

# Pest attack, diseases make Amon prospect bleak in greater Rangpur

STAR NATIONAL DESK

After successive floods that destroyed rice paddy, pest attack and diseases are making Amon prospects bleak in greater Rangpur, frustrating farmers and worrying agriculture officials.

Agriculture Extension Department (AED) officials in Rangpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari and Gaibandha have detected diseases along with pest attack in Amon fields that may affect the crop, now in flowering stage in most areas, our correspondents reported.

In Rangpur, some farmers claimed that the diseases and pest attack may reduce the yield by 25-30 per cent. Agriculture officials however differ on the extent of damage.

AED Deputy Director in Lalmonirhat Aftab Uddin said, "Transplanted Amon on 625 hectares of land out of 1,00,000 hectares in the district is so far affected with 'sheet blight' and 'rot blight' diseases. This may decrease the yield by 2 to 5 per cent".

Only BR-11 and Shawna varieties of Amon are attacked with the diseases, he said.

"BR-11 is an old variety and so its disease resistance capacity has decreased. Shawna is an Indian variety not suitable in the climate of the region", he explained.

Farmer Abu Moktadir of Itapotha village in Mogholhat union in Lalmonirhat said, he used pesticide but is worried that he would not get even 30 to 40 per cent yield.

Rangpur AED Deputy Director Shariful Alam admitted 'sheet blight' and 'rot blight' diseases in Amon fields in 'some areas' but said the 'situation is now under control'. He said all agriculture officials have been deployed in fields to monitor the situation.

"Deficiency of potash in lands in some areas in the district may affect Amon yield. Farmers use only urea but they need to use Potash also", the AED official said.

Khondker Topakkharul Islam of Dahiganj in Rangpur Sadar upazila said farmers like him can not afford

to buy potash at high price now. He said most of the late-transplanted Amon plants are attacked with 'sheet blight'. Chief Scientific Officer of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute in Rangpur, Dr. MA Mojib, identified two major causes for the diseases.

Climate in the region is dry after floods, which is suitable for the diseases to grow. Late planting may be another reason.

Our Nilphamari Correspondent reports: Widespread attack by 'brown plant hopper' in Amon fields in the district has caused serious concern among farmers.

They said BR-11 variety is more susceptible to the pest attack. About one-fourth of BR-11 paddy fields have so far been attacked, they claimed.

The worst affected unions are Panchapukur and Kachukata in Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

In Dimla upazila, the affected unions are Balapara, Jhunagachh Chapani, Khalisha Chapani, Nautara, Purba Chhatnai, Paschim Chhatnai and adjoining villages.

Mannan Fakir, a big farmer in Singdoi village in Sadar upazila said 'brown plant hopper', locally called 'current poka', suddenly attacks paddy fields in swarms, sucks plants' fluid within a short time and turns them into yellowish straw.

Ramzan Ali of Gayaban village in Dimla said paddy fields turn yellow after the attack. No ear of paddy come out from the plants. Even animals do not eat affected paddy plants.

The farmers said cold at night now and hot during day time is favourable for breeding of such insects. Usually, low-lying lands are more affected.

Member of Uttar Titpara Union Parishad in Dimla, Abul Hossen, said paddy on seven bighas out of

his 24 bighas have been damaged by pest attack.

Fazlar Rahman of Modhya Haroa village in Sadar upazila said he sold his cow and bought Amon seedlings at a high price for his one bigha land after the earlier crop was completely damaged by floods twice. But 'current poka' has damaged the field, now in flowering stage.

The farmers alleged that insecticides used by them are not effective against 'brown plant hopper'. Pesticide trader Pijush Sarkar in Nilphamari town said farmers come to him in large numbers every day for pesticide to combat attack by 'brown plant hopper'.

He said Tido-20 SL and Mephosin are effective against the insect but it should be used in appropriate dose.

Nilphamari DAE Deputy Director Eunus Ali however said farmer's claim of a massive pest

attack is not correct. "Amon on only 50-60 hectares have so far been attacked with brown plant hopper in the district, he said. The attack has been effectively controlled, he claimed.

A total of 1,15,135 hectares were brought under Amon cultivation in Nilphamari this year with a production target of 2,64,444 tonnes of rice, officials said.

Our Gaibandha Correspondent reports: About 20 per cent of Amon fields in Gaibandha has so far been attacked with pests and diseases, according to a field survey by agriculture extension officials.

Normally, downpour after flood and disproportionate use of fertiliser are the main reasons for pest attack and disease, which need instant care for remedy, they said.

Amon fields turned brown due to deficiency of potash, they said.

Farmers usually apply high dose of urea and lesser quantities of triple super phosphate (TSP), murate of potash (MP) and zinc sulphate. This creates an ideal situation for attack by diseases and pests, said Shahidur Rahman, sub-assistant agriculture officer in Gaibandha Sadar upazila.

According to AED, Amon was cultivated on 1,14,851 hectares in the district against a target of 1,27,447 hectares because of flood twice.

The officials said, Amon on 397 hectares have been attacked with 'stem rot' disease, 145 hectares with 'leaf rot', 54 hectares with 'stem blight' and 40 hectares with 'brown plant hopper' insect in the district.

"We have already controlled 90 per cent of the pest attack stopped its further attack", said AED deputy director Abdul Matin.

Adequate measure have been taken to combat spread of diseases and pest attack and an awareness campaign is going on urging farmers to contact local agriculture officials in case of any problem, he added.



Army men along with people try to prevent erosion by the Jamuna at Itakuri in Shaghata upazila on Saturday.

## Villagers join hands to combat Jamuna erosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Hundreds of people from all walks of life have joined hands to combat Jamuna erosion at Itakuri in Shaghata upazila on self-help basis.

They also supplied sandbags, bamboos, timber and collected money for this.

Earlier, a ring embankment was constructed on the western bank of the river a few years ago but it was eroded by flood. Since then over 2,000 homeless people took shelter at a nearby embankment.

As the erosion continued unabated, it rendered 300 families shelterless anew in last two weeks. About 1,500 others are now facing the threat of erosion.

In face of erosion, local people shifted Hatbari Primary School and Char Haldia Government Primary School to safer places. But

Kanaipara Primary School went under the gorge of river.

In such a dismal situation, people in the affected areas on Saturday gathered and decided to combat erosion on self-help basis by forming a committee titled, 'Shaghata River Erosion Resistance Committee', said its secretary Akhterul Islam.

Abdul Hye, a teacher who lost most of his cultivable land in river erosion said he has supplied timber to combat the disaster. He sought government steps for halting wide-spread erosion in the area.

Delwar, another farm labourer said earlier he shifted two of his huts thrice elsewhere. He said if he faced erosion for the fourth time, then he has no other alternative but to take shelter on embankment.

On contact, Gaibandha Water

Development Board (WDB) executive engineer Shafiqul Azam said that he had appreciated the endeavour of local people in combating river erosion. He further said he will send a proposal to the higher authorities on emergency basis to combat erosion.

Shaghata union chairman Abdur Rouf presided over Saturday's meeting.

Among others, Major Arif of joint forces, Shaghata upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) Mustakim Billah Faruki, Gaibandha Water Development Board (WDB) executive engineer Shafiqul Azam, former upazila chairman Altaf Hossain Sarker, Principal Saidur Rahman, Union Parishad (UP) member Lutfar Rahman, Shah Alam Mondol, Mosharaf Hossain and Fazlul Huq Sarker addressed.



Construction of this bridge on Jhagrabil-Rangamati road is postponed due to rise in the water level of Kaptai Lake.

## 'Extend CHT road project period' Only half of Tk 4,510cr will be utilised till March next year

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

Development initiatives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts assume bright prospect as construction work of ten vital roads linking different upazilas in three hill districts of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari are going on in full swing.

Supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project (CHTRDP) under the Upgrading and Rehabilitation of Rural Infrastructure (URRI) programme, however, cannot be completed when the project tenure ends in March 2008.

Construction of two of the ten roads has already been completed and two other roads are nearing completion while Tk 1863.35 have so far been spent, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) sources said.

Supported by ADB, the Tk 4510.61 crore project is the largest one launched in the CHT since independence.

If the ADB does not extend the stipulated time, full implementation of the ongoing CHTRDP project will not be possible and the government will have to return about half of the loan amount that was borrowed from the ADB, sources said.

The development of communication in the CHT region will benefit people of different remote and backward hilly areas as people can easily carry their agricultural products to upazila headquarters and district towns for sale while school-going children can use the roads to go to educational institutions.

Completion of the project will also help to develop tourism in CHT.

The eight-year-long (2001-2008) CHTRDP project was launched in the financial year of

2001-2002 but it tender works virtually stopped in 2004-2005 after the appointment of 'quality control engineer', sources said.

Meanwhile, construction works of some roads, especially bridges, have been hampered due to unusual increase of water of the Kaptai Lake this year. Construction works of all bridges as well as culverts under the aforesaid ten roads have to be done in the coming dry season whenever water level of Kaptai Lake comes down, LGED office sources said.

Total length of the ten roads under the CHTRDP project is 68 kilometres. The roads are: Battali-Ugalchhari union road 2.50 km, Wagga Junior High School -- Saphchhari union road 0.83 km, Bangalhalai R & H point -- Nalkachhari Union road 4.010 km, Kawkhal -- Ghagra R & H point upazila FRB road 7.73 km, Jhagrabil -- Rangamati via Baradam upazila FRB Road 18.367 km, Saphchhari High School -- Furamom Peak union/ Rural Road 7.627 km, Bogachattar union -- Ghonomore union 5.027 km, Bilal headquarters -- Farua Bazar Road and Naniachar College union/rural road 6.682 km, Bonojogi Chhara -- Subholong Bazar union/rural road 5.283 km and Khansama para -- Baghmara -- Antapara -- Rajasthali upazila road under Rajasthali upazila 10.632 km.

The construction of Battali -- Ugalchhari and Kawkhal -- Ghagra roads have already been completed and Wagga Junior High School -- Saphchhari union road and Bangalhalai -- Nalkachhari union road are nearing completion, LGED sources said. Construction works of six other roads have remained temporarily suspended as works of several bridges and culverts under those roads had to be stopped due to inundation of work sites.

Ashish Kumar Pal, executive

engineer of LGED, Rangamati told The Daily Star that works under the project had to undergo much difficulty and frequent interruptions during the last dry season also as necessary construction materials could not be reached regularly due to 'inaccessibility' of the work sites. Construction of most roads would have been completed by this time if works were not hindered, he said, adding that now time extension is essential to complete the rest of the works of the important roads.

Following a feasibility study jointly conducted by the officials of ADB and CHT affairs ministry in 1998-1999, the ministry approved the CHTRDP project.

The project aims at alleviation of poverty, creating employment opportunity, income generation and development of socio-economic condition of the marginal farmers in the region through upgrading of rural infrastructures.

Development of road communication and agriculture sector in CHT and ensuring sustainable development and technological supports are also objectives of the project.

Four components of the project are development of rural infrastructures and rehabilitation, community development, micro finance and assistance to project management.

When contacted, Doyal Kumar Chakma, deputy project director of CHTRDP, said the Ministry of CHT Affairs in a recent meeting held at the Secretariat have already approved a proposal for extension of the project tenure.

"I do not think ADB will close the project after termination of the stipulated time as most construction works remain half done," he said.

## 6 Allaher Dal men held in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Gaibandha police raided the house of 'regional commander' of banned Islamist organisation Allaher Dal at Kachuer Khamar village in the Sadar upazila and arrested six militants while they were holding a meeting yesterday.

All the six militants confessed to police that they were active members of Allaher Dal led by Matin Mehdi.

Police also recovered a huge quantity of books on Jihad and party documents.

The arrestees are Manjil Hossain, 55, Anwar Hossain, 27, both of Sujanager village, Pabna; Abu Bakker, 26, of Daryapur village, Shajahan Ali, 28, of Baruipara village, Sada Mia, 30, of Gideri village and Shahrier Rokon, 27, of Kuptola village in Gaibandha Sadar Upazila.

Police said they used to gather at the house almost every day for meeting.

Manjil Hossain was arrested earlier but released on bail.

Allaher Dal chief Matin Mehdi was arrested last year from Kurigram. He is accused in several cases relation to militant activities.

## Contractor Yunus remanded

### Hearing on remand of 2 cops tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Millionaire contractor Syed Muhammad Yunus, accused in several cases, was placed on four days' remand yesterday for interrogation.

Munim Hassan, magistrate of Sadar upazila court, granted the remand and ordered police to interrogate him 'cautiously'.

The same court deferred the hearing on remand of two arrested police officials till Tuesday (tomorrow).

More than 50 lawyers opposing the remand prayer told the court that cases against Yunus were fictitious and he was physically and mentally unable to face interrogation under remand.

Investigation officer Sub-inspector Shahabuddin said Yunus was wanted for long in corruption cases.

He was arrested from a flat in Purana Paltan in Dhaka by Rapid Action Battalion on October 25 and handed over to Barisal RAB-8 unit on Friday.

Constables Md. Alauddin and Shahidul Islam of Bogura Road police outpost in the city, arrested in a case of hijacking, were produced before the same court.

## Vow to curb drug abuse

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

It was unique event at Kulia, a remote village in Debhata upazila, where about 2,000 people have vowed to curb the menace of drug abuse and drug peddling from the society once for all.

Kulia Sachetan Nagarik Samaj, a newly formed anti drug committee organised the meeting. Held at Kulia Union Parishad (UP) office, the meeting was presided by Kulia UP chairman Abdul Hannan.

The people who took vow at the meeting included teachers, students, farmers, religious leaders, local government leaders, youths, political leaders, journalists, lawyers and local elite.

Satkhira superintendent of police (SP) Mirza Abdullahel Baki who was present at the meeting as chief guest expressed his solidarity with the people.

The SP declared amid cheers that stern action would be taken against the drug peddlers and their helpers. He urged people to identify and help arrest 'corrupt' policemen also.

Other speakers have demanded an immediate haltage of the harmful menace and urged the SP to arrest the drug peddlers without hesitation whoever he might be.

Among others, Debhata police station officer-in-charge (OC) Humayun Kabir, Debhata upazila Awami League (AL) president Advocate Golam Mostafa, Union Parishad (UP) member Ruhul Amin, Juba Dal leader Advocate Zahangir Kabir, District Temple

Association organising secretary Asim Chakraborty, journalists-Mostafizur Rahman Ujjal, Riadul Islam and Abdur Rouf, teacher Mizanur Rahman, UP member Rawnakul Islam Ripon and social worker Alhaj Rawshan Ali addressed.

## Tangail Jubo Dal leader gets 10yrs RI

UNB, Tangail

A Special Tribunal here yesterday sentenced a Jubo Dal leader and his cohort to ten years rigorous imprisonment (RI) in an arms case.

The convicts are Rafiqul Islam Swapan, general secretary of town Jubo Dal unit, and Aminul Islam Sumon. They were also fined Tk 3,000 each, in default, to suffer three months RI more.

Another accused, pourasava commissioner Hafizur Rahman Swapan alias Hatkata Swapan was acquitted from the case as allegation brought against him could not be proved.

The joint forces arrested Rafiqul Islam Swapan from his residence at Akur Takurpara in the town on April 25. Following his statement, they later arrested Sumon along with a foreign-made shutter gun from the same area.

After examining records and witnesses' statements, Special Tribunal Judge Mohammad Mohsin Mollah found them guilty and pronounced the judgement.

## Greedy fishermen poison Juri river for catches

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A large quantity of fish died in the Juri river as unscrupulous fishermen poured poison on its water in Juri upazila Friday and Saturday, local people said.

Locals saw many dead fish of Ruhi, Boal, Pabda, Kali-baush, Ayer, Gojar and Puthi floating in the river Friday morning. Many ducks also died following intake of poisonous fish, locals said.

Physicians have opined that the fishes are not suitable for human consumption.

Aquatic fauna are also threatened because of the phenomenon. Fishermen at Purbo Shilua, Paschim Shilua, Montrigaon, Jugimura, Sagarnal, Patila Sangon, Somai, Bhabanipur and Gobindapur villages collect poisonous fish by fishing nets.

Originating from Jampai hill in the Indian state of Tripura, the Juri, a small river entered into Bangladesh from where it is flowing through Fultala, Sagarnal, Goalbari, Jayfarnagar and Paschim Juri unions. Renamed as Kanthinala near Juri upazila headquarters, the river met at Hakaluki haor, one of the biggest water bodies in the country. The haor produces a large quantity of fish.

People living near the Juri have alleged that unscrupulous fishermen extract juice from 'Bish Lata', a kind of poisonous creeper and pour it in the river. This results in death of a large number of fish. Fishermen catch the poisonous fishes by fishing nets. This is a regular practice in every dry season, people alleged further.

People alleged they witnessed the same practice in September last. They said aquatic resources in Hakaluki Haor are also at threat due to the bad practice.

When contacted with Juri Upazila Fisheries Officer Phanindra Chandra Sarker over phone, he confirmed the incident. He assured action against the dishonest fishermen after consultation with the upazila administration.

However, Juri Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Nazrul Islam Sarker said that he had no knowledge about the incident.

## 200 urea bags seized in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police seized 200 sacks of urea at Phulbari upazila in Dinajpur yesterday while those were being transported to Birganj. Two persons were arrested.

The arrestees were identified as Muhammad Dablu of Vognanar village in Birganj upazila and Md. Asabur Rahman of Shiekh-Hati village in Dinajpur Sadar upazila.

Police said they suspected that the fertiliser sacks were being taken to the border for smuggling. A case has been recorded.

## Training of election officials begins in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The training of enumerators, supervisors and assistant registration officers began in Pabna yesterday.

Pabna Deputy Commissioner Md Golam Mousa as the chief guest inaugurated the training camp on Pabna Zila School premises in the morning.

District election office sources said 1302 enumerators, 288 supervisors and 25 assistant registration officers will be trained up as voter listing in Pabna Sadar upazila including the pourasava area starts on November 4.



Attack by pests including brown plant hopper (inset) turns Amon fields brown in Nilphamari.

PHOTO: STAR/FOCUS BANGLA



Fertiliser-hungry farmers through a dealer's shop at Tarail Bazar in Manikganj on Saturday.

PHOTO: STAR