

# Bangladesh rice modified to supplement vitamin A

## A panacea for child blindness, say scientists

REAZ AHMAD,  
back from the Philippines

Bangladesh's most productive rice variety, BR29, has been genetically engineered to fight vitamin A deficiency.

Millions of people, especially women and children, in South Asia suffer from chronic vitamin A deficiency that leads to blindness in worst cases.

The golden colour rice variety is capable of producing beta-carotene, a substance the human body can convert to vitamin A.

It is produced by splicing three foreign genes -- two from daffodil and one from a bacterium -- into japonica rice, a variety adapted to temperate climates.

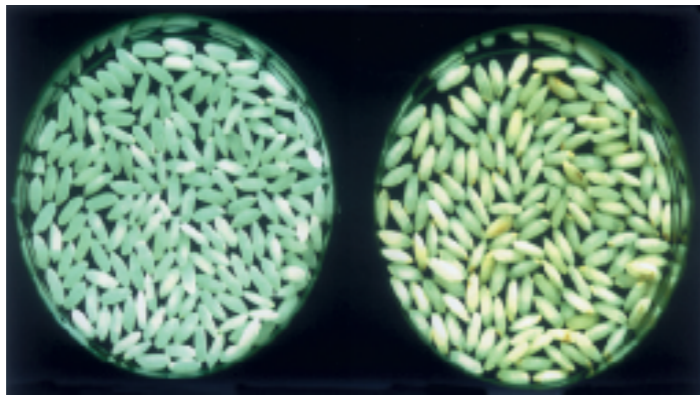


PHOTO: IIRI

The picture on the right shows genetically modified BR-29 variety rice seeds, which are rich in vitamin A to fight blindness in children. The picture on the left is the inbred seeds of the same variety.

Dr Swapan K Datta, a plant biotechnologist of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, engineered BR29.

Swiss and German scientists announced the development of golden rice in 1999.

German scientist Ingo Potrykus, professor emeritus of the Institute of Plant Sciences under the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, along with Professor Peter Beyer at the University of Freiburg led the team of scientists working on transgenic rice breeding.

All renowned journals and newsmagazines, including the Nature, the Science and the Time, covered the breakthrough in 2000.

"We'll hand the rice variety over

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

# Boost for Bangladesh



SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team finally got a boost in their final lead-up match ahead of the World Cup, starting on February 9.

Having lost the first of their warm-up matches, Bangladesh batsmen came good in a day-night encounter in Durban to beat KwaZulu-Natal by five wickets.

Youngster Ehsanul Haque and in-form Al Shahrir led the way for Bangladesh scoring 92 and 68 after the home side had posted an impressive 251 for six from their share of 50 overs.

The home side's innings was built around a partnership of 142 between Mark Sanders (64) and Hamish Amla (76), both of whom fell to leg-spinner Alok Kapali, who later also snared the wicket of Test player Dale Benkenstein to finish with three wickets for 70 runs.

Pacers Manjural Islam, SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: AFP

Two of the "big five", the lion (L) and the cheetah go through Wednesday's public dress rehearsal of the February 8 opening ceremony of the World Cup of Cricket at the Newlands Stadium in Capetown.

# Unmet election pledges leave BNP men irate

STAR REPORT

The government's indifference to some crucial election pledges has sparked resentment in a number of leaders and policymakers of the BNP and its alliance partners.

They are also frustrated at inertia in the administration, interference by vested quarter in its decision making and its general lack of direction.

The leaders told The Daily Star that they believe the government has been inclined more to 'con-

fronting' the opposition than addressing the 'real' issues.

Reserved seats in the Jatiya Sangsad, repeal of the Special Powers Act, formation of a human rights commission and anti-corruption commission, autonomy for the electronic media and appointment of ombudsmen are some of the BNP's election pledges.

In the first session of the eighth parliament, the party promised to resolve the reserved seats issue. However, five sessions over and

into the sixth session, the Sangsad is yet to see any bill on the women's seats.

The ruling party has not even named a replacement for AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury as the deputy leader of the House.

The position fell vacant when Chowdhury was elected president on November 14, 2001. Meanwhile, Chowdhury has resigned and been succeeded by Professor Iajuddin Ahmed.

Formation of parliamentary standing committees also remains

stuck in ruling-opposition standoff. The ruling party has recently said it will form the parliamentary watchdogs on different ministries after the Eid-ul-Azha vacation.

Insiders say a number of BNP policymakers and ministers have repeatedly raised these issues at different formal and informal meetings of the party, and also during one-to-one talks with the prime minister.

"As the 1991 BNP administration, this government also suffers

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

# PCJSS men abduct 11

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Rangamati

Armed men allegedly belonging to the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) kidnaped 11 people from a Union Parishad election rally at Baghaichhola village in Baghaichhori upazila on Wednesday night.

The abductors are supporters of Baghaichhori UP chairman candidate Diptiman Chakma, police said quoting local people.

The victims are Kala Chakma, Nogaram Chakma, Surbindu Chakma, Amor Bindu Chakma, Komol Dhor Chakma, Manik Chakma, Bogra Chakma, Laxmi Chakma, Duzu Chakma, Shanti Bilash Chakma, and Laxmi Priyo Chakma.

PCJSS activists also shot and injured Priyananda Chakma, an Awami League-backed candidate for the post of chairman of Sarboatali Union Parishad in the same Upazila. He is under treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital for bullet injury in the chest, neck and thigh, police said.

In another incident, illegal toll collectors have abducted four turmeric traders along with their two engine boats loaded with turmeric from Maichachhori area in Borkol Upazila in the district. Police said they are trying to rescue them.

# World debate on Iraq hots up

UN inspectors return to Baghdad tomorrow

AFP, Paris

World debate on the justification for war on Iraq intensified yesterday as US Secretary of State Colin Powell's indictment before the UN Security Council heaped new pressure on chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix, due to return to Baghdad tomorrow.

The raft of new evidence that Powell claimed proved that Iraq has systematically flouted United Nations demands to disarm left world opinion largely unmoved, but widely convinced that a US-led war is imminent -- with or without a UN green light -- barring a diplomatic miracle.

The US bid Wednesday did not change the official position of the four other veto-bearing members of the Security Council, with Britain supporting the US stance, France opposing it and Russia and China urging for UN inspectors to be given more time to search for illicit weapons in Iraq.

The European press yesterday

was generally unconvinced by Powell's presentation while leading US newspapers were impressed. The Wall Street Journal saying he had proved Iraq was in "material breach" of a UN resolution requiring Iraq to disclose any weapons of mass destruction.

But Britain's Financial Times said it was a moot point whether "sceptical (Security) Council members will be more persuaded after yesterday. Many of them know Iraq retains a residual armoury of rogue weapons. Their scepticism is about whether war is the best way of dealing with it."

Britain, Washington's staunchest ally, said that February 14, when Blix is to deliver new conclusions from more than three months of weapons inspections in Iraq, would be the turning point in the crisis.

"Time is now very short. This Council will have further reports from the inspectors on Friday week.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

# Bomb attack on police patrol vehicle in Khulna: 3 hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Suspected cadres of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) bombed a police patrol vehicle near Naihati Kalbari bazar of Rupsha upazila in the early hours of yesterday seriously injuring two policemen and the vehicle's driver.

The injured were identified as Havildar Abdul Karim Molla, 45, constable Alamgir Hossain, 33, and Tempo driver Abdur Rahim, 40, who were undergoing treatment at the Khulna General hospital. Condition of Havildar Karim is critical, doctors said.

Police superintendent Mosharef Hossain said six policemen of the Kismat Khulna police camp were patrolling the Naihati Kalbari bazar area in a Tempo at around 2:00am yesterday when a group of about 12 unidentified men hurled four bombs at them injuring the two policemen and the driver. The attackers fled the scene after the other policemen fired in self-defence.

Hossain suspected the attackers to be members of the outlawed PBCP. Sources said the attackers were after the weapons the police

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

# Washington to seek Dhaka's moral support in Iraq war

STAR REPORT

Washington would seek Dhaka's moral support in the event of a war on Iraq, US Ambassador Mary Ann Peters said yesterday.

The US envoy discussed the latest situation on Iraq with the editors of newspapers and news agencies in the city. She briefed on the US stand especially after US Secretary of State Collin Powell's speech before the UN Security Council on Wednesday.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



A student offers prayers in front of the image of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge, at the Rokeya Hall of Dhaka University yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Arsenic in vegetables still within limit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A research found arsenic accumulation in locally produced vegetables, but the concentrations apparently did not exceed the acceptable limits.

"But arsenic content in some cases is found higher in vegetables grown with arsenic contaminated water," said Prof. M Feroze Ahmed at the Department of Civil Engineering, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) at a seminar.

Leafy vegetables contained more arsenic than the fruity ones, he said while presenting the finds at the conclusion of a two-day seminar on "Fate of Arsenic in Environment" held at BUET Council Bhaban.

A high level of arsenic is found in the roots of rice plants, but the concentration is very low in the stem, leaves and husk. Besides, arsenic in rice is relatively low, he said.

A team of local and foreign researchers under the auspices of BUET and the United Nations University, Japan found that some vegetables were arsenic accumulators.

But specification and availability of arsenic present in all food items are required to understand the possible health effects, Ahmed added.

Dr. Zafar Adeel at the Department of Civil Engineering of BUET presented some recommendations at the seminar. These include finding ways to complete mass balance of arsenic in the environment and identifying end-

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PHOTO: STAR

Dr. Kamal Hossain leads a demonstration demanding punishment to the killers of Sabequn Nahar Sony, a BUET student, at Mukhtangan in the city yesterday.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Feb 7		5-49 pm
Feb 8	6-37 am	

Prayer Timings		
Feb 7		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-45	6-15
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-55	6-00
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation