

KEEPING CROPS SAFE FROM PESTICIDE

Pabna farmers show the way

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR
TOPU, Pabna

While the use of pesticides in crops raises serious concerns about food safety, farmers in Pabna have set a rare example of cutting its use by applying a method called "perching".

Farmers simply dig tree branches or T-shape sticks into the ground so that birds can sit there and eat insects harmful for the crops. As a result, crops grow without pesticide and its production cost goes down.

Abdus Salam, a farmer of Hamchiapur village of Pabna sadar, said he had been applying this method for the last three years.

Earlier, he used pesticide

worth Tk 2,500 per bigha of land, but now he does not spend a single penny on pesticide.

"Yet, paddy yield remains the same, 20 maunds a bigha," he told The Daily Star.

Agriculture scientists say birds eat harmful insects like mazra, pamri and grasshopper, thus rescuing the crops from pest attacks, especially during the pinna-ple period.

However, birds do not eat the friendly insects like lady bird deckle which are otherwise killed by pesticide, said agriculturist Zafar Sadique.

Though the eco-friendly method was introduced in the country formally in 1982, it was first used in

Pabna in 2009, said Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) officials in Pabna.

Within five years, however, perching method has become popular among farmers. Farmers used perching method on 59,100 hectares out of 61,560 hectares of boro field in the district this boro season, DAE officials said.

On an average, this method has halved the use of chemical pesticides, said ABM Mostafizur Rahman, deputy director of DAE in Pabna.

He suggested that farmers set up eight perches on a bigha of paddy field and regularly maintain those for perfect outcome.



Farmers in Pabna have adopted an innovative approach to killing insects. They set up structures in paddy fields, like the ones in the photo, so that birds can sit and eat insects harmful for crops.

PHOTO:
STAR

2 robbers killed in cop action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two alleged robbers were killed and two others injured in a fight that broke out after police tried to foil a robbery attempt at Pahartali in Chittagong yesterday.

The dead are Md Manik, 28, and Md Selim, 30. They were members of a gang known as "Belal Bahini".

Abdur Rouf, officer-in-charge of Pahartali Police Station, said: "The duo was killed by their own machetes as they waved those desperately after being caught by police."

The two wounded -- Liakat and Hasan who sustained injuries in a similar fashion -- were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital, the OC said. Sub-inspectors Nurul Islam and Md Alim were also hurt in the incident.

Police raided the City Gate area of the port city on a tip-off that a gang was preparing for robbery around 1:30am.

Sensing police presence, the gang members opened fire on the law-enforcers, and then swooped on them with machetes, the OC said.

Police arrested eight members of the gang, including the two injured, and seized a single-barrel gun, a light gun, 10 bullets, a bullet cartridge, three machetes and a rod cutter from their possession.

The six other arrestees are Belal, Sekander, Ismail, Saiful Islam, Osman and Suman.

The OC said the gang had been active in the port city as well as Sitakunda, Hathazari and Satkania upazilas of Chittagong for the last five years.

Belal, the ringleader, and his cohorts were accused in two robbery cases filed with Pahartali Police Station and several other cases in different police stations in the district, headed.

Three cases -- one each for assaulting police, robbery attempt and carrying arms -- were filed with Pahartali Police Station, said Suzaet Khan, deputy commissioner (west zone) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police.

Rights activists

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Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori; Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon; and Shamsul Huda, executive director of Association for Land Reforms and Development, went to the court on that day to observe the proceedings in the case.

In the application, they also prayed to Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain that he pass an order transferring the writ petition from the present HC bench to another bench for disposal.

Chief Executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela) Syeda Rizwana Hasan submitted the application to the CJ on May 29 on behalf of the petitioners, saying that "there was no such crowd in the courtroom for which the presiding judge could ask the aforesaid persons to leave the courtroom."

Contacted, Ashiyan City's lawyer Rakanuddin Mahmud said that an application was submitted to the chief justice yesterday so that he (CJ) hears arguments from the realtor before deciding about the application of the writ petitioners.

Also yesterday, Mahmudul Islam, a lawyer for the writ petitioners, informed the HC bench led by Justice Hoque about submitting their application to the chief justice.

The HC bench adjourned the hearing of the writ petition for two days.

Earlier on January 2, following the same writ petition, another HC bench ordered Rajdhan Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) to stop the activities of Ashiyan City, which had a conditional and partial approval from the housing ministry to develop land in the capital's Holan and Ashkona areas.

The SC on January 24 refused to stay the HC order.

Not honest to the cause

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opposition BNP behaved on Monday centring on an adjournment motion has only exposed their political bankruptcy. It also has revealed an unholy race between them to outplay each other despite the fact that the country has been going through an extremely critical phase of late.

A BNP MP had submitted an adjournment motion to the parliament secretariat proposing a discussion in the House over the restoration of the caretaker government system. At a meeting of the BNP Parliamentary Party on Monday, the MP was asked to withdraw his motion.

That was because the opposition neither wants to place any proposal nor wishes to discuss the issue in the House until the government agrees

in principle to restore the non-partisan election-time government. The opposition adopted the strategy knowing the truth of the adjournment motion. And they did not want to allow the ruling AL to gain political mileage by allowing a mere discussion on the issue in parliament.

The AL, on the other hand, seems to have acknowledged defeat before the BNP's strategy. It had tried to play a trump card through using the BNP MP's adjournment motion in its favour after it had backtracked from its stance to hold a dialogue with the BNP to resolve the political stand-off.

The treasury bench has had the Speaker reject all 835 adjournment motions submitted by opposition MPs in the last four and half a years

seeking discussions on various important national issues. The Speaker could not accept any motion from opposition MPs for discussion in the House as the treasury bench did not agree to such discussion.

Suddenly, the AL policymakers, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, at the Business Advisory Committee meeting with the Speaker in the chair on Monday agreed to allow a discussion on the adjournment motion submitted by the BNP MP. In fact, they agreed despite knowing the outcome of the discussion.

However, all the signs suggest there is now no possibility of any discussion taking place in the House on the adjournment motion. But what would happen if a discussion did take place in

the House? Some senior ruling and opposition MPs could have spoken in favour of or against the caretaker government system. They might have offered some suggestions on the formation of an election-time government. Their suggestions could have opened the window to further discussions.

Continued discussion can reduce the gap between the ruling and opposition camps. And if the gap is reduced, there will be a possibility of a consensus being arrived at between the two rival camps ahead of the next parliamentary election.

The reality, though, is rather something else. The parties remain unable to initiate a conversation, let alone keep it going.

Polls, Padma, reality

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As part of various populist measures, the government might offer two special increments or a special benefit package for the 12 lakh government staff.

The finance minister has already said there would be no dearness allowance for civil servants although a pay commission would be announced.

The government may allocate Tk 2,400 crore to Tk 3,400 crore under its block allocation for paying the benefits to government employees and for the next parliamentary election.

Meanwhile, the moribund stockmarket may get an incentive package. For small savers, more benefit will be given for saving certificates. There may be various concessions in the tax proposals to increase

stagnant investment and keep the price of essential commodities stable.

The government has already approved a new law on value added tax (VAT) to meet one of the conditions of the IMF. The law will come into full force from 2015, although some of its measures have already taken effect in the outgoing budget and will continue in the new budget.

The VAT law is expected to reduce exemptions and assess the tax based on actual transaction values instead of arbitrary approved values. This will increase the tax revenue despite expected tax concessions to implement the budget.

An ambitious revenue generation target is going to be set to keep the budget

deficit within the programme prescribed by the IMF.

However, National Board of Revenue officials termed the revenue target unrealistic, saying that the target might have to be revised at the end of the fiscal year.

The budget will see the end of a bureaucrat-turned-politician's colourful political career, as Muhith has already said that he would not become the finance minister even if the present government retains office.

Besides the failure in the Padma bridge project, he will be leaving the government with another agony, as the country could not achieve 7 percent growth in gross domestic product, although it continuously grew at over 6 percent in the last four years, amid the global slowdown.

Dhaka bins phantom vote

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have claimed that thousands of foreign nationals, including Bangladeshis, had been flown into the country to vote for ruling alliance Barisan Nasional.

"Such xenophobic propaganda may put the target group, especially Bangladeshi workers, in risk of physical, mental and involuntary abuse," said Rahman at a press conference in the Bangladesh High Commission on Monday, reports news site The Malaysian Insider.

The propaganda was nothing but a mere fabrication by some interest groups, said Rahman, dismissing the claim that 40,000 Bangladeshis had come to Malaysia a week before the vote.

The envoy said the portrayal of Bangladeshis as phantom voters had cast a negative image on Bangladesh.

"We have very good relations with Malaysia. We have met the ministers of Malaysia who said there had been no evidence of such accusations. So, this propa-

ganda must end," Rahman said.

He said some 100 people of Bangladesh origins had become naturalised Malaysian citizens after living there for decades. They might have voted.

No law, either of Bangladesh or Malaysia, allowed Bangladeshis to vote in Malaysia, the diplomat said, adding that there were some 5 lakh Bangladeshis working in Malaysia and the economic and diplomatic tie between the two nations had been improving.

UK minister for fair polls

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the social and economic impact of strikes and other forms of disruption.

Duncan made the remarks in a statement after holding a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office.

The UK minister also met Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office last night.

Duncan, in the statement, said, "How the election process is managed is of course a matter for Bangladesh. I hope, all sides will resolve their differences through a meaningful dialogue."

At the meeting, Hasina said the next general election would be held as per the system which is being followed by major developed nations of parliamentary democracy, including the UK.

The government had strengthened the Election Commission through a search committee led by late president Zillur Rahman, the premier was quoted as saying by her Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad.

Azad was talking to reporters after the meeting.

Hasina said over 5,600 elections had already been held in a free, fair, neutral and peaceful manner in

the last four and a half years without any intervention from the ruling party.

She requested the British investors to take advantage of investment-friendly climate in Bangladesh for channeling more FDI into the country.

In the press statement, Duncan also said the relationship between Britain and Bangladesh remains strong, founded on a long-standing and deep bond stretching across and beyond in the last four decades.

Bangladesh's influence was growing around the world and therefore more people than ever before would be watching closely, he said.

"Their attention has been raised further by the recent episodes of violence as well as tragedies such as the Rana Plaza building collapse," he added.

The UK minister also said Britain is committed to Bangladesh's development and its ambition of achieving middle income status within the next decade.

"It's economic prosperity and social development is important to us, as it also is to the half a million people of Bangladeshi origin living in the UK," he added.

Ambassador at-Large M Ziauddin, Principal

Secretary to the PM Shaikh Wahid Uz Zaman, among others, were present at the meeting.

DUNCAN MEETS

KHALEDA

At a meeting with Khaleda Zia, Duncan said his country wants to see a free, fair and non-violent general election in Bangladesh with participation of all parties.

"My feeling is that the election will be non-violent... every one to participate in the democratic election without any threat and violence," he said while talking to reporters after the meeting.

He hoped that the political parties would work together so that the Constitution can work effectively for holding a smooth election.

Briefing reporters, BNP Vice-chairman Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury said the UK minister hoped that the next general election would be held under a process acceptable to all.

The British High Commissioner in Dhaka Robert Gibson and DFID Country Representative Sarah Cooke accompanied Duncan.

Earlier in the day, the UK minister met Finance Minister AMA Muhith and Expatriates' and Overseas Employment Minister Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain.



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

The chamber of a consultant physician in Chittagong is unusually quiet yesterday. Consultant physicians in the city went on an indefinite strike protesting a court order sending one of their colleagues to prison for negligence in surgery.

Ctg doctors go on strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Consultant physicians in Chittagong yesterday went on an indefinite strike protesting a court order that sent one of their fellow physicians to jail on charges of negligence in surgery.

The consultants remained absent from their chambers in the city even as worried patients kept wait-

ing to consult with the doctors.

"Where will we go now as all the consultants have gone on an indefinite strike?" said Shahjahan Khan, who came to the private chamber of a consultant in the city from Satkania upazila for his grandson's treatment.

Dr Mujibul Huq Khan, president of Bangladesh

Medical Association, Chittagong chapter, told The Daily Star that the doctors had called the work abstention in private chambers from the afternoon to protest what he called the case against a colleague.

Child health specialist Prof Dr Mahmud A Chowdhury Arzu, who did not render consultancy

services, said, "I just abide by the decision taken by the BMA."

He, however, said the government hospitals and the emergencies of private hospitals would remain out of the purview of the strike.

A Chittagong court on Monday sent Dr Shurman Ali to jail on charges of negligence in performing surgery on a patient.

Shattered yet proud

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Though she forbade her husband to go to the rescue, Ripon left without saying goodbye.

"I found him on the veranda of the Burn Unit of Dhaka Medical College at 1:00 am. He only asked for his mother twice and then lost consciousness," recalls Shamsunnahar.

After saving five members of his friend's family from the ground floor of the two storey building adjacent to Gulzar Khan's house, from where the fire generated, Ripon had gone to the first floor.

"When the lower part of his trousers caught fire he jumped from the first floor. Unfortunately, others who jumped to escape the fire fell

on him. The fall broke his spinal cord and ruptured his bladder," Shamsunnahar said, showing the X-rays images of Ripon's body.

With the breadwinner of the family gone, Shamsunnahar, who completed studies up to class eight, now has to find a new income source.

Ignoring her in-laws' pressure to spend the Tk 1 lakh government compensation for the victims of Nimtoli, Shamsunnahar has kept it as a fixed deposit in the bank. "I need to secure my daughters' futures," she said.

Shamsunnahar now works as a tutor teaching the Arabic alphabet in the neighbourhood. "I earn Tk 2500 per

month but most of it is spent on my elder daughter's education expenses which amount to Tk 2000," she said.

"Next year she will take her Junior School Certificate examination which will require extra tuition and expense," she anticipates.

"All I ask for is a respectable job that can pay for my daughters' educations, or some help to start a small business," she implores, showing her tailoring work lying beside the sewing machine that stands in one corner of her one-room flat.

The tin-shed flat is on the 3rd floor of her mother-in-law's four-storey house which is shared by Ripon's three brothers.

With families of their own to look after, they cannot provide much financial support to their nieces. "Family members try to help during festivals like Eid, giving my two grand-daughters gifts according to their ability," said Shamena, Ripon's 60-year-old mother.

"I am an orphan and keeping that in mind Ripon never misbehaved with me," said Shamsunnahar remembering her husband.

Nothing how hard it is to live in this society as a young widow, Shamsunnahar said, "I will not marry again. I want to live a respectable life bringing up my daughters and making sure they lead a good life."