

Boro faces debacle in *haors* as sheaves bear no grains

Farmers using plants as fodder in four districts

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Boro production will suffer a great setback in haor areas of Brahmanbaria, Netrakona, Habiganj and Sunamganj districts this year as sheaves do not bear grains.

In Brahmanbaria, at least 8000 hectares are set to yield no Boro paddy and farmers are using the plants as fodder. Same is the case about 8,600 hectares in Netrakona haor areas.

The situation is not so worse in Sunamganj and Habiganj districts. But farmers there said the yield will be around 40 per cent and 30 per cent below target.

Agriculture Extension Department (AED) officials in the districts said sheaves do not bear grains due to 'cold injury', caused by insufficient temperature during flowering period and early transplantation of seed-

lings. But farmers attribute this disaster to irrigation failure and inadequate fertiliser.

Boro harvest is supposed to begin in the districts in about two weeks.

In Brahmanbaria, at least one lakh farmers will be affected as their main crop Boro on 8000 hectares have turned into fodder, reports our correspondent.

According to district AED officials, 105,862 hectares were brought under Boro cultivation this year. There will not be any harvest in 8,000 hectares where farmers cultivated Bori-28 and Bori-29 varieties of paddy.

The farmers will be hard hit as Boro is the lone crop in the areas.

The affected areas are Beel Shapla, Beel Dattakhala, Majlishpur, Dharanti, Bariura, Nagong,

Shahbazpur, Shahzadpur, Moindo, Sultanpur Kalikatcha and Radhika.

The AED officials said they visited the affected areas and found sheaves without grain on about 5,000 hectares in Brahmanbaria Sadara upazila, 1468 is Sarail, 50 in Nabinagar, 100 in Akhaura, 150 in Bancharampur and 1,232 hectares in Nasimgar upazila.

Farid Mia at Sahzadpur village said he cultivated Bori-28 paddy on about four acres (less than one hectare). He expected at least 75 maunds of paddy but the fields are now grazing grounds.

A team of specialists headed by Abdul Bari, Director of Agriculture Extension Department and Md. Motiar Rahman, Deputy Director of local AED visited some of the affected areas and collected some sheaves.

Motiar Rahman told this correspondent that after tests, scientists concluded that there was no pollina-

The affected areas are Khallajuri, Madan and Mohangonj upazilas, according to Deputy Director of Netrakona AED Md Tajuddin.

Tajuddin said sheaves did not bear rice due to 'abnormal variation of temperature during day time and night'. Early planting of seedlings or low quality seed may be other causes, he claimed.

Three agriculture scientists from Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) at Gazipur headed by Scientific Officer Helal Uddin Ahmed visited haor areas in Khallajuri upazila last week.

Tajuddin also quoted them as saying that wide variation in temperature might have caused the crop disaster.

But farmers differed. They attributed this debacle to inadequate irrigation due to diesel crisis and use of urea in insufficient quantities.



PHOTO: STAR

Two farmers with lost hopes sitting on their Boro field in a haor area in Brahmanbaria.

tion as the temperature during the period was 11 to 12 degree celsius against 18 degree needed. This is called 'cold injury', he said.

Early transplantation and lack of fertility in soil could be the other reasons, he said.

Some AED sources however claimed that the affected areas are not less than 10,000 hectares.

Our Netrakona Correspondent reports: Iri-Boro on at least 8,600 hectares in three haor upazilas in Netrakona district will not yield any paddy, AED sources and farmers said.

This has become a cause of concern for agriculture officials and farmers as Boro is the lone rice crop in the areas. Moreover, most of the low lying haors are single crop areas.

He also differed with officials who observed that the disaster could be due to early transplantation of seedlings.

Around 79,680 hectares were brought under Iri-Boro cultivation in the three upazilas this year, AED officials said.

Our Staff Correspondent reports from Sylhet: Farmers in vast haor areas of Sunamganj are worried over disappointed with prospect of Boro paddy this year. The yield will be at least 40 per cent less as sheaves do not bear grains.

Agriculture officials however claimed that the situation is not so much disappointing.

Some farmers in Hashkuri village in Sunamganj Sadar upazila blamed drought for it. They transplanted Boro seedlings about two weeks earlier as there was no flood this year. But after that there was neither any rain nor they could irrigate lands properly due to power supply disruption and high price of diesel, said Nuruddin Ahmed.

"Most farmers in our area have lost interest to go for harvest", he said. Same was the view of Anwar Miah of Govindaganj. "I will not get even half of the normal yield", he said.

Khaled Ahmed of Ujanigaon in Sunamganj Sadar said many sharecroppers are worried how they will repay loans.

Nurul Haque of Tahirpur upazila said Tk 300 is spent for harvesting paddy on each acre, but the crop is not worth that amount.

"Normally I get at least 140 maunds of paddy from seven acres. I will not get over 50 maunds this year", he lamented.

However, the situation is slightly better in Matian Haor, Shanir Haor, Gummar Haor areas, farmers and officials said.

District AED officials said Boro paddy was cultivated on 113,000 hectares, hybrid on 10,000 hectares and local varieties on 54,000 hectares in Sunamganj district.

The AED Deputy Director said the situation is worse in comparatively higher lands as farmers transplanted seedlings earlier there. Inadequate irrigation and less-than-required temperature added to the problem, he said.

Our Moulvibazar Correspondent reports: Boro production in Habiganj district may be 25 to 30 per cent less than this year as sheaves do not bear rice in many areas, according to farmers.

AED Deputy Director Sultan Ali Khan said the yield may be five per cent less than usual. He however said he has not yet received latest reports on Boro crops from upazila offices.

The AED fixed a target to to produce 3.95 lakh tones of Boro from about 99,000 hectares in eight upazilas.

This correspondent visited Chinari, Mohammadpur, Gongazol, Pukur, Bariuri and Muradpur villages in Baniachang upazila and Shibapasa and Paschimbhag haor areas in Ajmiriganj upazila and talked to farmers.

They claimed that the yield will be 25 to 30 per cent less, allegedly due to fertiliser crisis and inadequate irrigation. Many of them said they cultivated 'Bori-28' variety of Boro paddy.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

The once mighty Brahmaputra is now vast sheets of sand. The photo was taken in Mymensingh.

List being made to oust grabbers of forestland in Rangamati

Move evokes criticism as fate of 'forest villagers' unexplained

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

The Forest Department in Rangamati is preparing a list of alleged land grabbers to evict them from different government forests.

This has evoked criticism from indigenous leaders as they were neither informed nor consulted.

The Conservator of Forest (CF) of Rangamati Circle, in a letter directed officials concerned in five forest departments to prepare lists of 'land grabbers', sources said.

The five departments are CHT South Forest Department, CHT North Forest Department, Jhum Control Forest Department, Unclassified Forest Department and Plywood Forest Department.

Chief Conservator of Forests (CF) Dr. Saiful Islam also sent letters to forest departments on January 25 asking officials to prepare lists of 'land grabbers' and to inform Deputy Commissioners (DCs) 'as early as possible' to evict them.

The letter also said that illegal structures mushroomed on forestlands and in areas close to forest ranges, bit stations and at Kaptai National Park. Many illegal structures and clubs were built even in Banarupa Tribaladom and Forest Colony, the letter said. These structures should be demolished, it said.

When contacted, DFO of South Forest Division Asit Ranjan Pal admitted preparing list of 'land grab-

bers'. Demolition will start after the list is complete, he said.

Asked whether 'forest villagers' would be evicted, he said, "I do not know exactly about the matter".

Rangamati Deputy Commissioner Dr. Harun Ur Rashid Khan said some DFOs discussed the matter with him.

He however said the eviction drive will be launched keeping in mind genuine locals are not affected.

When contacted, Dr. Saiful Islam said, "We will start eviction drive after completion of lists".

He said any body living illegally on forestland is a land grabber.

He avoided a direct reply when asked whether forest villagers would also be evicted.

He said, "Social afforestation will be launched in three CHT hill districts soon. The project is awaiting approval of the ministry. I hope it will be approved.

"Local people will be included in the project on the basis of profit sharing. Three to four acres of land will be provide to each family", he said.

Under the project, short, mid-term and long term crops will be cultivated so that locals can benefit more, Dr. Saiful added.

The move has been criticised by the leaders of CHT Forests and Land Rights Protection Andolan (CHT-FLRPA). It will displace people living in forests for generations and desta-

bilise the situation in hills, FLRPA president Goutam Dewan told this correspondent. Dewan is also ex-chairman of Rangamati Local Government Council.

FLRPA sources claimed that about 3.50 lakh people including Bengali and tribesmen who do not own lands have been living on government forestlands for about three decades. They are called 'forest villagers'.

The forest department at different times declared many areas in hills as 'unclassified forests' and published gazette notification but there is no provision for such 'unclassified forest' in CHT Act of 1900, the FLRPA sources claimed.

During British period, some 750 square mile areas in Sitapahar, Kaptai and Mynee valley were declared as reserve forests in 1875. Later, in 1880 and 1883, more 1,345 square miles in Matamuhuri and Sangu in Bandaraban and Kachalong and Rayingkhing in Rangamati were brought under the reserve forests.

The forest department started creating reserve forests and engaged local people as labourers. Descendents of the labourers now living in the forest areas are called 'forest villagers'.

In 1991, the forest department declared more 2, 18,000 acres of land in 83 mouzas in CHT as reserve forest. But the process was post-

poned in faced of agitation by local people. Nevertheless, the forest department still consider those areas as reserve forests as the gazette notification has not been cancelled, the sources said.

Goutam Dewan however expressed his ignorance about preparation of lists of land grabbers.

"I do not know whether the forest department really wants to evict people living there for long.

"I think it would be a wrong decision to evict them without consultation with Hill District Council and local bodies", he said.

He said, the land issue in CHT is quite complicated. There are many types of lands and to deal any land issue, there are so many authorities like Land Commission, Chakma Circle, Hill District Council and Headmen Association.

"So I think it (eviction) will create both discord and disorder in the whole of CHT", Dewan said.

He said, "Since the colonial period, our headmen have been playing a vital role in land affairs. They can lease any type of land to local people and as such we are enjoying the lands. It would be unacceptable to us if the forest department all of a sudden claims ownership of any land".

Fake doctor held in Rangamati

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Kaptai police have arrested a fake MBBS doctor along with two aides and sealed his illegal vaccination centre.

Arif Billah, was arrested from KRC High School ground in Chandraghona on Saturday after the Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer (UHFO) filed a case against him, police said.

Police also sealed his illegal Hepatitis-B vaccination centre.

Two of Arif's aides arrested are Mossarf Hossain and Monir Hossain. Two others escaped when police raided the centre.

Rangamati Civil Surgeon Dr Md Nazer, Rangamati Sadar UHFO Dr. Sneh Kanti Chakma and Kaptai UHFO Aparajita Padma were also present when the raid was conducted.

Arif Billah told people that he was a MBBS doctor but could not show any certificate, police said.

LGED engineer suspended on corruption charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A Sub-Assistant Engineer of Local government Engineering Department (LGED) in Sadullapur upazila was suspended for alleged corruption.

Sub-Assistant Engineer Kazi Rezaul Hafiz was in charge of implementation of pavement work of the road from Nagbari Bazar to Gopalganj hat in Sadullapur upazila under Greater Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Infrastructure Development Programme. He was found involved in corrupt practice in construction work.

LGED chief engineer suspended him as the charge against him was proved during investigation, sources said.

Jaundice spreading fast in Moulvibazar town

About 900 infected in four weeks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Jaundice is spreading alarmingly in the town and its adjoining areas in last four weeks.

At least 867 people including children were infected with jaundice between March 12 and April 8, sources in the pathological laboratories said.

On average, seven patients are now being examined at the outdoors of Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital daily, resident medical officer (RMO) said.

Moulvibazar civil surgeon (CS) Dr Afaz Uddin said people are usually infected with jaundice

through contaminated water. He apprehended that contamination of water supplied by the municipality might be the reason of outbreak of jaundice (Hepatitis-B). Some other doctors in the Sadar Hospital also echoed his view.

Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital resident medical officer (RMO) said, on average they are examining seven jaundice patients at the outdoors of the hospital daily.

Many patients are now crowding the four pathological laboratories in the town to test their blood daily. In most cases, level of Serum bilirubin in blood of the patients were detected to be abnormal.

On contact, Moulvibazar Pourasava superintendent (Water Supply) Bijoy Krishna Dey said he got numerous complaints of contamination of municipality supplied water from lots of people. On receipt of the complaints, he had sent samples of water to Comilla regional office of the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) to examine existence of virus, if any. He said he would take necessary measures after receiving the report from the department.

Moulvibazar CS Dr Afaz said health workers are now engaged in creating awareness about jaundice among people.



PHOTO: STAR

As Pahela Baishakh is approaching, students of Institute of Fine Arts in Rajshahi University are busy colouring masks for the Bangla new year programmes. RU is spending Tk 3 lakh including Tk 2.50 lakh given by sponsor Banglalink.

HSTU VC resigns protesting corruption

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Vice Chancellor of Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University (HSTU) Md. Motahar Hossain Mondal resigned yesterday protesting alleged illegal appointments in the university on political consideration and corruption during the past government.

The Md. Motahar Hossain Mondal joined the university on August 31 last year.

The university's fifth founding anniversary celebrations were scheduled yesterday but no programme was held.

Mentionably, former BNP parliament member and army chief Lt (Rt.) General Mahbubur Rahman also resigned from the post of HSTU Regent Board on June 30, 2005 protesting alleged corruption.

One killed in Jhenidah clash

A CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

One person was killed and 20 others were injured, two of them critically, in a clash over land at Karimpur village in Jhenidah Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

The dead is Charu, 25, son of Shakhwat Hossain of the aforesaid village. Critically injured Alim, 26, and Habibul, 30, are now undergoing treatment at Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

Villagers said the clash ensued when a group of villagers led by Dulal Mohammad and another group led by Monjer Ali locked in a clash over land dispute.

When contacted, Jhenidah Sadar Police Station sub-inspector (SI) Abul Kashem said police officials visited the spot. 'Action will be taken against the culprits after their return, he said.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Mouth watering watermelons are arriving in plenty in Barisal markets but their prices are higher in scorching summer heat.

JATKA PROTECTION

Fishermen yet to get subsistence allowance

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Poor and jobless fishermen did not receive subsistence money allotted for their survival during the seven-month ban on catching Jatka under the official Jatka Protection Programme.

This is because of failure of the authorities concerned in preparing a list of fishermen although five out of seven months expired after the official allotment.

The Department of Fisheries banned fishing of Jatka in seven months of the year from November to May, according to sources in Patuakhali District Fisheries Office (DFO). An amount of Tk 20 lakh was allocated for distribution among poor and jobless fishermen to create alternative jobs like rickshaw

or van pulling, rearing of goat, duck or hen, tailoring and other jobs under the programme in 2006-07 fiscal.

An amount of Tk 4.5 lakh each was allocated for Patuakhali Sadar and Galachipa upazilas, Tk 4 lakh for Kalapara, Tk 3 lakh for Baufal, Tk 2 lakh for Dashmina and Tk 1 lakh each for Dumki and Mirzaganj upazilas.

A taskforce committee was formed at union and district level to monitor the programme. The committee launched drives in different rivers to resist fishing of Jatka during the ban period.

The committee seized about 1, 74,397 metres of net worth Tk 57 lakh from November 1 last year till March 31 this year from various rivers in the district.

As many as 2, 423 fishermen were earmarked for rehabilitation last year (2005-06 fiscal). But the government allotted money could not be disbursed among the fishermen due to lack of list. Ultimately, the total amount was returned, sources said.

When asked, three fishermen named Solaiman, Kashem and Abul Hossain of Pairakunja village under Sadar upazila expressed their ignorance about the programme. They said they did not at all hear about official allocation of fund for them.

When contacted, an official of the district fisheries office said, 'We could not disburse the amount due to failure of the taskforce committee in submitting the list of poor and jobless fishermen'.