

Aman likely to face setback in flood-hit dists

Delay in seed distribution

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Attainment of *Aman* cultivation target in flood affected districts in the current season is uncertain due to scarcity and high price of seeds and seedlings.

The government-promised *Aman* seeds and fertiliser are yet to reach the affected poor and marginal farmers, according to reports reaching from some of the affected districts.

The government earlier announced free distribution of five kg *Aman* seeds and 25 kg fertiliser to each poor farmer in flood affected areas.

But at most places, seeds are yet to reach farmers though it is high time for transplanting seedlings. Seedlings can be transplanted from seedbeds after 21 days of sowing, at the earliest. Transplantation after August reduces output significantly, according to



Two farmers at Kumarpara village in the Sadar upazila looking at their empty fields ponder how to collect Aman seedlings.

PHOTO: STAR

agriculture experts.

Small quantities of seedlings are available in markets in affected areas, which are sold at exorbitant prices, according to reports from out correspondents. Big farmers can buy seedlings but smaller and marginal ones, can not afford those.

Our Rangpur Correspondent reports: *Aman* seedlings are scarce in five upzilas of Kurigram

District, where floods damaged most of the seedbeds.

Small quantities of seedlings are sold at local markets at very high prices, which is beyond the buying capacity of farmers.

Some farmers this correspondent talked to said they went to neighbouring districts for seedlings, but returned empty handed.

During a visit to Velur Khamar

village in Ulipur upzila on Thursday, farmer Motiur Rahman told this correspondent that he bought Tk 3000 seedlings from Dinajpur for one acre of land. The price is ten times higher than normal, he said.

All seedbeds in 71 unions in the district were damaged by flood.

The farmers said about 3000 hectares of land may remain fallow in the current *Aman* season.

Asked about government's free seed and fertiliser, some said they heard it on TV but did not know whether any one got it.

Kurigram AED officials said BADC (Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation) officials regretted to them, failing to supply the required quantity of Amon seeds.

An official at Rangpur AED office said they do not have any reserve of *Aman*

seeds but have floated tender to procure seeds.

Those will be distributed among affected farmers after procurement, they said.

A BADC official seeking anonymity said only three percent of government's *Aman* seed distribution target could be achieved because of shortage.

"Procurement of four tonnes of *Aman* seeds in the current season is almost impossible", he said.

Our Gaibandha Correspondent reports: Seedlings on 3,080 hectare of land have been completely damaged by flood in Gaibandha district, according to assessment made by the AED. A total of 3,25,635 farmers were badly affected in the district.

Most of the small and marginal farmers spent their last penny during flood for survival. Now they have no money for *Aman* farming. Many of them will have to transplant seedlings for the second time as earlier transplanted *Aman* seedlings were damaged by the deluge.

"I am searching for seedlings for the last two days and procured three and half pawn (80 bundles) of seedlings from market at Tk 160 per pawn," said Abdur Rahman of Chagao village in Gaibandha Sadar upazila.

Prices have shot up in market. One pawn now sells at Tk 160 to 180 depending on quality against Tk 50 to 70 earlier, he said. Five to six pawns are needed per bigha.

Moneylenders have also become active in flood affected areas, providing poor farmers with loans at Tk 10 to 12 per cent interest per month, some farmers said.

Finding no alternative, farmers are compelled to borrow money at so high interest or promising to sell paddy at Tk 200 per maund after harvest.

Government has allocated Tk 1.51 crore for agriculture rehabilitation

in Gaibandha. Under this programme, 23,010 small and marginal farmers will get seedlings and other inputs free for one bigha.

AED officials here said they received Tk 33 lakh so far for supplying seedlings among farmers.

"Seedbeds of late variety *Aman* is being prepared on 150 acres of land for supplying seedlings to farmers," said AED Deputy Director Abdur Rouf.

"Priority list of farmers for distributing seedlings is being prepared by union rehabilitation committees", he said.

But many farmers this correspondent talked to in the sadar upazila said the government help will go to people close to local body members.

Model farmer Kamrul Hasan at Kholahati village in Gaibandha Sadar upazila said, "It is high time but I can not procure seedlings".

Our Netrakona Correspondent reports: *Aman* seeds are sold at between Tk 400 and 500 per five kilogram in markets, which is beyond the purchasing capacity of poor flood affected farmers in Netrakona and Kishoreganj.

The government-promised seeds are yet to reach agriculture officials, they said.

An acute scarcity of *Aman* seedlings is prevailing in the two districts, most areas of which were severely affected by the flood.

AED officials said it would be difficult to attain the *Aman* cultivation target of 1,26,000 hectares in Netrakona and 1,18,000 in Kishoreganj.

Kamal Hossain of Jugir Nagua village in Atpara upazila in Netrakona said he will transplant *Aman* on two acres and another three acres will remain fallow for want of seedlings.

Many farmers said they did not get the government seeds and fertiliser but the prime time for sowing is almost over.



PHOTO: STAR

People demolishing the house of drug lord Shaymol in Manikganj town on Friday.

Manikganj youths rise against drug abuse

Massive campaign launched, house of drug lord demolished

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Amid rising drug use, some groups of youngsters in Manikganj have raised a hope against the social scourge.

Grouped under the 'Conscious Young Generation', they have launched a determined campaign against drug use and drawn people from all classes into their fold to make Manikganj district 'free of drug use and trade'.

Some local influentials including politicians and representatives of teachers, businessmen and sportsmen have joined them, campaigning to create mass awareness and launching a tirade against drug lords.

But they are getting a lukewarm response from police, some members of newly floated body told this correspondent.

In the last couple of weeks, they held several gatherings in different areas of the town.

"Our message is well received by the people", one member said.

Enthusied by the Conscious Young Generation and determined to "drive away drug traders and demolish their houses", several hundred people led by former municipality chairman Sudev Saha demolished the house of drug lord Shaymol at Dashora in the town.

Shyamol is the son of Ram Pashad.

Cricketer Morshed Ali Khan Sumon, journalist Rashedul Islam Khan, college teacher Abdul Karim Biswas and businessman Abdus Salam were also among them.

After demolishing the house, the people submitted a memorandum to Manikganj Police Superintendent to arrest Shyamol. But he was not arrested till yesterday.

The organisers said they demolished Shyamol's house after persuasion to desist him from drug trading failed.

Members of the Young Generation

had gone to Shyamol several times earlier and tried to convince him to give up the trade, they said.

When contacted over cell phone, the Manikganj Police Superintendent said he is on leave and advised this correspondent to talk to the Additional SP. The Additional SP said he does not know anything about the matter.

Drugs like phensidyl, hemp, heroin and pathedine injection are taken almost openly in some areas in the town. Youths fall victim to those easily.

Paturia ferry terminal under Shivalaya police station is a safe point through which most of drugs flow into the district, sources said.

The drug trading spots in Manikganj town are known to all. These are Water Development Board office premises near the bus stand, Isu Babur Kachari

and the now-demolished house of Shyamol. Just after sunset, young addicts and peddlers flock to these areas.

The campaigners say they have created awareness among people against drug use.

Its use will reduce if smuggling is stopped and law enforces arrest the drug traders and peddlers, which they can do easily, the campaigners say.

They also visit houses of addicts and traders to campaign against drug.

"But it is a tragedy that law enforcing agencies do not respond adequately to our efforts", said Selim, one of the leaders of organisation.

"But we believe we will be able to make Manikganj a drug free district," he said.

Arms recovered: Two arrested in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A home made pistol and a pipe gun with bullet were recovered from beneath the bed of a rice mill worker at Galachipa on Tuesday.

Galachipa Thana police also arrested two youths Shafiqul, 23, and Monir Hossain, 20, of Kesheb Kathi village in Ujirpur upazila, Barisal from the spot.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided a rice mill owned by Likon Talukder in Kutail para and recovered the arms and ammunition, according to police.

A case was filed with Galachipa Thana.

Train service to N dists resumes early Sept

Balashi ghat to be open to goods train today: One of five damaged tracks restored

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The Railway will resume goods wagon movement from Trimohoni to Balashi ferry ghat in the Brahmaputra river from today after 35 days.

All the five tracks from Trimohoni to the ghat were badly damaged by the recent flood as water inundated those and removed the soil underneath. Railway officials and employees worked round the clock and restored one of the tracks.

Restoration of passenger train service through the ghat is still uncertain but railway officials hope to open the service by the end of this month.

A temporary bridge has been being set up on about 1000 feet stretch of the breached railway line adjacent to Balashi ghat by using RS Joist and CC Crips. The damaged tracks were virtually hanging with no soil underneath.

The Railway authorities on July 11 suspended train movement from Trimohoni to Balashi and also the ferry service between Balashi and

Bahadurabad ghats. The marine yard and adjacent outer station had reeled under about four feet water.

The emergency renovation work has been done with Railway's own manpower and equipment. The flood has incurred a loss of about Tk one crore to the railway, said a high official.

Over 2000 wagons loaded with essentials are now stuck up at outer stations of both the ghats.

Operation of two inter-city trains and one mail train from Dinajpur to Dhaka remained suspended as all the tracks at Balashi went under water.

Last week, the Ekota Inter-city was routed via Jamuna Bridge. The two other trains are shutting between Dinajpur and Trimohoni.

"The emergency step to has been taken to restore the Trimohoni-Balashi section as at least 100 wagons loaded with essentials like fuel, food grain and fertiliser are stranded in the mid-stream (of Brahmaputra) on board four barges since July 11" said Divisional Railway Manager Emdadul Haque.

Additional General Manager (West) Musfigur Rahman said, "We are not in a position to run passenger trains through this section at the moment as only one track has been restored just to pass goods wagons."

"Passenger train movement will resume soon."

"We are expecting to restore direct train service between northern districts and Dhaka through Balashi and Bahadurabad ghats by the first week of September", he said.

Initiative has also been taken to restore Dewanganj-Bahadurabad ghat in Jamalpur to resume train service between Dhaka and Bahadurabad ghat by August 25, said a railway source.

The Divisional Railway Manager said emergency renovation of tracks in the flood-damaged Kurigram-Ramna section is nearing completion. Train communication in this section will resume on August 15, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

A temporary bridge is being erected at the breached portion of the Trimohoni-Balashi rail track. The photo was taken on Friday.

Bomb found at school

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A powerful bomb was recovered from a primary school at Bheramara here on Thursday.

After the incident, panic-stricken guardians stopped sending their children to school. On arrival at school, a guardian of a student found the bomb near a classroom, according to police. At once he informed the matter to the school authority and police.

Later, police recovered the bomb in presence of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer.

Food official faces corruption charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A food official faces corruption charge for misappropriating wheat worth Tk 6 lakh.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) has filed the case with Dashmina Thana on Tuesday against the Officer-in-Charge of Rangopaldi food godown in Dashmina upazila, Shawkat Hossain for misappropriating 43 metric tons of wheat.

The corruption was detected following a surprise visit to the food godown by upazila food controller on 30 November in 2002, according to BAC sources. At once he informed the matter to the district food controller who formed a four-member investigation team. This team found shortage of 42,743 metric tons of wheat.

Five of a bridal party bullet-hit by dacoits

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

At least five persons were bullet-hit when dacoits attacked a bridal party on board a boat in Bhitormala Beel (lake) in Haraspur union in the Sadar upazila Friday night.

The dacoits looted about Tk three lakh in gold ornaments and other valuables, police said yesterday.

The bridal party with the bridegroom and the bride had sailed from Khalinga village for Paikpara village in the same union.

As they reached Hazipur in the Beel at about 10 pm, a gang of 20 to 25 armed men came in a machinised boat and attacked them. They looted 11 ounces of gold ornaments, a TV set, furniture and other gifts and valuables.

The dacoity fired on the members of the party and stabbed some of them.

The bridegroom, Nasir Mia, 25 and four others were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital. The condition of Nasir is critical, hospital source said.

Tk 50,000 fish looted by pirates

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Fish worth Tk 50,000 was looted by pirates of notorious Shiraj Bahini from nine fishing boats in the Tatulia river on Friday.

They also looted fuel from the boats, local fishermen said.

The same group attacked five boats carrying merchandise in the river on Tuesday. They looted Tk 2 lakh from the boats, returning from Kalaiya bazaar. Ten businessmen sustained injuries by their attack. After committing the crime the pirates fled away towards Lalmohon with the booty by a white colour speed-boat.

On contact, Patuakhali Police Superintendent (SP) Awarangzeb Mahub confirmed the report.

Life of people in 15 shoals of Bauphal upazila became miserable due to pirates' menace.

However, police fail to catch them due to absence of speed-boats.

The notorious group is named after its ring leader Shiraj of Gajaria village in Lalmohon upazila, Bhola. Most frequently pirates raid boats of fishermen and traders, loot their cash and valuables. They also attack inhabitants of different shoals in the river and loot their crops, cattle including cash and valuables. The group is engaged in looting aman paddy from villagers of the bordering shoals during harvesting season every year, according to local people.

Police cannot take action against them because of their location outside the district.

Suffering people have demanded a routine joint operation by police of Patuakhali and Bhola districts regularly.

SNAPS

Bomb hoax at Sylhet Betar
STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet
A bomb threat by an anonymous caller panicked officials and employees at the Sylhet centre of Bangladesh Betar on Friday. The Assistant Controller of News received a phone call at 10-40 AM that the centre would be blown up at 11 PM. The matter was immediately brought to the notice of law enforcers, who beefed up security there. But the threat turned to be a hoax. The DIG of police and officials of other security agencies also visited the centre.

Life savers in peril
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal
About 200 officials and employees of cyclone preparedness programme (CPP) in ten coastal districts are not getting salary for two months as the decisions of the Policy Committee on the CPP have not been implemented. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BRS) jointly conduct the CPP. The 200 CPP employees are in Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Barguna, Bagherhat, Bhola, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Chittagong, Feni and Cox's Bazar. Talking to this correspondent, Abdul Latif, director of Mathbaria CPP, urged the minister concerned and the Red Crescent Society Chairman to take steps in this regard.

RAKUB disburses over Tk 3 lakh loan
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha
Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) has disbursed Tk 3 lakh 15,000 loans among small traders here. General Manager (GM) of RAKUB, Rangpur zonal division Sheikh Ahmed disbursed the credit at a simple function held at its main branch. The GM called for proper utilisation of money.

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