

High zinc rice released

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varieties of rice, jute and potato were released yesterday at a meeting of the NSB headed by the agriculture secretary.

The BRRI breeders developed the hi-zinc rice with support from HarvestPlus, which is a global biofortification mission launched back in 2004 under the Washington-based global agro-science coordinating body Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

India lags behind as Bangladeshi breeders succeeded in developing two hi-zinc rice varieties -- one for Aman season and the other for Boro. The Aman one got the NSB nod yesterday and as per the mandate of the international collaboration, the zinc-enriched rice variety is now expected to expand to Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Dr Alamgir Hossain, the main Biri breeder behind the zinc-enriched rice variety, who got promoted from principal scientific officer (PSO) to chief scientific officer (CSO) on Sunday, told The Daily Star that as against the average zinc content of rice -- 14 to 16 parts per million (ppm)-- the one that got the NSB nod yesterday has 20 to 22 ppm.

"Besides, we've just successfully completed field trial of another biofortified rice variety -- fit for Boro season cultivation-- which has 24 ppm zinc content. Soon we're going to apply for approval of this Boro season zinc rice too," said Alamgir, also a post-doctoral fellow of the Manila-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

BRRI Director General Dr Md Syedul Islam told this correspondent yesterday that the zinc-enriched rice variety also outpaced two of the country's best performing Aman season early-mature varieties -- Bina dhan-7 and Biri dhan-33. Crop duration from seed to seed is 110-120 days for Bina dhan-7 and Biri dhan-33 while Biri dhan-62 can be reaped in 100 to 105 days.

"Besides, the variety is also higher in protein content (9 percent) in comparison to other Biri varieties, which have 5 to 7 percent proteins," he added.

Zinc, iron and vitamin-A are the three most vital micronutrients, deficiency of which hampers children's natural growth and decrease their disease prevention capacity. In Bangladesh, over 40 percent children under five are stunted while an estimated 44 percent children of the same age group are at risk of zinc deficiency. The other varieties the

NSB released yesterday are three rice varieties developed by the BRRI, four rice varieties by Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (Bina) and two jute and one potato varieties, officials present at the NSB meetings said.

Asked, BRRI plant breeding division head Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed said yesterday that of the newly released varieties, Biri dhan-61 is saline-tolerant and of good grain quality while Biri dhan-59 and 60 could be reaped 10 to 12 days earlier than the country's best performing Boro rice variety - Biri dhan-29.

Shamsunnahar Begum, a senior scientific officer at the plant breeding division of Bina, said that of the four new Bina rice varieties, Bina-11 and Bina-12 are submergence-tolerant while Bina-13 is an aromatic variety like Kalizira but with higher yield potential.

"While farmers get 2.5 metric tons of Kalizira from one hectare of land, they'll be able to reap 3.5 MT per hectare once they start cultivating Bina-13." Besides, Shamsunnahar added, Bina-14, the 4th variety released, is suitable for late sowing during Boro season.

The other crop varieties the NSB approved yesterday are two saline-tolerant and disease-resistant jute varieties and a disease-resistant potato variety.

Outages

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700-750 megawatts (MW) on Sunday and this trend might continue if the weather remained hot.

Favourable weather and an increase in gas supply to power plants, by keeping fertiliser factories closed since April, had helped the PDB to control the demand-supply deficit for the better part of this year.

The state-owned fertiliser factories, which use natural gas to make fertiliser, resumed production from mid-August. Gas was diverted to the fertiliser factories depriving power plants. This resulted in a power generation drop of around 600MW a day.

Even with the drop, load shedding remained within 200MW a day as regular rain kept power consumption low.

The PDB is now generating around 5,750MW but the demand shot up to 6,500MW on Sunday due to the warm weather.

The PDB made a record power generation of 6,675MW on July 12. Higher power generation can be achieved if proper gas supply to power plants is ensured. But this has not been possible due to gas supply shortfalls.

The country's power demand is increasing by more than 10 percent a year.

MPs

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forcing the councils to spend the lion's share of the money allocated for the annual development programmes on projects chosen by the lawmakers.

"We cannot independently implement programmes due to their interference," the administrator said requesting anonymity.

Interestingly, some upazila chairmen, who are members of the district councils and have been blessed by their local MPs, speak in favour of their local lawmakers and against the administrators, fuelling conflict, the sources said.

Hasina took note of their demands and said, "I will look into all the issues," an administrator told The Daily Star.

Instead of holding polls to the district councils as per the ruling Awami League's electoral pledge, the government appointed 61 administrators to as many districts in December, 2011.

It had not even specified their terms of appointment. Most of the administrators were top Awami League district leaders.

The meeting was held yesterday to intensify the publicity of the government's development activities at the districts ahead of the next parliamentary polls, sources claimed.

At least seven administrators spoke at the meeting. They also demanded an increase in the allocation for development programmes in the districts, magistracy power for the chief executive officers of the councils and a change in the Representation of the People Order that would allow them to contest the next general elections.

"We do not get magistrates from deputy commissioners on time to launch a drive to recover government land from grabbers. So, we need the magistracy power for the chief executive officers," an administrator said.

Another administrator said as per the current provision of the RPO, they are holding office of profit which disqualifies them from contesting the parliamentary polls.

In response to the demand for the change in the RPO, the premier directed the LGRD secretary to talk to the law ministry to find out if there were any hurdles for the administrators to run in the polls.

On some MPs' controversial activities, an administrator claimed that there were no allegations against any administrator. "You [PM] can consider us to replace those controversial MPs in the next polls," he added.

In response, the premier urged them to carry out their job properly and she assured them of looking into all the matters discussed.

CANCELLING CANDIDATURE EC firm against proposed power

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite widespread criticism, the Election Commission (EC) remains firm on scrapping its proposed authority to cancel one's candidature in parliamentary polls for violation of electoral laws.

Defending its decision once again, the commission last night explained that it was not possible to cancel one's candidature using the provision of article 91E of the Representation of the People Order (RPO).

"The provision is practically inapplicable," the EC said in its explanation, adding that the provision was incorporated in 2008 but there was no instance of its application until now.

Dropping of the article 91E does not take away the commission's power to cancel one's candidature, the explanation said, adding that the same power is also provided in article 91A of the same act.

The EC on July 25 sent a set of proposal to the law ministry for bringing changes in the

RPO. In a surprise move, the commission on July 28 took the decision to scrap the article 91E.

As per the provision of article 91E, fresh election will be held if only one candidate remains in the electoral race in a constituency after the EC cancels candidatures of others for violating electoral laws.

However, article 19 of the RPO said if there was only one candidate remaining in the polls in a constituency, he or she would be declared elected uncontested.

"Because of the self-contradictory provision in article 91E, it was being considered whether the article should be dropped from the RPO," the explanation said.

"The EC does not make laws, it is the sole purview of Parliament to do so."

"At the end, the commission's original proposal may be passed as it is or may be modified or may be rejected -- all depend on Parliament, the law making authority of the State," the explanation said.

Criminals attack cops

Snatch arrestee

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Criminals yesterday snatched an arrestee from police, leaving two law enforcers injured at Ranirhat Bazar in Bakerganj upazila.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Bakerganj Police Station Nurul Islam said sub-inspector Nazrul Islam Majumder and constable Enayet Hossain had arrested Asif Talukder, 29, accused of attacking his rivals with lethal weapons, from Rahirhat area.

On their way back

around 7:30pm, when they reached the bazar area with Asif, accomplices of the arrestee equipped with lethal weapons swooped on the police personnel and beat up Nazrul and Enayet.

The attackers then took away Asif. The injured policemen had been taken to Barisal Police Lines Hospital for treatment, the OC added.

Barisal district Police Superintendent AKM Ehsan Ullah said police had launched a drive to catch Asif and his accomplices.

Prosecutors rebuked

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Angered by the prosecution's behaviour, Mizanul said, "The slang is unutterable. It seems [from their slang] I will have to change my father's name."

Another member of the tribunal Justice Anwarul Haque asked the prosecution, "Could it be the language of a lawyer? It cannot be the language of a gentleman."

The three-member tribunal also expressed resentment over defence counsel Tajul Islam's way of drawing the court's attention to the matter.

Tajul told the tribunal that they had heard the slang and comment passed by the prosecution.

"You always talk hurting the tribunal. How dare you are! How do you know we've heard it?" said Justice Selim, adding, "It seems as if we remained silent even after hearing it."

Saying that the tribunal always took immediate steps whenever such matters came to their notice, Justice Selim said the court was occupied recording the cross-examination.

Tajul also sought apology later. "I could not control my temper after hearing it. I had no intention to hurt the tribunal," he added.

After that the situation of the courtroom calmed down. The defence had completed cross-examining Jamal Uddin, 17th prosecution witness in the case before the proceeding was adjourned until today.

MOBARAK'S CASE
A prosecution witness who used to cook at a Razakar camp at Anandamoyee Kalibari Temple in Brahmanbaria yesterday told the tribunal that he had witnessed war crimes accused Mobarak Hossain torturing a Hindu youth.

Eighth prosecution witness Abdus Samad, 72, of Akhaura village of Brahmanbaria said the youth was bullet-hit and confined to the temple.

"His injury began putrefying and smelling foul. I offered him food, but he refused to eat," said the septuagenarian witness.

"I did not see him after four or five days. After enquiry I learned that Razakar commander

Mobarak and Kachu Mia had taken him to Kurulia canal and shot him there," said Samad.

A few days later, Razakar commander Mobarak along with his group members had gone to Suhilpur Razakar camp where they killed another person, he added.

The witness also said Mobarak and other Razakars had destroyed all the idols of the temple.

The seventh prosecution witness of the case on August 20 said Mobarak had forced Ashu Ranjan Dev to drink urine after torturing him at the temple. Ashu was later shot dead on the bank of Kurulia canal.

Samad yesterday said Mobarak and others joined Razakar, an auxiliary force of the Pakistani occupation army during the Liberation War, in August 1971.

The defence cross-examined the witness after his deposition.

Mobarak had been the organising secretary of a union unit of Awami League in Akhaura of Brahmanbaria for 16 years. He was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

The proceeding of the case was adjourned until September 4.

ICT-2
The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday rejected a petition of Jamaat leader AKM Yusuf seeking review of the charge framing order, as the petition was not filed in due time.

On August 1, the tribunal indicted Yusuf, historically known as the founder of the infamous Razakar force, on 13 charges including murders and genocide committed during the war.

As per the relevant law, any review petition must be filed within seven days of charge framing.

Defence lawyer Saifur Rahman said they could not file the petition within the stipulated time as they did not get the certified copy of the order by then.

The tribunal led by Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam summarily rejected the petition.

Peace is very necessary

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The 20-member team of BKP, a component of the BNP-led 18-party alliance, had discussions with Yunus for nearly an hour.

Different political parties have held a series of talks with the Grameen Bank founder in the last two months.

Asked to comment on Prof Yunus' offer to talk with the government, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star last night, "He [Yunus] is not a political personality. Yet if he wants to say something, he may do so. Awami League will weigh what he says."

Speaking at the meeting

with the BKP delegation, Prof Yunus said he thinks "if the election is held under an impartial caretaker government, it will ease the crisis and bring peace in the country."

He also urged people to have their voices heard about which system would be better for holding the election.

Yunus called upon the political leaders to take the path of peace for building a nation in which the youth can thrive. "I deeply feel that it is essential to have peace in the country for a long period."

Urging the government and the main opposition to

start the process of establishing peace in the country, Yunus said if there is any delay in negotiations between the two sides over the election, it will give rise to conflict in the country.

Questions have been raised whether the election will be held without the participation of the opposition parties or it will be held under a non-party government, he said.

In his inaugural speech, BKP Chairman Syed Muhammad Ibrahim called upon the Grameen Bank founder to share his experience and skills with others.

90 more fly to KL today

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procrastination within the government process. They also feared that other labour sending countries -- including India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal -- would tap the market within this idle period.

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, however, said the process was working properly.

"We have resumed sending workers at low migration costs to Malaysia, which earlier was very high and illogical," he told The Daily Star.

Manpower export to Malaysia was suspended in 2009 for allegations of middlemen's intervention and irregularities in the recruitment process. The state arrangement resumed the process two years back making it possible for a job seeker to spend Tk 33,178 compared to the previous Tk 2 lakh to 2.8 lakh going

through private recruiting agencies.

More than 700,000 Bangladeshis are working in different sectors in Malaysia and of the \$14.17 billion remittance sent by Bangladeshi expatriates last year, workers in Malaysia alone sent around \$800 million, according to BMET officials.

The workers will sign renewable two-year job contracts as soon as they land and get a salary of 900 Malaysian Ringgits (around Tk 21,000) per month with their accommodations paid for by their employers. They will have to pay for their food only, said BMET officials.

Around 1.5 million aspirants registered online in January this year for the Malaysian jobs. Of them, 10,000 were selected and given technical training in 23 centres across the country.

Around one-third of the aspirants have completed

their secondary education to the least, but have no other options than to work abroad due to shortage of job opportunities in the country.

Honours final year student Shahinur Rahman dropped out and took working in Malaysia as an alternative as his family was unable to bear costs for his education.

Similarly, unemployed B.Com graduate Shofiqul Islam chose Malaysia after many tries in landing a job.

Shahinur made his choice after struggling to pay for his own education till attaining his Higher Secondary Certificate, and not being able to continue due to his poverty stricken family.

The workers, however, are satisfied in landing the jobs in Malaysia through spending very little money in comparison.

Protest against cop extortion

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food items from the shops but never pay for any of them, local trader Nayem Uddin said. "Sometimes they [policemen] threaten to file cases against us when anyone demands payment," he said.

The agitation began after two policemen of the camp tried to take meat, without paying, from a shop owned by one Manzu at Amin Bazar market around 8:30am, witnesses said.

When Manzu refused to give them the meat, the duo threatened to implicate him in false cases.

As the news spread, traders and local people carrying bamboo sticks and bricks thronged the spot, blocked the road and started shouting slogans against police, said people in the neighbourhoods.

At one stage, local transport workers joined them intensifying the agitation.

The blockade that began around 10:30am caused huge traffic congestion over 10 kilometres on the highway from Hemayetpur of Savar to Gabtoli, Dhaka.

It was withdrawn around 11:30am after police high officials assured the protesters of taking action if any policeman had been involved in extortion.

Moshiuddawla Reza, assistant superintendent of police, Savar police circle, who rushed to the spot and quelled the protest, said, "The incident took place following a misunderstanding with the local people."

Asking not to be named, several traders said Sub-Inspector (SI) Wali Ashraf Khan, who was transferred from the police camp two

days back, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Lutfar Rahman and other officials were involved in extortion.

They alleged the police members had been collecting money up to Tk 1,500 a month from local traders and the truck drivers who used Amin Bazar truck stand adjacent to the camp. The policemen also used to take Tk 50 per day from each shop on the footpaths, which has recently been increased to Tk 80.

SI Wali Ashraf Khan, who was in-charge of Amin Bazar police camp, said, "I had no connection with extortion. Sometimes transport workers did not take fare from me though I wanted to pay them."

ASI Lutfar Rahman also refuted the allegation against him.

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