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DHAKA THURSDAY JANUARY 3, 2013, e-mail:business@thedailystar.net

# More climate-smart rice seeds to reach farmers this year

**SOHEL PARVEZ**

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Bangladesh will introduce four more stress-tolerant rice seeds this year -- two saline-tolerant and two submergence-tolerant -- to scale up production by fighting the effects of climate change.

"The seeds will make us more prepared to face the impact of climate change," said Anwar Faruque, director general of the seed wing of the agriculture ministry.

The seeds will enter the existing basket of 11 climate-smart rice seeds developed in the last six years as Bangladesh is heavily vulnerable to climate change.

Most of these varieties having capacity to fight salinity, drought and submerged condition have started reaching the farmers through government and international agencies such as International Rice Research Institute.

Of the four stress-tolerant seeds, two saline-resistant high-yielding varieties came from Bangladesh Rice Research Institute.

Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (Bina) has come up with the rest two submergence-resistant seeds in a bid to cushion growers from crop losses due to floods during the aman season.

Helal Uddin Ahmed, BRRI's chief scientific officer and head of plant breeding division, said the research institute has developed the seeds targeting the *boro* season in southern Bangladesh.

The two saline-resilient seeds, which are expected to be named BRRI Dhan 61



and 62, have up to 6.5 tonnes of yield potential per hectare at normal condition.

Yields will be four tonnes each hectare under saline condition, said Ahmed.

This will help farmers grow rice during the boro season in the south, where 10 lakh hectares of farmland remain unused during the dry season due to salinity intrusion.

In February, salinity reaches its peak in the southern coastal region and starts declining with the advent of monsoon, according to agriculturists.

The BRRI has earlier developed four saline-resistant rice seeds -- BRRI Dhan-47, 53, 54 and 55.

But the new ones will have less shattering (fall of grains before being ripe) rate compared to BRRI Dhan-47, said Ahmed of BRRI.

Bina earlier introduced two saline-resistant seeds -- Bina Dhan-8 and Bina Dhan-10 that have already started going to the farmers' field.

Bina Director (research) MA Salam said the newly developed submergence-tolerant rice seeds will mature early, within 115-125 days, while the normal rate is 140-160 days.

The new seeds will also have the potential to withstand 20-25 days in submerged condition.

These seeds, which are likely to be named Bina Dhan-11 and Bina Dhan-12, will yield 4.5 tonnes to 5.5 tonnes per hectare, said Salam.

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## TICFA: not now, says govt again

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Bangladesh has no immediate plan to sign TICFA as the country needs more time to set much higher labour standards tagged by the US as a precondition with the trade and investment cooperation deal, an official said.

The US wants immediate elimination of child and forced labour from all sectors and permission for trade unionism at factories, but Bangladesh wants to implement these conditions in phases.

The US has been pressing Bangladesh for signing the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (TICFA) for several years.

The latest call came in December.

"Bangladesh will call Assistant US Trade Representative for South Asia Michael J Delaney in Dhaka soon to discuss the issue," said an official of the commerce ministry after a TICFA-related meeting at the secretariat in Dhaka yesterday.

Commerce Minister GM Quader, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, and Prime Minister's Foreign Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi were present at the meeting, chaired by Finance Minister AMA Muhith.

Earlier, Delany came to Dhaka to discuss the TICFA issue in April 2011, but both the countries failed to reach any consensus.

If signed, TICFA will offer a platform for Bangladesh and the US to discuss bilateral trade issues, including trade barriers, opportunities and investment in the two countries.

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Visitors flock to a five-day housing fair that began at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday.

## REHAB fair kicks off

### Rajuk barred from the five-day housing show

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The country's biggest housing fair kicked off yesterday at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

More than 200 developers are displaying their land and apartment projects at the five-day fair, which will remain open from 10am to 8pm.

At the opening ceremony, Abdul Mannan Khan, state minister for housing and public works, urged the realtors not to display any unapproved project at the fair.

Punitive actions against the wrongdoers will help realtors do business proudly and regain confidence, he said.

However, in a rare move, the realtors did not allow Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) to set up booths on the fair premises, which has created scope to display unapproved projects.

In previous shows, Rajuk set up stalls to carry out random inspections and take punitive actions against any illegal housing scheme on display.

In a recent letter, the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) asked Rajuk not to "interfere" in its five-day show.

However, Md Nurul Huda, chairman of Rajuk, told The Daily Star earlier that the REHAB letter has no basis and they will as usual carry out inspections and drives against illegal housing schemes on display at the show.

But this correspondent did not find any representative from Rajuk at the fair.

The media information wing of the show also confirmed that there would be no stall by Rajuk and neither its drives.

The Rajuk chairman also did not attend the inaugural ceremony even though he was supposed to.

A number of illegal housing projects were allegedly being displayed at the show in violation of a High Court order, in the same manner as it occurred in December 2011 and in June last year.

However, Anisuzzaman Bhuiyan Rana, REHAB general secretary, said there is no scope of displaying illegal projects at the show.

"In our database, we have all information of the 220 stalls and the projects they are offering," he told The Daily Star by phone.

A customer can crosscheck information at the 'help desk' of REHAB before booking a project, he added.

"Even after that, if we find any illegal project, we will take punitive action against them," Rana said.

The HC in a judgment in June 2011 declared a total of 78 private housing projects in and around Dhaka city illegal.

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## Remittance sets new benchmark

**REJAUL KARIM BYRON**

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Remittance reached \$14.17 billion setting another benchmark in 2012 and offering the government a cushion against eroding foreign exchange reserves and exchange rate volatility.

Inward remittances grew 16.43 percent in 2012 from the previous year, when it accelerated 10 percent from 2010.

Migrant workers remitted \$1.28 billion back home in December -- a 16.60 percent rise from the previous month. In the last 12 months, the number is the highest remittance inflow in a single month, according to data from Bangladesh Bank.

Remittance inflow goes up by \$1,000 to \$1,100 a year with every new expatriate, said Zahid Hussain, senior economist of the World Bank, citing a study of his organisation. The trend of manpower export has to be maintained to continue the growth, he said.

Last fiscal year, manpower export increased 57 percent and the total number of workers went abroad was 691,402, the second highest in Bangladesh's history, according to the central bank statistics. In 2007-08, around 981,102 workers went abroad for jobs.

In the first three months of the current fiscal year, manpower export declined 6.69 percent from the same period last year.



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## Govt to float roadmap to apply new VAT law

**REJAUL KARIM BYRON**

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The government will prepare a plan and timetable by March to implement the new VAT law, in line with the conditions of the International Monetary Fund.

A finance ministry official said the government will also give the National Board of Revenue a new organisational structure to boost earnings.

An eight-member committee headed by NBR Chairman Md Ghulam Hussain was formed on Tuesday to prepare the VAT law implementation plan, an NBR official said.

Representatives from the tax administrator, the finance ministry, and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry were included in the committee.

The new VAT (value added tax) law got passage in parliament in November last year. However, the NBR official said the new law will be implemented in three years beginning from the next fiscal year.

In the new law, there will be a single VAT rate at 15 percent at each level of value addition, instead of different rates as are in the existing law.

Also there will be clear valuation rules and VAT will be imposed on the basis of the actual price, not the truncated base price, the NBR official said.

The new VAT law will be simple and tax-payer friendly, the official added. Also, there will be a provision for payment of VAT through cheques and credit cards.

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  - Send your application to Head of Human Resources, BRAC Bank Limited, 1 Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan - 1, Dhaka - 1212

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We Mourn

Computer Source expresses deepest condolence at the demise of Mr. M. N. Islam, Chairman, Flora Limited.

As true IT leader of Bangladesh, he always was conscientious and led by example and inspired others to follow in his footsteps.

His sudden death is an irreplaceable loss to the IT business community of Bangladesh. We heartily commemorate his memory and pray for his departed soul.

May ALLAH bless him with the highest position in heaven and give his family courage to bear the sudden loss.

Mr. M. N. Islam

(3 July, 1933 - 1 Jan, 2013)

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