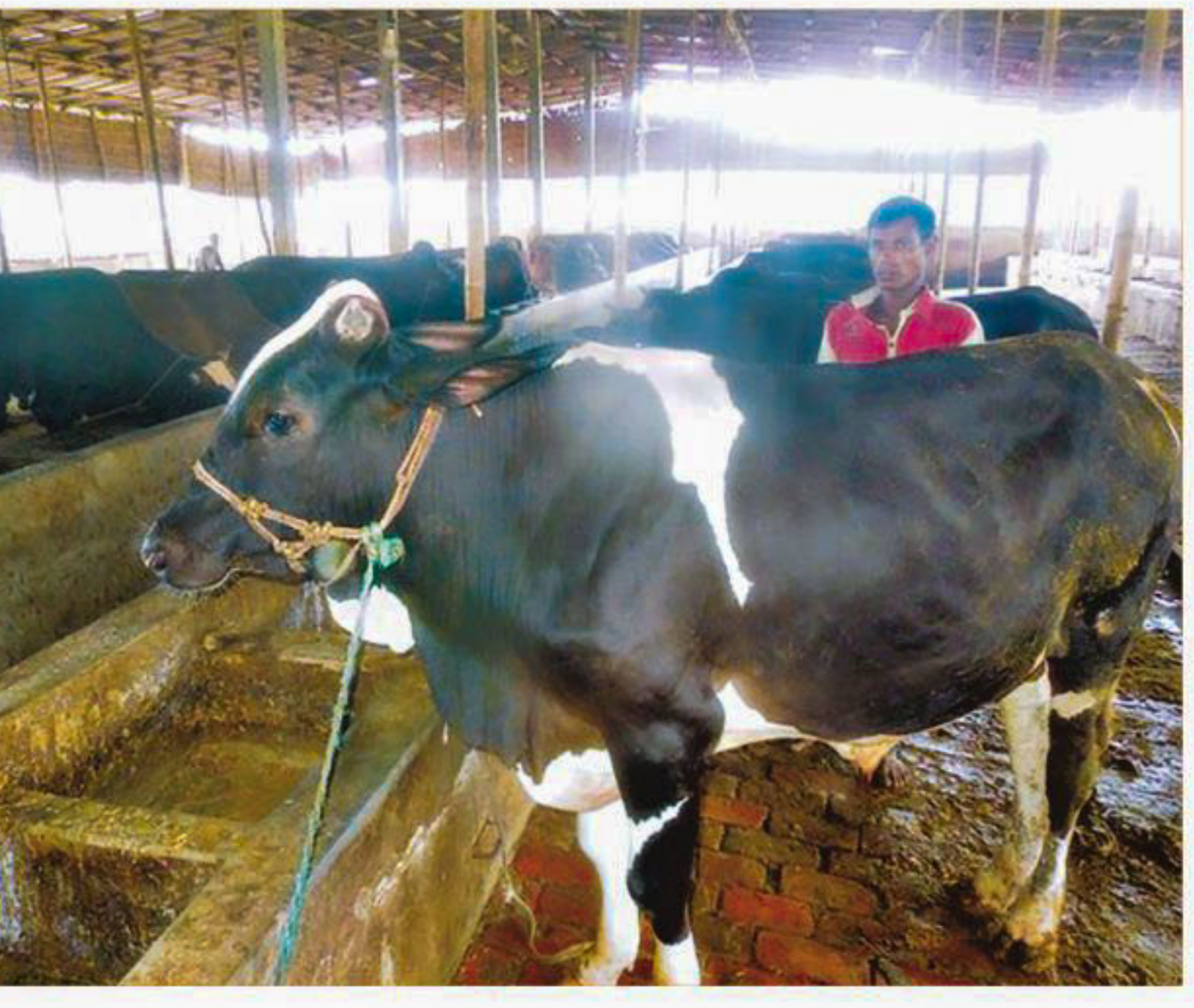
Cattle farm owner Russel Hossain, 35, of Purba Satnai village in Dimla upazila, said, "Dodging law enforcers and ignoring restrictions, smugglers brought a good number of cattle into the country, which might be a cause for the fall in cattle prices."

Cattle farmers Ashadul Islam, 45, of Jaldhaka upazila, and Abdul Bariz, 50, of Saidpur upazila, said they want to sell their remaining reared cattle at a minimum suitable price as soon as

possible to avoid further loss as keeping for long would add to the cost.

District Livestock Officer Md Monakka Ali refuted the allegation of smuggling of Indian cattle into the country and said farmers prepared 62,000 cattle this year against demand for 50,000, causing a surplus as there are 793 big and medium cattle farms in the district.

"A good number of marginal farmers using family labour reared one to two cattle each without our knowledge, and making the number of animals higher than the demand. It is time to look for alternatives markets abroad," he further said.



Cattle farm owner Abdul Malek of Ithakhola village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila did not sell this giant ox at Dhela Piner Haat the day before Eid-ul-Azha due to the drastic fall in prices.

PHOTO: STAR



Five travelling girls (sitting in front) pose for photograph with the students of Patuakhali Collectorate School and College in the town on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

Girls on scooties to see beauty of nature

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Five girls on scooties have been visiting different districts to watch the beauty of nature and build a better Bangladesh as well.

During the tour, they exchanged views with female students in seven districts over various social issues like road safety, food and nutrition, health, child marriage, dowry, stalking, etc.

As part of their seven-day tour, the five travellers on three scooties reached Patuakhali town on Tuesday. They participated in a meeting with female students of Patuakhali Collectorate School and exchanged views over different social issues.

Later, the girls went to Kuakata

tourist spot where they visited different spots like the sea beach, Rakhine temple, statue of Goutam Buddha and other historical places.

Yesterday, they went to Barguna and exchanged views with female students of Barguna Adarsha High School in the town.

The five girls formed an organisation named 'Travelletes of Bangladesh' to watch the country by travelling to different tourist spots with historical, economical values and natural beauty.

Founder of the organisation Dr Sakia Haque, also internee of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), Dr Manosi Saha Tuli, internee of DMCH, Kazi Shanta Islam, a third

year student of marketing department of Mirpur University College in Dhaka, Shamsun Nahar Suma, a fourth year student of Dhaka University, and Mushfiqa Rahman Nijhum, a 10th grader of BAF Shaheen English Medium School in Dhaka, are members of the organisation.

The seven-day tour, which started on August 27, will end on September 2 through visiting Jhalakathi, Barisal, Madaripur, Pirojpur and Shariatpur, said team leader Sakia.

"It is our fifth phase tour that started from Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka and we have visited 21 districts in separate phases with our slogan 'Narir Chokhe Bangladesh'," she said.