

Farmers never say

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region where farmers no longer afford to remain oblivious to climatic changes having serious ramifications on traditional ways of crop production.

The (farmers) say one of the most obvious fallout of climate change is gradual drifting of rain-fed rice season (aman) due to drought and delayed monsoon. Over the last couple of years, farmers in the rice-rich northern districts experienced the same problem of getting insufficient rains, missing out the appropriate time of planting aman seedlings, and then again, crop loss owing to inundation as late monsoon bursts with too much of rains within too short a span of time.

Changes in weather and erratic rain patterns not only pushed the aman season from June-July to August-September but also, as a cascading effect, delayed planting and harvesting of winter rice -- boro. And this made the country's top productive rice season vulnerable to sunstroke and susceptible to sterility.

Irrigated boro contributes 60 percent of the country's over 30 million tonnes annual rice output while the rest comes from rain-fed and aman.

Abdur Rouf, a farmer of Joyampur village in Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila, says delayed rain makes seedlings in seedbeds grow old and that's why "We have to invest more on supplementary irrigation so that aman can be reaped by Nov 15 allowing us to grow potato prior to preparing land for boro."

Khairul Mostafa Bablu of the same village says due to delayed monsoon, aman growers had to go for supplementary irrigation in the last two years. Those who want to grow potato in between are opting for shorter-duration varieties like BRRI-33 and BINA-7.

The farmers have to compromise a bit in grains output, as the shorter-duration ones are comparatively little less productive than the traditional HVVs (high yielding varieties) but can be harvested a month ahead, thereby releasing land for potato.

Farmers in the northern region are particularly happy that rice science is providing them with shorter-duration aman varieties as those come handy to them to fight back climatic adversities like delayed monsoon that they have been experiencing since 2007.

Porimol Chandra Sarkar is a very known face among farmers in Rangpur's Pairaband union because they always find this young agriculture extension official by their side whenever they face any sort of difficulties in growing crops.

Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer of Pairaband union Porimol blames last year's erratic monsoon (late and heavy rains in a short span of time) for damage of aman crops in many fields. He says daytime high temperature and nighttime cool and mists during September-October causes hindrance to flowering of aman and rabi crops.

Septuagenarian farmer Abu Bakar Siddiqui of Louhoni village says, unlike in the yesteryears winter now comes late and its duration is shorter. He feels that the gap between daytime and nighttime temperature is widening. Bakar mentioned larger infestation of insects these days. He recalled that there were not so many insects in crop fields 20 years back.

This correspondent got similar views from a pesticide trader, who could not agree more on what Bakar had said. Md Shah Alam sells pesticides at Shofi Traders in Rangpur. He says often he hears farmers complain that even after applying equal doses of pesticides as in yesteryears, they are not getting relief from pest attacks.

Abul Kalam of Joyampur says, due to shifting of cropping seasons last year aman was planted late and so was harvested late. This resulted in late plantation of irrigated winter rice -- boro -- eventually exposing the crop to too high temperature in April-May. "That is why we got many sterile grains as BR-29 in last boro season suffered neck-blight."

Dr SK Ghulam Hussain, who closely monitors the probable impact of climate change in Bangladesh's farmlands and serves as a member-director in Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (Barc), declined to foresee any worsening scenario.

"We're in a virtual climate change laboratory, which is a natural advantage for us. Our

farmers are innovative and they can cope well with adaptation technology."

According to him, 1.5 to 2.5 degrees Celsius projected rise in temperature over the next 50 to 70 years is nothing conspicuous. But he promptly adds, "If the rise is in winter, it's no problem for rice but if the mean temperature rises beyond 28 to 30 degrees Celsius during summer, that is not suitable for rice. This however can be adapted by deferring the flowering stage of rice."

Dr Hussain identifies concentration of mists near coastal regions as a factor contributing to more insect infestation and diseases.

He thinks waning flow of fresh water from the upstream is also inviting intrusion of salty seawater further inwards.

BR-10, 41, 42 and 47 -- the rice varieties developed by Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) -- Hussain says made some breakthroughs in "our fight against salinity in the agriculture frontier."

Dr Zeba I Seraj, who teaches biochemistry at Dhaka University and has been engaged in rice breeding science for years, says they're almost at the doorstep of infusing salinity tolerant genes into the country's best performing aman variety -- BR-11.

She noted that changes in climate are evident from more frequent and severe storms that have been stalking the region in recent years. "This year we experienced very late monsoon. Inundation and salinity are on the rise."

Zeba said, "Like Vietnam, Bangladesh can go for mangrove plantation. This will help us combat salinity and erosion in the coastal belt."

Aman season is shifting from June up to September because of very late monsoon, she said. "Delayed aman delays boro, thereby disturbing the usual photosynthesis cycle. As a result, more grains are sterile."

Too much rain in too short period is of no use; it enhances farmers' cost on supplementary irrigation for the otherwise rain-fed aman fields, Prof Zeba pointed out.

Due to monsoon-induced season shift, boro suffered sterility problem last season, and that's why many farmers are switching to BR-28 this year from BR-29. Because of its longer duration, BR-29 is more likely to get exposed to hot weather. BR-28 is less productive than BR-29 but can be reaped before temperature rises beyond 30 degree Celsius.

Dr M A Mazid heads one of the eight hubs of the International Rice Research Institute's flagship programme -- Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia (CSISA). Mazid says as rains come late aman seedlings get old in the seedbeds and become less productive when ultimately transplanted in the field late in the season.

Mazid, who steered BRRI's Rangpur Station for many years and saw from a close range farmers' ability to adjust with changed circumstances, says the short-duration aman rice varieties hold the prospect of farmers' growing boro in time and avoid the risk of crop getting sunburnt in hot Mayweather.

Food Minister Abdur Razzaque reckons climate change has too much impact on the country's food security.

Given the volatility of international rice market, both in terms of output fluctuations and price instability, import and aid-dependence are not options that Bangladesh considers for ensuring its food security, he says.

"We've to face the challenges of climate change through various coping mechanisms and guarantee autonomy in food."

Body of boy

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victims' family will be given Tk 30,000.

Sub-inspector Abdul

Motalib of Mithamoin Police Station filed a case against five people -- two officials of the sunken motorboat and three staff of the launch that hit the motorboat -- on Friday in this connection.

On the first day the meeting discussed whether water was being shared as per the agreement. Bangladesh delegation at the meeting said flow of the Ganges water to Bangladesh was less than what was agreed.

After the first day's meeting an annual report was finalised incorporating data of sharing of the Ganges water.

China favours road link plan thru' Kunming keen on road

UNB, Dhaka

The government is taking initiative to establish road and rail communications between Bangladesh and China through Kunming for trans-border transportation between the two countries.

Communications Minister Syed Abdul Hossain, who is on a five-member delegation of the ruling Bangladesh Awami League now visiting China, proposed the road and railway links during a meeting Friday in Kunming with a delegation of Yunnan provincial unit of the Communist Party of China, led by its secretary Comrade Li Han Bie.

"The Chinese delegation showed their keen interest about the proposal," said a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

It said the provincial government of Yunnan also agreed to send a proposal to the Chinese central government for initiating a feasibility study in this regard under the aegis of the ministries concerned of the two countries.

The AL delegation also invited the Chinese Communist Party delegation to visit Bangladesh at a time of their convenience.

Led by AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam, the delegation is passing a busy time holding meetings and exchanging views with the heads of provincial committees of the Communist Party of China.

Mall fire

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Clouds of smoke, which dispersed throughout the building choking the staircase, with witnesses said.

Following the incident, some people were panicked into jumping off different floors that entailed the death and injuries of the victims, they added. Some in desperation also jumped to rooftops of adjacent buildings and got hurt.

Besides, witnesses said a few people had fallen sick after inhaling smoke.

The shop, ICT Enterprise, adjacent to the staircase on the ground floor, might have caught fire from an electrical short circuit, fire brigade sources said.

Seven fire fighting units were able to restrict the fire to the shop and doused it in an hour, they mentioned. They also rescued some people trapped inside the building during the operation.

Kohiur Akter Lucky, one of the injured, said she was at her work point in the office of a buying house on the fourth floor during the incident and it took her by surprise when her room got suddenly covered with smoke.

None could use the staircase to go down as heat and smoke produced from the fire almost choked the staircase, she noted.

Meanwhile, a fire gutted four shops and seven scrap (garment by-products) depots at Badia in the capital yesterday.

The fire broke out at the shops of Khawaja Bazar in Santarkul around 11:25am and five firefighting units from Baridhara and Tejgaon put out the blaze around 1:15pm.

Deputy Director Masudur Rahman of the Fire Brigade and Civil Defence coordinating the fire fighting work told The Daily Star that the fire might have originated from a burning cigarette.

Teesta tops

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began on Friday at the JRC office in Dhamondi were held at the state guesthouse Meghna yesterday.

JRC member from Bangladesh Mir Sajjad Hossain led the home team at the meeting while his Indian counterpart SP Kakran headed the Indian delegation.

Foreign ministry sources told The Daily Star that the two sides discussed sharing of the Teesta water with utmost importance.

Officials at the water resources ministry said the meeting on the first day had a very positive discussion on the Ganges water sharing.

A proposal has been made to India for a ministerial-level JRC meeting in Dhaka on Dec 9-13 to finalise the draft agreement on Teesta water sharing, they said.

Dhaka has prepared the draft agreement and wants to hand it over to Indian authorities before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India from December 18.

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India edge past

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2010 Asia Cup, could hardly impress some 2,000 spectators. The young team was at the receiving end most of the time against the misfiring Afghans.

Afghanistan were certainly the better side but they paid the penalty for missing some good opportunities. Still, they could have won a point had not their goalkeeper Hamidullah Yousafzai despite covering the near post conceded a goal that should have stopped.

"Afghanistan played well and came close to scoring twice and we were lucky to snatch full three points," said a relieved Indian coach Sukhwinder Singh at the post-match briefing.

But Singh knows that his boys must up their game with tough battles against defending champions Maldives and an improved Nepal ahead.

Meantime, hosts Bangladesh, fresh after their 4-1 demolition of Bhutan will get back to business against Pakistan in one of the two games to be played today. A victory will confirm Bangladesh a place in the semifinals with a match in hand against Sri Lanka, who take on Bhutan in the first match at 4pm.

Back in the slow and at time erratic match between India and Afghanistan, it was predictably mundane in the absence of few exciting names like Baichung Bhutia, Sunil Chetri and Rahim Nabi. India opted to attack through the flanks with Bhutia and Chetia and exchanging views with the heads of provincial committees of the Communist Party of China.

India made one change in each half to sharpen their attack and it finally brought result for them but not before

surviving two close calls from Afghan forwards.

Substitute Ahmed Khesraw Ahmadi had Indian goalkeeper Arindam Bhattacharya in a one to one situation but wasted the golden chance with a hurriedly taken side-volley that missed the mark nine minutes into the second half.

In the next moments, Afghanistan almost took a lead when Sayed Bashir Azimi whopped a well-judged cross from the right for Hashimullah Barkezai, whose powerful header narrowly missed the mark.

Alpukhkhula, who came in for Bawali Singh after 70 minutes, broke the evening's duck with a grounder on the right hand side of the box.

The late goal broke the Afghan hearts.

"It was painful to concede a late goal. It was very frustrating to lose a match we should have won," said a dejected Afghan coach Yusuf Kargar.

TEAMS

INDIA: Arindam Bhattacharya, Rowilson Rolando Rodriguez, Baldeep Singh, Jagpreet Singh (Manish Mathani), Bawali Singh (Je Le Lalpukhkhula), SK Singh Chongham, Joaquin Santan Aranches, Jibon Dharmaraj Ravan, Robert Lathlamuana and Denzil Michael Franco.

AFGHANISTAN: Zohib Islam, Ali Ahmed Yarzada, Masod Hashemi, Israfeel Kohistani, Sayed Bashir Azimi, Hashimullah Barkezai, Mustafa Hadid (Ahmad Khesraw Ahmadi), Saboor Khalil, Zakria Rezai (Faisal Sakzada), Ali Azara and Hamidullah Yousafzai.

Yellow cards: Joaquin Santan Aranches (India), Faisal Sakzada (Afghanistan). Referee: Hla Tint (Myanmar).

Six BDR

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Around eight thousand troops were at Pilkhana during the bloodbath on February 25-26. But all of them would not have to go on trial, said a BDR source.

Some three thousand of them might have to stand trial on charges of mutiny. The rest would face departmental actions that could at the maximum cost them their jobs, added the source.

However, for those to be tried on mutiny charges, the conviction could carry up to seven years in jail, fine and dismissal from service.

Like at Pilkhana headquarters, mutiny took place in more than one place in some districts. For example, revolt spread among three of the five battalions in Rangamati sector. In Sathkira, jawans mutinied in 7 Rifle Battalion at Nildumur and 41 Rifle Battalion under Khulna sector.

Initially, the courts will sit for two days.

On the opening day, charges will be pressed and arrest warrants issued, and on the second day, the accused will be produced before the court.

After the second day's proceedings, the court will be adjourned for about a month as the BDR act prescribes giving the accused at least 27 days to consult lawyers and prepare for defence.

On the second day of the trial at Rangamati, the court adjourned its proceedings till December 27 so the nine accused and their lawyers could make preparations.

Most speakers pointed out security as India's main concern regarding Bangladesh, which should ensure that it will not allow anyone to operate against India using its territory. Similarly, it's India's duty to pay attention to Bangladesh's security concerns.

Sources said another leader of the United Liberation Front of Assam, Babul Sharma, was taken to Rangpur jail at the same time.

Huge crowds gathered before the magistrate's court to get a glimpse of Rajkhowa, Raju Baruah and Raja Bora.

Rajkhowa in handcuffs and Baruah claimed that they had not surrendered, that they would never do it, as they were taken back to the police van by personnel of the Special Operations Unit of Assam police.

Rajkhowa, who had been on the run from law for 17 years, accused Bangladesh of "betraying" him. He said talks with India cannot be held with him in handcuffs.

Paresh Baruah, who is believed to be in Myanmar and asked Rajkhowa on Friday not to "fall into the government's trap" of dialogue, yesterday denied there was any split in ULFA which has "full confidence" in Rajkhowa.

"We are ready for dialogue provided sovereignty for Assam is discussed," he said in an email to the media from an undisclosed location.

But Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram has ruled out talks with ULFA unless it abjures violence and gives up the sovereignty demand.

Paresh Baruah said Rajkhowa had not surrendered but been arrested "following a deep-rooted conspiracy of the Indian government".

The same day the Indian authorities formally announced that the ULFA chairman surrendered to the Indian Border Security Force earlier in the day at Dawki in the northeastern state of Meghalaya.

Terming the media reports baseless, Home Minister Sahara Khatun said, "Since we did not arrest him [Rajkhowa], there is no question of pushing him back."

The CO's family was not in Sathkira but families of other officers, including the second-in-command and medical officer, were attacked. The rebellious border guards looted the officers' houses and shot numerous rounds of bullets inside the houses. The families with the help of some officers managed to escape safely.

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