



Traders are seen bringing boatloads of watermelon into Barishal city at Kirtankhola river port, which is the second largest and busiest riverport in Bangladesh. However, rotten watermelons are seen floating in the waters below as much of the fruit grown in the region has been damaged by heavy hailstorms. PHOTO: TITU DAS

Hailstorms wreak havoc on watermelon farms

Poor market price also leading to losses, farmers and traders say

SUSHANTA GHOSH, SOHRAB HOSSAIN and DIPANKAR ROY

Although watermelon yields have been good this year, a section of farmers in Barishal and Khulna are facing heavy losses due to heavy hailstorms and poor market price amid the final stage of harvesting.

Watermelons grown on some 3,124 hectares of land across the two regions have been damaged so far, leading to collective losses of more than Tk 250 crore, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

About 35,000 hectares of land in Barishal were brought under watermelon cultivation this year and considering an average yield of roughly 30 tonnes per hectare, the region should bear about 10 lakh tonnes of the fruit worth over Tk 3,000 crore at the current market price.

However, farmers would have received almost double the price just one month back.

At present, watermelons are being sold for Tk 20-25 per kilogramme (kg) from the field level while it was Tk 50-60 per kg as recently as 10 days back.

Rainstorms have already damaged the watermelons on some 28.24 lakh hectares of land in Barishal, amounting to over Tk 200 crore in losses. The most affected district is Bhola, where about 1,800 hectares, or 10 per

cent of the area's total acreage, have been affected.

In Patuakhali, around 1,000 hectares of the fruit worth about Tk 40 crore have been damaged.

In addition, 24 hectares of watermelon worth Tk 3 crore have been damaged in Barguna, as per sources at the local DAE office.

Karthik Dutta, secretary of the Barishal District Fruit Traders Association, said around 40,000 watermelons arrive at the Kirtankhola river port through 20 trawlers each day.

"But at least 20 per cent of these fruits are too damaged for sale," he added.

Mosharrar Sikder, a farmer from Char Fasson upazila in Bhola, said he had brought 4,000 watermelons to a wholesale market near the port in Barishal city.

But after it was found that just 2,400 of these watermelons were of good quality, Sikder was forced to throw the rest into the nearby Kirtankhola river.

As such, he earned just Tk 1 lakh after having spent upwards of Tk 10 lakh to grow the fruit on eight acres of land.

Ibrahim Titu, a fruit trader at the wholesale market, said at least one-third of the watermelons brought by each trawler are rotten.

Hasan Waridul Kabir, deputy director of the Bhola DAE, said 8 to 10 per cent of the watermelons



grown across 18,000 hectares of land in the region are either damaged or fully rotten.

Around 10 per cent, or Tk 200 crore worth of watermelon, has gone to waste with only those who planted the fruit early having benefited by harvesting them before the rains came.

Patuakhali accounts for a majority of the watermelon produced in Barishal as some 28,750 hectares of land in the district were brought under cultivation.

Of the total acreage, 1,000 hectares worth Tk 40 crore have been damaged, informed Nazrul Islam, deputy director of the Patuakhali DAE.

"Due to heavy hailstorms for the past week, watermelon grown in the Char Kajal, Boalia, Char Biswas and Kalapara areas

have been damaged," he added.

Badrul Alam, additional deputy director of the Barguna DAE, said 24 hectares of the 15,838 hectares of land brought under watermelon cultivation in the district have been damaged, amounting to Tk 3 crore losses.

In Khulna, heavy rainfall has destroyed more than 300 hectares of watermelon worth Tk 10 crore, as per sources at the Khulna DAE.

Utpal, a farmer of Banishanta union under Dacope upazila, said he cultivated three bighas of land to cover last year's losses.

"But now I am worried about the rain and price," he added.

Utpal went on to say that two bighas of his land are now submerged.

"The irony is that I spent Tk 3,200 for irrigation 20 days ago

but am now having to pay Tk 780 for draining water from the field," he said.

Ismail Hossain, a farmer of Pankhali union under the same upazila, said he grew watermelon on 10 bighas of land last year but reduced cultivation to six bighas of land this year.

"Still, untimely rain has ruined my fate as four bighas of land were affected by hailstorms," he added.

KM Maksudunnabi, agriculture officer of Dacope upazila, said that rain has damaged some fields but it would not affect overall production as yields are better than last time.

On March 21, a daylong torrential downpour destroyed 203 hectares of watermelon worth about Tk 10 crore at Koyra upazila, where farmers cultivated 1,200 hectares of the fruit.

Asim Kumar Das, in-charge of the agriculture department in Koyra Upazila, said farmers had started cultivation earlier to reduce losses.

Nevertheless, watermelons grown on 203 hectares of land were completely destroyed by one day's heavy rain, leading to losses of about Tk 10 crore.

Md Mosaddek Hossain, additional deputy director of the Khulna DAE, said he expected farmers to overcome last year's losses through good yields this year, but hailstorms have dashed such hopes.

Five Ps for a sustainable future

MD TOUHIDUL ALAM KHAN

As a United Nations member state, Bangladesh has pledged to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The SDGs urge all countries to take action towards ending poverty, preserving the planet, and promoting universal peace and prosperity.

In Bangladesh, attaining the SDGs demands a collaborative approach from all stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, civil society, universities, and individuals. The SDGs revolve around five fundamental pillars: people, planet, prosperity, partnership, and peace, which can be realised through the 5 Ps blueprint for a sustainable future in Bangladesh.

The people component of the SDGs focuses on poverty eradication and human development. Bangladesh has made significant progress in reducing poverty and achieving universal primary education, but there are still challenges related to gender equality, women's empowerment, and reducing inequality.

The government has taken initiatives, such as increasing access to education, healthcare, and social protection, to improve the lives of people.

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change, making the planet component of the SDGs crucial. The government has set targets to raise the share of renewable energy in the country's energy mix and increase forest coverage to address deforestation.

Bangladesh has also made progress in improving access to clean water and sanitation. The prosperity component aims to ensure economic growth and development in a sustainable manner. Bangladesh has experienced remarkable economic growth over the past few decades, and the government is taking initiatives to ensure that this growth is sustainable and inclusive. The government has set targets to promote decent work and economic growth, industrialisation, and innovation.

The partnership component of the SDGs emphasises cooperation between stakeholders to achieve the goals. The government has established a dedicated SDG implementation and monitoring unit to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the goals. The government is also working closely with the private sector and civil society to achieve the SDGs.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in ensuring peace and security, which is crucial for the peace component of SDGs. The government has taken measures to strengthen institutions, reduce violence, and promote human rights. There are still challenges related to political stability and human rights that need to be addressed.

In Bangladesh, the successful implementation of the SDGs requires significant investments and innovative financing. The implementation of the SDGs is estimated to require \$66 billion annually, which is about 20 per cent of the country's GDP. In this respect, the government has identified priority areas for investment and is working to mobilise resources from both domestic and international sources.

To effectively implement the SDGs, a thorough comprehension of all objectives is essential, with a particular emphasis on the crucial role of climate change. Climate change poses a challenge that affects all of humanity and goes beyond religious, cultural, and geographic boundaries. To tackle this challenge, we must exercise wisdom and common sense to coexist with nature in a sustainable manner.

As former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon aptly stated, "Nature does not negotiate with human beings. We must adapt to nature, as it is our only choice. Additionally, it's crucial to keep in mind that we have only one planet, and there is no alternative since there is no Planet B."

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1 crore family cards to be turned into smart cards

Says Tipu Munshi

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government is turning the one crore family cards, which are used by low-income groups to buy essentials at subsidised rates, into smart cards to fix loopholes, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said yesterday.

"The process of converting the hand-written family cards into smart cards is underway," he said at the inauguration of the second phase of the sales of goods by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) in the capital's Uttara, according to a press release of the commerce ministry.

Some anomalies in the hand-written cards could easily be resolved if they are converted into smart cards with QR code features, he added.

A pilot project has already been completed to turn the hand-written cards into smart ones in the areas under the Dhaka North City Corporation, the Narayanganj City Corporation and the Barishal City Corporation, said the press release.

State-run TCB usually sells essentials such as soybean oil, lentil, onion, and sugar among one crore families across the country at lower prices once a month. Each cardholder is eligible to buy one kilogramme of sugar, two kgs of lentil, two litres of soybean, and two kgs of onion.

But the agency will sell the essentials twice this Ramadan as low-income households have kept feeling the pinch of higher inflation.

Inflation in Bangladesh climbed to 8.78 per cent in February, breaking a five-month declining trend. It surged to a 10-year high of 9.52 per cent in August, driven by higher commodity prices in the global markets.



An oil tanker unloads imported crude oil at Qingdao port in China's eastern Shandong province. Oil prices surged in the global market yesterday after the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and their allies, including Russia, shook markets by announcing further production cuts of about 1.16 million barrels per day on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Oil price surges amid surprise output cuts

REUTERS, London

Oil prices surged yesterday in the global market, posting the biggest daily rise in nearly a year, after a surprise announcement by Opec+ to cut more production jolted markets.

Brent crude was trading at \$84.22 a barrel by 0900 GMT, up \$4.33, or 5.4 per cent, after touching the highest in a month at \$86.44 earlier in the session.

US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$79.84 a barrel, up \$4.17, or 5.5 per cent, after earlier hitting the highest level since late January.

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies including Russia shook markets by announcing further production cuts of about 1.16 million barrels per day (bpd) on Sunday.