



Several people at Sakoya village in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat gather beside a fire to get warmth during the biting cold that sweeps the region yesterday. *Below*, vehicles move with caution at Sheikhpara village in Dinajpur Sadar upazila as dense fog engulfs the area.

PHOTO: STAR

Biting cold paralyses life in N dists

Poor people in dire need of warm clothes

STAR COUNTRY DESK

The biting cold during the last couple of days disrupted life in northern districts near the Himalayas. The Met office at Rajarhat in Kurigram district recorded 10.8 degrees Celsius as the lowest temperature in eight districts of Rangpur division yesterday, reports our Dinajpur correspondent. The lowest temperature in Rangpur was 13 degrees Celsius, Dinajpur 13.7, Syedpur of Nilphamari 13.5, Dimla of Nilphamari 13.2 and Tentulia of Panchagarh district 13.3 degrees Celsius yesterday. Dense fog kept the sun invisible throughout the day. "My earning has dropped as people are staying inside to save themselves from cold," said Khalilur Rahman, a rickshaw-van puller at Banglabandha in Panchagarh. "This is the first cold wave-like situation in Dinajpur," said Tofazzal Hossain, in charge of Dinajpur Met office. The district town saw light traffic due to the dense fog. In Rangpur, a large number of people, mostly from poorer group, thronged makeshift shops beside roads to buy warm clothes for cheaper prices. Drivers of buses on all the routes are using lights during the daytime as foggy weather prevailed everywhere in the



region, said Fazle Rabby, general secretary of Dinajpur Transport Workers Union. Our Lalmonirhat Correspondent reports: Life in the district is badly disturbed due to the biting cold accompanied by dense fog as the sun remained invisible for the last two days. The poor people are badly suffering due to lack of warm clothes. The people living in the char (land emerging from riverbed) areas beside Teesta and Dharla rivers are more vulnerable.

Under the blanket of dense fog, vehicles move slowly with headlights on. The low-income people, especially the farm labourers, are the worst sufferers as most of them cannot go out for work due to the adverse weather while many people, especially children and aged ones, are getting cold-related diseases like diarrhoea and pneumonia. "I don't have the ability to purchase warm clothes. As I can't go out for work due to the fog and cold, I have to pass days half-starved," said Nur Jahan Bewa, 52, at Dharla River basin Bongram village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. Nazmul Islam, 44, a day labourer at Sakoya village in Aditmari upazila said, "We can't go out the home for work due to cold wave. We burn straws to get warmth as we don't have sufficient warm clothes." Saidul Islam, 46, a rickshaw puller at Shaheed Shajahan Colony, a slum area in Lalmonirhat town, echoed the same. Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner Abu Jafor said, "A total of 28,700 blankets are being distributed among the cold-hit poor people. We have sent demand letter to Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry, seeking more 50 thousand blankets for the poor people in the district."

RAPE CASE

UP chairman, son still at large

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A union parishad (UP) chairman and his son accused in a rape case filed with Durgapur Police Station of Netrakona are still at large, five days into the incident. The victim's father lodged a case accusing three people with Durgapur Police Station. Police arrested one of the accused so far. Officer-in-Charge of the police station Md Mizanur Rahman said the 14-year-old girl went to visit her maternal uncle's house at Banjail village on December 10. When the girl was returning home alone on Friday noon, Mir Abdul Kaium, 21, an honours student, and son of local Kakoirgara UP Chairman Mir Noor Mohammad waylaid her. He took the girl to the house of his cousin Mir Muktedir and raped the girl alluring to marry her. On information, police rushed to the spot and took the victim to the police station the following day. The victim's father lodged a case accusing Kaium, his father Noor Mohammad and cousin Muktedir on Sunday. Police arrested Muktedir from his village. The arrestee was later produced before a Netrakona court that sent him to jail, the OC said. Police drives are on to arrest the other accused, said the OC. Meanwhile, the statement of the victim was recorded with a Netrakona court and her medical test was conducted at Netrakona General Hospital on Tuesday, said the police official.

CLASH OVER LAND DISPUTE

Man killed, three injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A man was killed and three others sustained stab injuries in an attack by their rivals allegedly over a disputed land in Habiganj Sadar upazila on Tuesday night. The deceased, Abdul Kuddus Mia, 55, was a resident of Sukhchar village in the upazila. Quoting locals and witnesses, Officer in Charge (OC) of Habiganj Model Police Station Masuk Ali said there had been a longstanding rivalry between Kuddus and one Shahjahan Mia of the village over the ownership of a disputed land. As a sequel to the conflict, the two locked in an altercation around 8:30pm on Tuesday night, the OC said, adding that, at one stage, Shahjahan and his men attacked Kuddus with sharp weapons and stabbed him indiscriminately, leaving him critically injured. The gang also injured three other villagers when they tried to save Kuddus from their wrath, he said. Local people rescued the injured four and took them to Habiganj Sadar Hospital, where the doctors declared Kuddus dead. Being informed, they recovered the body and sent it to the hospital for autopsy, the OC said, adding that police were conducting drives to arrest the culprits.

Good days for Jhenidah gourd growers

UZ agri officer says soil of 4 villages in Kotchandpur is especially suitable for the vegetable farming

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Bumper yield and fair prices have delighted gourd growers in Kotchandpur upazila. Upazila agriculture office sources said around 100 farmers are cultivating gourd on their plots at four villages. Talina, Ekra, Jalalpur and Ghagha are the most gourd producing villages in the upazila. While talking to the farmers at Talina village they said this farming is very profitable than traditional crops like paddy. If the weather is favourable, the growers can harvest up to March next year. They can sell at Tk 80 to Tk 90 thousand from one bigha. Tk 15 to Tk 20 thousand is spent for cultivation of per bigha. Motiar Rahman of Talina village said he has been farming this vegetable for over a decade. He did not incur loss during this long period, said Motiar. In the middle of September this year, he has cultivated gourd on 20 decimals of land spending Tk 15,000, said Motiar.

He expects that he will harvest up to March and sell at Tk 60,000. Another farmer Rabiul Islam of the same village said he has been farming gourd for ten years. He got a profit of Tk one lakh from 45 decimals of land last year. He has cultivated the vegetable on 66 decimals of land this year, said Rabiul, adding that if the weather is favourable, he will sell at Tk 1.50 lakh. Upazila Sub-assistant Agriculture Officer Mahmudur Rahman said he often visits the plots of the farmers and advises them to use pheromone trap to avoid food fly. He also forbids the gourd growers to use insecticide so that they can lead sound health, said Mahmudur. Upazila Agriculture Officer Md Sheikh Sazzad Hossain said the soil of the villages is very suitable for gourd farming. Every year the farmers grow gourd and earn a lot. "We always keep vigilance on the farmers so that the latter can get bumper production," he said.



A farmer tends his gourd plants at Talina village in Jhenidah's Kotchandpur upazila.

PHOTO: STAR



Students of Chowdhury Para Government Primary School, in Rangamati's hilly upazila of Kawkhali, eagerly wait under a tree outside their school building for afternoon shift to start. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANVIL CHAKMA

Hopes big, school small

ANVIL CHAKMA, Rangamati

When reconstruction of Chowdhury Para Government Primary School building was completed back in 1998, its three rooms -- two for classes and the other for administrative purposes -- were probably more than enough for a sparsely populated hill tract upazila such as Kawkhali. Since the inception of the school in 1984, the population in the upazila nearly doubled and the inhabitants have been sending their children to school more than ever before. But unfortunately, the infrastructure of the school could not catch up with the changed mindset of parents over the past two decades. Against the present student enrolment of 174, the school authorities can arrange seating for only 60 students in the two classrooms at one time and around 10 to 12 more in the veranda outside the classrooms. Currently, only four teachers offer three classes -- pre-primary, grade one and grade two -- in the morning shift and three other classes

up to fifth grade in the afternoon shift. During a recent visit, this correspondent saw children of higher classes eagerly waiting under a tree outside the school building for their afternoon classes to start. Asked why they came to school early, they said they head out from their homes, miles away from the school, a bit early so they can get in the classroom on time. Fourth grader Thuima Ching Marma, waiting with other classmates under a tree outside, said, "It's really difficult to study in the veranda, but the classrooms are so small that all of us can't sit together inside." Ching Thoai Marma, a fifth grader, said paying attention to the class while sitting in the veranda is not easy because many students of other classes play in the schoolground right in front of them. Teachers of the school said condition of the school building, constructed by Local Government Engineering Department, is no longer safe.

During rainy season, academic activities of the school, nationalised in 2013, are often interrupted with rainwater seeping through the roof of every single room, they also said. Saching Uye Marma, the school's headteacher, told this newspaper that student enrolment at the school is growing day by day. With the number of students rising, it is getting more and more difficult to continue spending on maintenance of the rundown building, especially during the wet season. "We wrote to the higher authorities for a larger accommodation many times, but did not get any response yet," he added. School managing committee President Thuisa Ching Marma said for the sake of the students, the authorities should soon replace the school building with a larger new one. Hoping that the authorities concerned would take necessary steps in this regard soon, Manas Mukul Chakma, Kawkhali upazila education officer, said the higher authorities were already informed of the state of the school building.