

Northern region may miss aman for poor rainfall

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Cultivation of aman, traditionally considered profitable for the framers, is like to face a serious setback due to the drought-like situation prevailing in northern region during the ongoing rainy season.

Most of the farmers in eight northern districts could not transplant aman seedlings in their lands due to absence of rainfall for over a month while the seedlings

region comprising Rangpur, Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon Panchagarh and Nilphamari districts while there is target of cultivating aman on 10,45,950 hectares of land to produce 23 lakh tonnes of rice this year, said AED sources.

"Farmers are dependent on rainwater for aman cultivation. For high yield, aman saplings are to be trans-

reddish to die within a few days. Farmers informed that it is a must to keep water in the land for few weeks more after planting aman saplings. In many places saplings in the seed beds have become too old to be transplanted. If tender saplings of 30-35 days old are not transplanted then poor output will come.

The situation will turn grave if the farmers cannot transplant aman saplings

Although there is the irrigation scheme, the farmers are mostly dependent on rainwater to cultivate Rop-aman, Md Shahin, an agriculture official of Pabna AED, said.

During visit to different areas of the district, this correspondent found that seedbeds are drying due to lack of the rain while many others could not even start preparing the seedbeds.

Our Dinajpur Correspondent reports: Faced with scanty rainfall coupled with acute shortage of power, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and Joypurhat districts have seen only two per cent of aman paddy transplantation so far while the figure was about 60 per cent this time the last year.

Growers of other crops including sugarcane and maize are also worried due to the draught-like situation, said officials of Panchagarh AED.

Dinajpur Met official sources said the rainfall was 250mm last year while 60mm rainfall has been recorded this year.

The situation is alarming as sufficient water for the paddy crop was not available due to long and frequent power cuts.

Aman production in Mymensingh district might face a serious setback if the ongoing rainy season continues without rain for a few more days, reports our correspondent.

Despite less rainfall in May this year farmers prepared their seedbeds through irrigation with their own efforts but they are now waiting for rain to transplant their aman saplings in the fields, said Md Shafiqul Islam, sub-assistant agriculture officer of Dhubaura, a bordering upazila of the district.

A total of 2,65,000 hectares of land have been brought under aman cultivation in all 12 upazilas of the district but transplantation was done on some 1226 hectares of land till July 21 in eight upazilas of the district, said AED sources.

Only 146 millimetre (mm) rainfall was recorded in the district till July 21 which was 522 mm last year, shows the AED records.

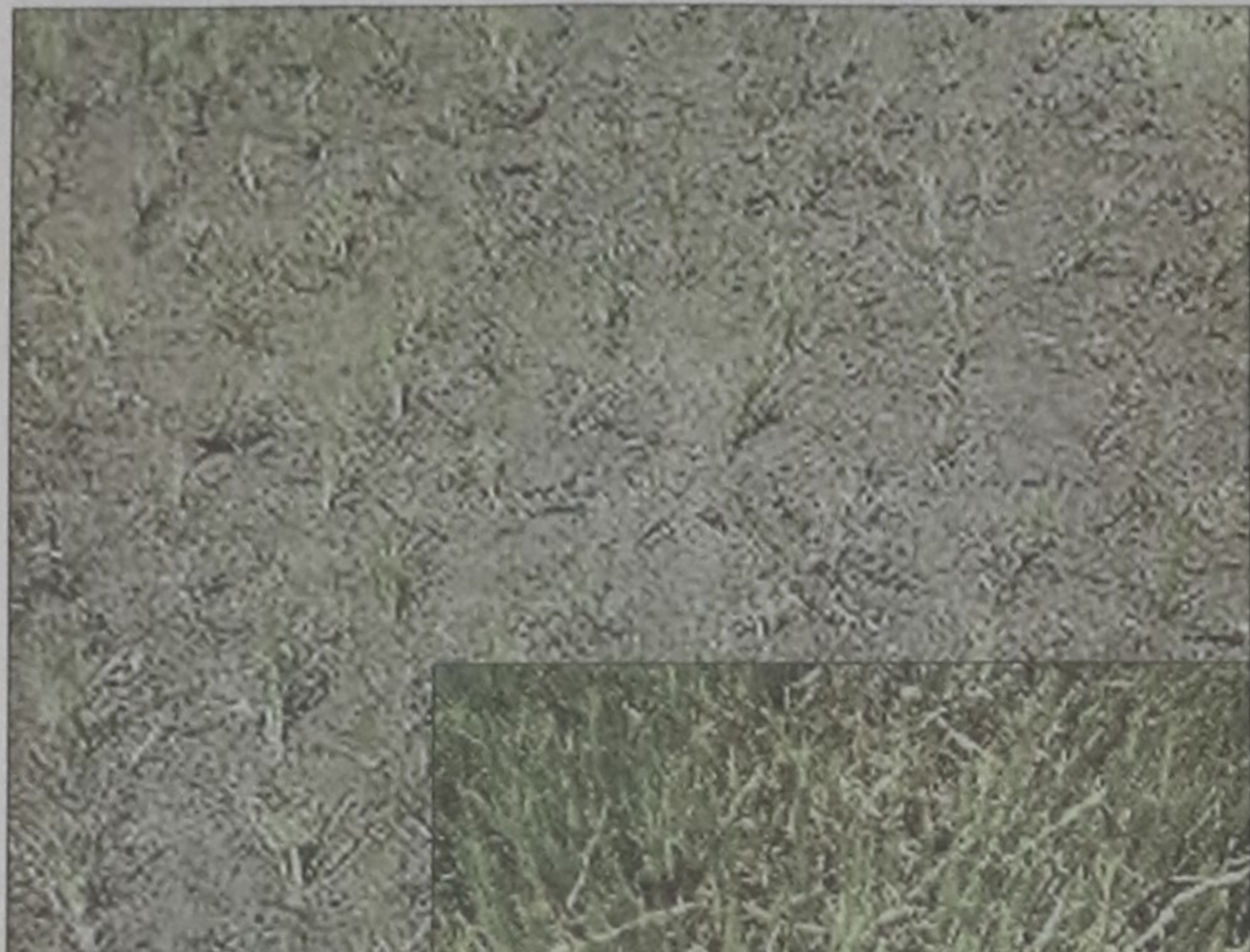


PHOTO: STAR
Transplanted aman saplings are dying in a dried up field in Nilphamari district while grown up plants are getting burnt, inset, in the sunlight as the rainy season continues with scanty rain.



transplanted earlier are turning reddish, reports our Nilphamari correspondent.

Besides, farmers cannot rot their matured jute plants as the ponds and canals have almost dried up.

The average rainfall recorded in eight northern districts till the third week of July is only 136 millimetre (mm) while it was 547mm in the same period last year, said sources at the regional office of AED in Rangpur.

With the help of diesel or electricity-run shallow pumps, farmers have been able to transplant Aman saplings only on 10,374 hectares of land in the

planted from beginning of July to first week of August. Transplantation after the period would result in drastic fall in yield," said AED Deputy Director Hazrat Ali.

During a recent visit to different villages including Mirganj of Nilphamari, Chandanbari of Panchagarh and Mohishkhocha of Lalmonirhat district, this correspondent saw that farmers tilled their lands much before but the soft earth of the tilled lands have turned hard for want of rainwater.

In some fields where transplantation completed earlier saplings are turning

within next 15 days, Deputy Director of AED, Nilphamari, Younus Ali said.

Irrigating lands for Aman cultivation would be too expensive, several small and medium farmers said.

Our Pabna Correspondent adds: Farmers in many places of the district are yet to make seedlings for Aman paddy due to lack of rainwater during the rainy season, sources said.

AED sources said at least 55 thousand hectares of lands would be taken under Aman cultivation this year with production target of 1.23 lakh metric tonnes.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN
A viewer watching total solar eclipse through a telescope at Panchagarh Stadium where thousands thronged to witness the captivating sight yesterday morning.

Superstitions haunt many when others watch solar eclipse

MORSHED ALI KHAN and ANWAR ALI, from Panchagarh

Decades after landing on the moon by man, solar eclipse still remains a 'mystery' shrouded in superstitions and fear for multitudes of villagers in the northern areas.

While thousands of curious people including science enthusiasts and nature lovers busied themselves availing the rare occasion of full eclipse at Panchagarh town and other places of the northern district, many others remained inside their houses,

maintaining strict rituals for 'protection from evils'.

Women have to remain indoors, refrain from doing any household jobs and eating or drinking during the entirety of the eclipse, said several villagers in Shalbahan, 30 kilometres from Panchagarh.

"During the eclipse a pregnant woman is virtually shielded by their relatives to protect her and the unborn baby from possible harm by some unknown power. This has been practised by my grandmother and other mem-

bers of the family," said Jharna Begum, a housewife in Shalbahan.

"Pregnant women of our village were asked to stay indoors to prevent birth defects of their babies," said Shariful Islam, a farmer in Boda upazila.

"My mother asked me not to eat or drink anything for some hours around the eclipse," said Raju, who came to Panchagarh from Birampur in Dinajpur.

As darkness gripped the area with the sun disappearing behind a round black curtain

under the shadow of the moon, hundreds of people waiting at the Zilla Stadium started pointing to the eastern sky.

Despite hindrance by the clouds, a large number of people watched the eclipse.

Several science enthusiasts used models of the sun, the moon and the earth to explain solar eclipse to interested people.

Sounds of prayer were heard as thousands of people gathered in the Zilla Stadium and many other places of the town.

The full eclipse starting from 7:56am lasted for three minutes and 58 seconds.

SNIPPETS

Absconding accused held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Security personnel on Tuesday arrested one person from a teal stall at Samata Ghat at Banarupa in connection with Captain Gazi killing case. Arrestee Mokbul Chakma alias Nayan, 38, is son of Pravat Ranjan Chakma of village Hazachhari Barapul para in Naniachar upazila. Mokbul, an active member of UPDF, was one of the 29 charge sheeted accused in the case. He was later handed over to Kotwali police after interrogation by army men, police said. Captain Gazi died in a crossfire when he went to the spot where armed members of pro-peace treaty Parbotta Chattagram Jano Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and anti-peace treaty United Peoples' Democratic Front (UPDF) locked in a gun fight. The incident took place at Maischhari in Naniachar in 2006.

Attempt on AL leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Armed criminals yesterday attacked Advocate Abdul Ahad Babu, office secretary of Pabna district unit of AL, when he was coming to the court on a motorbike. Babu managed to escape attack but his companion on the bike, Mahamud, was critically injured. Police and locals said that a gang of armed rivals attacked them in the morning with lethal weapons. As Babu fled the scene, the attackers stabbed Mahamud several times. Mahamud was rushed to Pabna General Hospital in a critical condition. Intra-party feud might be behind the attack, officer-in-charge of Pabna police station Motiur Rahman said.

Wife murdered for dowry

A CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

A woman was killed allegedly by her husband for dowry at village Sharifpur under Laksam upazila yesterday. Zannatul Ferdous alias Shilpi, 22, was daughter of Ohidur Rahman Miah. Police arrested Shamsul Haque, son of Suraj Miah of Norpaty union of the upazila on charge of murder. Shamsul and his family members often tortured Shilpi as her parents failed to pay the dowry. Shilpi's family sources said, they had already paid one lakh taka to Shamsul. But Shamsul was putting pressure on Shilpi for more money. On the fateful night, Shamsul beat up Shilpi mercilessly and possibly strangled her as police found a black mark around her neck. Shilpi's father filed a murder case with Laksam police station.

Fake fertiliser factories

A CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Agriculture Extension Department and police in a joint raid yesterday unearthed four fake fertiliser factories at Noapara, the largest fertiliser market in southwestern region under Abhoynagar upazila. One person was arrested and 55 bags of fake fertilisers and fertiliser making materials were seized. The team recovered brick dust, mud and ashes from SK Traders, Tanzim Stores and two other shops and arrested one Bachchu Sarder on charge of making adulterated fertiliser. Five cases were filed with Abhoynagar police station.

RU teacher's release demanded

RU CORRESPONDENT

A group of pro-BNP teachers of Rajshahi University (RU) under the banner of Zia Parishad yesterday met RU vice-chancellor Prof Abdus Sobhan and demanded immediate steps for release of Fine Arts Department teacher who was arrested on Monday on charge of giving death threat to Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) RU unit president. Detective Branch police arrested Prof Abdus Salam and Polish Hossain Ranga, a local youth, after BCL president Ibrahim Hossain Moon filed a case with Mother police station on Monday alleging death threat and bid to extort Tk 1 lakh. The youth got bail but the teacher was sent to jail. They were produced in Rajshahi Metropolitan Magistrate Court on Tuesday. The teachers at the meeting at VC's residence expressed their deep concern at the arrest of their colleague and demanded his immediate release.

MAIN CHANNEL ON BOTH SIDES OF BRIDGE

Dredging starts today to remove Jamuna chars

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Dredging to remove chars (shoals) emerged in the main channel of Jamuna River on both sides of Bangabandhu Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (BJMB) will start today.

WDB sources said two dredgers--one from Arichaghat and the other from Kazipur-- have already been installed in the area. Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen is expected to inaugurate the operation.

Due to the emergence of a number of shoals, flow of the mighty Jamuna has taken a turn to Sirajganj town protection embankment, about eight kilometers upstream of the bridge, devouring the embankment, adjacent lands

and hundreds of homesteads.

WDB officials said the river erosion can be checked if shoals are removed to ensure smooth water flow in the main channel through dredging.

Navy divers have detected a few more large size gaps developed in the town protection embankment under water. As a result, panic of further breach in the embankment has again spread among the locals.

WDB engineers are still repairing the damaged portion of the embankment. The WDB workers with the help of police and army personnel are placing sand sacks in the vulnerable areas of the embankment.

However, report of an investigation team formed by the district administration on

Tuesday said lack of proper monitoring by Water Development Board (WDB) was one of main causes behind the breach in the embankment.

Unplanned sand lifting from the riverbed near the embankment, movement of overloaded vehicles on the road cum embankment and obstruction to flow in the main channel of the Jamuna due to emergence of many shoals on both sides of Bangabandhu Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge are mainly responsible for the embankment collapse, says thereport.

The investigation report of the six-member committee formed by the water resources ministry is yet to be revealed.

BCL cadres injure two KPI teachers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two senior teachers of Khulna Polytechnic Institute (KPI) were injured when a group of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists attacked them in the academic building.

Injured teachers Md Fariduddin of Civil Engineering Department and Mahfuzur Rahman of Electronics Department were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital.

According to police, the BCL cadres attacked the teachers as they refused to admit students in the second shift of the institute as per alist given by them.

According to KPI principal Md Shajahan, the BCL activists also confined the teachers to a room and locked the collapsible gate of the academic building.

The teachers were later rescued by the members of Rapid Action Battalion-6. None was arrested till filing of this report.

Septuagenarian freedom fighter Abdul Sheikh selling groundnut at Kotchandpur in Jhenidah.

Once valiant FF now struggling to survive

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Septuagenarian freedom fighter Abdul Sheikh is now struggling to survive by selling groundnut.

Physical movement is hard for him as senility and disease have overtaken the freedom fighter now living in a dilapidated hut on the land of Alim Raham of Dhobabila village under Kotchandpur upazila.

A young man during the liberation war, Abdul Sheikh of Dhobabila village decided to fight for the country's independence and took training at Majdia camp in India. He fought against the Pakistan occupation forces at different places including Subdia in Kotchandpur upazila under Jhenidah district.

While telling the stories of the turbulent days during the Liberation War, Abdul Sheikh became absent-minded, as if

he got lost in the past.

Selfless service and sacrifice of the heroic sons of the soil like Abdul Sheikh brought the nation victory but many freedom fighters remained ignored. After the independence, Abdul Sheikh joined Village Defence Party (VDP) where he served 27/28 years for a little salary.

Abdul Sheikh, who now gets Tk 900 monthly allowance as a freedom fighter, sells groundnut at Bangkira Bazar in Sadar upazila. On an average, he sells two kgs of groundnut a day and maintains his family with the scanty income.

"Often I have to starve. My two sons do not support me. I am suffering from various diseases. Blood comes out with coughs. I cannot afford to visit doctors. Carrying the basket of groundnut to market seems tough to me," said Abdul Sheikh.



PHOTO: STAR
Rajshahi Shahar Rakkha Sangram Parishad forms a human chain at Shaheb Bazar Zero Point in Rajshahi city yesterday demanding steps to maintain navigability in the Padma.

15 face war crime charges

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Fifteen alleged collaborators of Pakistani occupation forces have been sued for killing, looting and arson in Gaibandha and Satkhira districts in 1971.

In Gaibandha, two petition case cases were filed against 12 collaborators, including former Jamaat lawmaker Maulana Abdul Aziz, with the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court by Anisur Rahman of Dharmapur village and Azizul Huq Sarker of Panchgachi Santiram village under Suhdarganj upazila on

Monday.

The other accused are Abdul Latif, Abdur Rahim, Habibur Rahman alias Habibur, Abu Sufian, Ahmed Ali, Abdus samad, Abdul Kader Mollah, Abdul Majid, Anisur Rahman, Abdul Majid, Quader Mollah (2).

The complainant Anisur Rahman alleged that the accused, led by Mau Abdul Aziz, were involved in looting, murder, rape and arson in the area.

They also killed union parishad member Akbar Ali at Sudarganj army camp on October 10, 1971, the complainants said.

Azizul Huq Sarker in his case stated that the accused picked up college student Bayes Uddin of Panchgachi Santiram village on October 9, 1971. They took him to a rajakkar camp near Matherhat Bridge on Gaibandha-Sundarganj road on October 10, 1971 and shot him dead.

Our Satkhira correspondent reports: Three people have been sued on charges of killing a freedom fighter in Assassun during Liberation War in 1971.

The accused are Nesar uddin Gazi, Abdur Rouf and Hossain Gain.