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## Goodbye to Monga

New short-duration rice varieties bring relief to marginal farmers, farm labourers in greater Rangpur

REAZ AHMAD with RAFIQUE SARKER

Gone are the days when Monga (seasonal and localised famine) used to stalk the landless farm labourers and marginal farmers of five northern districts sending a chill during the lean period of October-November each year.

Thanks to modern rice science that has bred short-duration varieties like BRRI dhan-33 and BINA dhan-7 much to the relief of over 37 lakh hard-hit poor, who have now started saying goodbye to Monga.

Both the high yielding rice varieties (HYVs) mature in 115 days and can be harvested at least a month before the other HYV -- BR11 -- that farmers have been growing so far during aman season.

Early harvesting of the new varieties this year in as much as 44,000 hectares of land in the five Monga-prone districts of greater Rangpur has successfully absorbed the farm labourers and marginal farmers, who otherwise remain unemployed due to lack of farm activities in this lean period of the year. The five districts are Rangpur, Gaibandha,

Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Nilphamari.

On top of the rice scientists' success in breeding short-duration varieties, non-government initiatives are also there to help farmers in the Teesta chars build 'Rice Banks', an innovative way of lending rice to the needy under a cooperative arrangement.

Previously, farm labourers had to remain idle for lack of on-farm jobs when aman paddy plantation ends by mid-September, and Monga forced a large number of them to leave for other districts in search of employment. By early October, marginal farmers also used to exhaust their stock of paddy for family consumption, and this forced them to starve or sell land for buying food.

Dr Md Abdul Jalil Mridha, who heads Rangpur Regional Station of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), told The Daily Star that efforts are on to bring over one lakh hectares of land in the five districts under short-duration rice cultivation during aman season by 2010-11. This would help the 37 lakh farm labourers and marginal farmers conquer the seasonal famine once for all.

"This will require providing the farmers with 4,280 tonnes of seeds so that they can cover 1,07,000 hectares of land, as targeted by the government, by 2010-11," said Dr Mridha.

With support from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) in Mymensingh developed BINA dhan-7, and the variety got approval from the National Seed Board in 2007.

During a field day programme at Joyrampur Anwar village in Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila recently, Chief Scientific Officer (plant breeding) of BINA Dr Md Ali Azam said, "BINA dhan-7 is an early harvest variety. It can be harvested in mid-October. Massive cultivation of this rice can create job opportunity for the farm labourers during October and November, thereby stamping out Monga from the region completely."

Dr M A Mazid, who heads one of the eight hubs of the International Rice Research Institute's flagship programme -- Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia

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Early harvest of short duration rice variety BR-33 brings hope of food in the lean season and opportunity for work to the monga-prone northern areas like Dharmadas village in Rangpur Sadar.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

### 6 more JMB men held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Police arrested four suspected JMB members at Bandarban early yesterday while Rab arrested two more at Bagerhat on Monday.

With the help of Bandarban sadar police, Naikhangchhari police caught four JMB men from two separated residential hotels in the town.

The arrestees are identified as M Afsar Selim, 37, Shahidul Islam, 28, Abul Bashar, 20 and Nurul Afsar, 28.

Police said Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) earlier arrested these four at Naikhangchhari check post on September 19. They were coming from Jaruliachari, a hilly border area. The four were produced before a court and placed on remand. Afsar Selim, on

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### ATTACK ON TAPOSH

## Mohiuddin's 2 sons arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective Branch of Police (DB) yesterday arrested two sons of Lt Col Mohiuddin Ahmed, a death convict in Bangabandhu murder case, for suspected links to the bomb attack on Awami League lawmaker Fazle Noor Taposh.

DB picked up Nazmul Hasan alias Sohail, 34, his younger brother Mahbubul Hasan, 30, from their residence at Gaware Prembagan of Ashkona in the city's Dakkhinkhan at around 3:00am.

Later they were produced before a Dhaka court, which placed them on a five-day remand.

Lt Col (retd) Mohiuddin Ahmed (artillery) condemned to death in August 15 killing case is now detained in Dhaka central jail.

With the arrest of the two brothers, six people have so far been arrested in connection with the bomb attack on Taposh.

Of the arrestees four persons are from among the families of convicted killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Earlier police arrested Mehnaz Rashid, eldest daughter of Lt Col (retd) Khandaker Abdur Rashid on Saturday. Kamrul Haque Swapan, younger brother of Major (retd) Shariful Haq Dalim,

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### 'Influential group out to hinder healthy journalism'

Senior journo worried

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ten senior journalists in a statement yesterday expressed deep concern over the orchestrated scheme of an influential quarter to obstruct the flow of healthy and investigative journalism.

The latest precedent of such an ill attempt was filing a general diary (GD) by a business group against the editors and publishers of Prothom Alo and Samakal.

The statement reads that the two newspapers ran the reports in line with the general norms and principles of journalism. If somebody had been aggrieved by the reports he could have sent a protest to the newspapers concerned and if the protest letter had not been published properly a case could have been filed with the press council against the newspaper or a criminal

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### FEBRUARY MUTINY

## BDR proposes disbanding 4 battalions

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Bangladesh Rifles has proposed to the government to immediately disband its four battalions for their direct involvement in the February 25-26 mutiny, and replace them with new ones to strengthen the force and gear up its operational activities.

The BDR authorities in a report submitted to the home ministry a couple of days back said battalions 13, 24, 36 and 44 stationed in the Pikhana headquarters are no more capable of functioning due to arrest of a large number of personnel of these battalions.

In the report containing a set of proposals, the paramilitary force urged the government to relieve it of running 10 shopping centres and three wholesale markets. An immediate decision to this end is necessary to free the BDR from the process of doing business using its name, the report said.

The BDR also proposed creating posts against its 3,238 arrested personnel to fill the vacuum and bring normalcy in its functioning.

The report sought approval of the home ministry for appointment of civilians in the BDR, especially experts, to conduct its intelligence activities. Immediate approval of it is needed for proper intelligence activities of the force, and BDR's intelligence capability would get a boost with such appointments, the report said.

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## Red alert at jails, security up

Law enforcers fear 'subversive acts'

KAILASH SARKAR

The government put all 67 jails in the country on red alert, and asked law enforcing and intelligence agencies to heighten security as part of preventive measures against any attempt of attack on the jails, or any other subversive activity in the country.

The government made the move on Monday in the context of the ongoing appeal hearing of Bangabandhu murder case convicts in the Supreme Court, and some fresh arrests of some of their family members.

The authorities are apprehending, as the case proceedings are at their final stage, the convicts in the case and their sympathisers might put their maximum efforts to foil the hearing process, or attempt to break into the jails to free the convicts, or try to carry out some other serious subversive acts to destabilise the government and the country.

Meanwhile, Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Director General Hassan Mahmood Khandker, and the chiefs of intelligence agencies visited Dhaka Central Jail on Thursday night.

Jail sources said condemned convicts Lt Col (retd) Syed Faruqoor Rahman, Maj (retd) AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed, Maj (retd) Bazul Huda, Lt Col (retd) Sultan Shahrar Rashid Khan, and Lt Col Mahiuddin Ahmed Khan are currently jailed in Dhaka Central jail. State Minister for Home Shamsul Huq Tuku yesterday said they suspect that to foil the trial process of Bangabandhu murder case, criminals might attempt to disrupt the country's law and order.

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## JS bodies want ADR to recover defaulted loans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two parliamentary standing committees yesterday held a joint meeting to find out ways to recover huge amount of defaulted loans and stressed introducing alternative disputes resolution (ADR) system to get better results in loan recovery.

On invitation of the parliamentary standing committee on law justice and parliamentary affairs ministry, members of the parliamentary standing committee on finance ministry joined the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The joint meeting of the committees was the first in Bangladesh's parliamentary history.

The meeting, attended by ruling party and opposition MPs,

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## Socio-political drive against militancy limps

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The government's six-month old massive socio-political drive involving 14 different agencies to educate people and closely monitor militant activities at grassroots level has stumbled down due to lack of fund and supervision.

Formed in April the 17-member committee spearheaded by the state minister for home so far saw only two meetings in the last six months. The third meeting will sit today.

Till now, the authorities could hardly implement any decisions made in the last two meetings. In some cases, the progress was zero.

The initiatives include anti-militancy publicity campaigns

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