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Bangladesh readies flood-tolerant rice

3 varieties to prevent a million tonnes of crop loss a year

REAZ AHMAD

Bangladesh is set to officially release three flood-tolerant rice varieties that would help farmers prevent up to a million tonnes of annual crop loss caused by flash floods, researchers said.

Officials concerned told The Daily Star that these rice varieties with submergence-tolerant gene, known as Sub1, can withstand two weeks of complete submergence.

"In September, we applied to the Seed Certification Agency for release of the three submergence-tolerant varieties, Swarna-Sub1, BR-11-Sub1, and BR-11-Recombinant-Sub1. Once the Agency completes its field evaluations, these varieties will be officially released, hopefully this year," said Khandakar Iftekharuddaula, principal investigator of the project of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation supports the project.

The flood-tolerant versions of the high-yielding varieties (HYVs), popular with farmers and consumers, that are grown over huge areas across Bangladesh are effectively identical to their susceptible counterparts but those recover after severe flooding to yield well.



The Sub1 varieties withstood submergence quite well during this year's flash floods in Jamalpur's Dewanganj, Kurigram's Kachir Char, Mymensingh's Dhobaura and Sylhet's Golapganj, said Iftekharuddaula, who is the mastermind behind getting the Sub1 gene into BR-11, the country's most popular rain-fed aman rice variety.

The Sub1 varieties have been tested in six BRRI fields and nine farmers' fields over the last couple of years and all results show positive signs.

During a recent visit to one such field in Rangpur's Darshona, it was found that 35 farmers on trial cultivated Swarna-Sub1 on 19 acres.

MA Mazid, former chief of the BRRI Regional Station in Rangpur, told The Daily Star that Sub1 at Darshona remained unharmed despite being completely submerged for nine to 16 days this year.

Mazid, who now heads Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia, one of the eight hubs of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), said 65 percent farmers cultivate BR-11 during aman season, which is susceptible to flash floods or rainwater over 10 days. "So the Sub1 varieties now hold the potential to become a good replacement for BR-11."

There are four different Sub1 varieties, IR-64-Sub1, Samba Mahsuri-Sub1, BR-11-Sub1, and Swarna-Sub1, at the Darshona trial site. Of these four, the former two are relatively shorter-duration rice while the later two takes a long time to harvest.

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Bhutanese Premier Jigme Y Thinley and his wife Aum Rinsy Dem accompany Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amidst a red carpet reception as she arrives at Paro Airport of Thimphu yesterday afternoon on a four-day visit to the Himalayan country.

PHOTO: PID

Lawmakers form action group on climate change

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lawmakers from coastal constituencies formed "Bangladesh Climate Change Action Group" yesterday in a move to address the adverse impact of climate change.

"People in the coastal areas are bearing the brunt of natural disasters that prompted us to form the forum in the face of the inevitable consequences of climate change," said ASM Firoz, whip of parliament and an elected member from Patuakhali.

Firoz has been selected as convener of the forum. The group is expected to have around 50 members, all elected from the southern region.

The forum was formed at a discussion on Climate Change: Adverse Effect on Bangladesh and Our Action held at the Parliament Members' Club in the city.

Firoz said that they would appoint a spokesman for the forum to make their voices heard in local and international conferences on climate change.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

PM calls for fighting poverty, climate change

Starts visit to Bhutan; Accorded red carpet reception

UNB, Thimphu

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called for closer fraternity among the South Asian countries to fight poverty and tackle threats posed by climate change as she described the two as "common enemies" of the region.

The premier made the call when Bhutanese Foreign Minister Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering paid a courtesy call on her at her hotel suite yesterday evening.

Hasina, who arrived in Thimphu in the

afternoon on a four-day official visit, referred to the flash flood in Bhutan in last June and the earthquake in September, and said natural disasters in the region increased due to climate change.

She deeply condoled the death of Bhutanese people in the recent natural disasters.

With no fault of their own, countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives are the worst sufferers of climate change, she said.

The Bhutanese minister thanked Hasina for

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Khaleda worried over RMG unrest

Smells 'provocation from outside the country'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia smells provocation of competitor foreign countries behind the persistent unrest in the readymade garment sector (RMG).

"Instigation by competitor foreign countries and external hands in the attempt to create anarchy in this sector would not be far-fetched," she said yesterday while addressing the closing ceremony of Bangladesh Apparel & Textile Exposition 2009 (Batexpo), organised by Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in Sonargaon hotel of the capital.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

President leaves for Turkey

UNB, Dhaka

President Zillur Rahman left for Turkey yesterday on a six-day visit to attend COMCEC economic summit under the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, Dean of Diplomatic Core Swedish Ambassador Britt Falkman Hagstrom, Turkish Ambassador Sakir Ozkan Torunlar, chiefs of three

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

AUG 21 ATTACK

Babar sent to TFI cell for quizzing

KAILASH SARKAR

The Criminal Investigation Department yesterday sent detained former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar to the Taskforce for Interrogation (TFI) cell for quizzing in the August 21 grenade attack case.

The same day CID interrogated Shamsul Islam, former deputy inspector general of the Special Branch, and Superintendent of Police Mostofa Kamal of the Armed Police Battalion.

Shamsul was acting SB chief in absence of the then chief additional inspector general of police Abdul Qayyum and Mostofa Kamal was additional deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Motijheel zone when grenade blasts at an Awami League rally killed 24 people and injured scores on

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

BNP observes National Solidarity Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) observes the National Revolution and Solidarity Day today marking the civil-military "uprising" that led to release of then army chief Ziaur Rahman on this very day in 1975.

The party has drawn up elaborate programmes including discussion to observe the day.

Political parties and different social organisations observe the day from different historical perspective.

While BNP and its alliances celebrate today National Revolution and Solidarity Day, the ruling Awami League and its front organisations consider it as the day of "killing of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5



Suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba leaders -- Shahidul Islam, 2nd from left, next to him Mufti Harun Izahar and Al Amin -- are taken to a Dhaka court yesterday in connection with links to a plot to attack the US embassy.

PHOTO: STAR

3 suspected LeT men remanded

IOJ faction chief denies son's militancy link

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba leaders, arrested with links to a plot to attack the US embassy in Dhaka, were placed on a two-day remand yesterday.

The Detective Branch of police produced Mufti Harun Izahar, son of Islami Oikya Jote leader Mufti Izaharul Islam, Shahidul Islam and Al Amin alias Saiful before the metropolitan magistrate's court seeking their 10-day remand, said Sanwar Hossain, Assistant Commissioner of DB.

He said the arrestees needed to be remanded for obtaining crucial information about the plot, their network and the people involved in it.

Detectives arrested the three at Jameyatul Ulum Madrasa on a hill at Lalkhan Bazar in Chittagong on Wednesday night. They were brought to Dhaka Thursday night.

Lashkar-e-Taiba works for banned Islamist outfit Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji).

Meanwhile, Izaharul Islam, chairman of an IOJ faction, protested the arrest of his son Harun Izahar and the two others denying their involvement with LeT or Huji.

Izaharul, also founder of the madrasa, said his son Harun

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4 killed as bus rams private car

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Four people, including a BNP leader, were killed as a bus rammed their private car on Dhaka-Barisal Highway at Maligram in Bhanga upazila yesterday.

Kazi Nazrul Islam, 48, a joint convener of Faridpur district unit BNP, Saidul Islam Tutul, 38, a ward commissioner of Bhanga Pourashava, Hannan, 35, and Sraful Islam, 30, driver of the car, died instantly.

Source said the accident took place around 3:30pm near Maligram bus stand when a Dhaka-bound bus rammed the private car coming from opposite direction.

The victims were going to join a conference of Bhanga upazila unit BNP in the car. Police seized the bus.

Chevron eyes drilling in 2010 after long silence

Preparation starts for oil, gas exploration in Patuakhali in next Feb, drilling in Sept

SHARIF KHAN

After nearly nine years of refraining from drilling any exploratory well, US oil giant Chevron along with British company Cairn is set to drill an well in Patuakhali in search of oil or gas, preparation for which begins in February next.

Petrobangla sources said drilling of the well in Block-7 would take place between September 2010 and July 2011 costing

about \$21million.

The oil companies would drill two more wells around that area if this drilling operation produces positive results.

Bangladeshi company Bapex holds 10 percent carried over interest in this block where Chevron-Cairn had conducted nearly 1,500 km of seismic survey in 2006 and 2008.

"Data generated by the two-dimensional seismic survey has allowed Chevron to

determine the most suitable location for exploratory drilling in Charkajal union under Golachipa upazila of Patuakhali district," said a Petrobangla official.

Between February and August next, Chevron-Cairn would develop the drilling site along with access roads, storage areas and other amenities. Between September next and July 2011, they would go for the drilling.

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Women cadres go into hiding as drive starts

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

The suspected women cadres of outlawed parties in Kushtia have gone into hiding following a special drive started on Wednesday to arrest them.

Sources said at least 25 to 30 women, who were reportedly involved in outlawed party activities in different areas of the district, decamped soon after the arrest of four women cadres. All of them are suspected to be the activists of Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF).

Police are also looking for some male cadres who always

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BANNING UNDERGROUND GROUPS

Govt sitting idle on police HQ proposal

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The move to ban 13 splinter groups of underground communists taken by the caretaker government is shelved, although the police headquarters strongly recommended it last year.

The police headquarters made the proposal in August last year to ban the left-leaning underground parties identifying those as outfits engaged in anti-state activities.

The proposal came following recommendations from different intelligence agencies in a

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bid to ensure that outlaws cannot slip through legal loopholes and their patrons are brought to book.

The home ministry held a number of meetings on the issue soon after receiving the proposal and the police high-ups welcomed the move taken for the first time since independence.

But the ministry suddenly became inactive and there are no activities by it in this regard since holding the meetings.

A senior official at the police HQ said, "As far

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