

Rising salinity limits food production in the South

SHYKH SERAJ

I recently visited the southern belt of Bangladesh, the Aila affected regions, to film the recent farming developments there. The heat was extreme and I could easily notice that I have never felt this much heat on the field. I wanted to learn about people's access to safe drinking water and salinity on the crops, and specially wanted to find how rice production and farmers are being affected. I went to Shyamnagar in Satkhira. When almost the whole of Bangladesh is filled with crops on farmlands, here I saw the opposite- landscape of barren lands, hundreds of bighas of barren lands.

Salinity has caused this severity. But the mother of this rising salinity is climate change. It was impossible to stand on the rice field where there was nothing - no crops, no sign of greenery. I was planning to move to another field, when some farmers came forward to meet me.

"We can't farm anymore as the salinity is too high in soil and water", said one farmer. "The situation has made our survival impossible", said another farmer.

Global warming has made disaster prone areas even more vulnerable. High temperatures greater than 35 degrees Celsius during the reproductive stages reduces rice production will hamper yield as rice flowers becoming sterile in high temperatures. The result is output of less grain or no grain at all. Higher night temperatures during the ripening stage also decrease rice yield and grain quality. Even at the vegetative growth stage, heat stress can cause leaf yellowing and accelerated development, leading to low yield potential in sensitive rice varieties. Both yield



PHOTO: STAR

Saline water in the Aila affected areas hampers rice production, leaving the farmers frustrated.

grain qualities are adversely affected at the flowering and ripening stages of rice plants. A research of International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) indicated that temperature of one degree Celsius rise in night time may reduce rice yields by as much as 10%.

It's very difficult comprehending the agony that has spread over these lands - it's even more difficult to explain how badly salinity has shattered the lives of these rural southern people

whose lives were dependent entirely on farming. Some of them told us that there is a nearby reservoir of water but that only has extreme saline water with which nothing can be produced, forget about drinking! It reminded me of the great poem by S.T. Coleridge, 'The Rime of Ancient Mariner', 'Water, water, every where, Nor any drop to drink.'

As a result of climate change, rice yield will decrease by 15% in developing coun-

tries by 2050 and consequently rice prices will increase by 12%. Impact of climate change on rice production is negative. As rice is cultivated in low lying areas, the rising of sea levels would make rice production vulnerable to climate change. I planned to look for other places where we could at least find some green lands. On my way, I saw a crowd and stopped there for a while. People were standing in a spot with

of different types- here they have a house water tap which gives them underground water, filtered as safe drinking water.

"Is this healthy for you?" I asked. "We have to preserve this water at home for one day and then we can drink it", said a farmer. There is foul smell in the water and by drinking this, people are suffering from various diseases. The lives of these people are so tough that finding a good solution seemed impossible. I could easily understand it would be really difficult to find any able green land around this region, if it at all exists in the region.

After being severely massacred by Aila in May 2009, farmers of the South could not harvest anything because of high salinity intrusion in their crop lands. Farm households in coastal belts are now ultra-poor and not able to feed themselves properly. These are mostly subsistence farmers living in coastal areas. Once salinity strikes, they can no longer grow food in coastal areas and thus they can't afford to buy food either.

Climate experts already pointed out that sea level rise will cause the country's landscape to become barren. In terms of the impact of climate change, Bangladesh is the most vulnerable country in South Asia. With higher sea level, more areas would be affected by cyclone surges while inland fresh water lakes, ponds and

aquifers could also be affected by saline water intrusion.

There are some saline tolerant varieties of rice which has lost its strength and some are gaining new strength, say experts. Finally we started getting good news. Binadhan-8 and 10 have showed very good performance, says the local agriculture authority. But we need to keep on working on inventing the right varieties focused on saline tolerance. Massive programs are needed in the next Boro season on these newly developed salt-tolerant rice varieties in the coastal area. In this connection, seeds of these salt tolerant rice varieties need to be collected immediately from the current Boro season, otherwise seeds will not be available later.

In the end, I found hope from a man named S M Abdul Wahab, who approached me and told me that his organization 'Shushilon' has found freshwater, 240 feet below the ground. They have already ensured safe drinking water at the Harinagar village in Shyamnagar for 200 families. He hopes that by next year, his organization would be able to ensure safe drinking water for 2000 families. I felt so hopeful that there are some people helping others in the area and there are ways to find solutions. The right policy invention at the field level is key to saving these people. The future of Bangladesh lies in the hands of these poor



PHOTO: STAR

District Commissioner Habibur Rahman receives Nitibhuson Award for his honesty and morality at the Sadar Upazila Parishad hall room.

Lalmonirhat DC awarded Nitibhuson

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The Lalmonirhat District Commissioner (DC) Habibur Rahman received the Nitibhuson Award for his incorruptible morals and principals from the District Museum recently. The award was given at the Sadar upazila parishad hall room. According to DC Habibur Rahman, honesty and morality are assets of human beings and everybody needs to be loyal to his own conscience and sense of morality. "I never expected award; it came as a surprise," he added, saying that honesty can bring peace in one's life.

DC Habibur Rahman, son of Nazrul Islam and Morsheda Begum, lives in the

Pirojpur area of Naogaon town in Naogaon district. He was born on November 1, 1963 and passed his SSC in 1979 and HSC in 1981 from Cantonment Daud Public School and College in Jessore. He achieved his BSS degree from Rajshahi University in 1990, and then joined the public service job as an Assistant Commissioner in April 1993. Later on, he was

promoted to Assistant Commissioner, Land and began work at Bagha upazila in Rajshahi district. He moved to Nilphamari district as Senior Assistant Commissioner and first class magistrate in January 2000. In July 2006, he was promoted to Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Fulchhari upazila in Gaibandha district. Habibur Rahman was promoted to District Commissioner DC of Lalmonirhat on 14 October 2012.

Talking to the officials in Lalmonirhat, the DC office informed that Habibur Rahman could never be diverted from his moral stance. He is talented at handling the management of the DC office, they said, adding that, as District Commissioner, Habibur Rahman is honest and straightforward. The Founder Director of Lalmonirhat District Museum Ashrafuzzaman Mandol Sabuj said that the District Museum body checked and rechecked the profile of Lalmonirhat DC Habibur Rahman and consulted many local people before reaching the decision to honour the DC as Nitibhuson.

Sec 144 as AL rival groups clash for control of bus terminal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The district administration early yesterday imposed Section 144, prohibiting mass gathering at the central bus terminal in the town following a clash between two groups of the ruling Awami League.

The ban will remain in force for an indefinite period from noon.

Two people were injured as two rival groups of ruling Awami League clashed over control of Satkhira central bus terminal in the district on Monday afternoon.

Locals said, District unit of Shramik League president Saiful Karim and Kulia union parishad chairman Asadul Haque, also a transport union leader, were controlling the terminal for long.

But Satkhira Sadar upazila chairman Md Asaduzzaman, also general secretary of district unit of Jubo League, was recently trying to capture the terminal.

On Sunday afternoon, the two feuding groups, in presence of the local administration officials, sat at the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO)'s office for settling the issue.

On Monday afternoon, two transport workers, Nazmul Hossain and Bappi Rahman, both supporters of Asaduzzaman group, were hacked by the rival group creating a tense situation at the terminal.

On information, police rushed to the spot and fired three blank shots to bring the situation under control.

Inspector Sheikh Nasir Uddin of Satkhira Sadar Police Station said the law enforcers detained four people including Nazrul Silam Sarder, a transport leader from the spot.



PHOTO: STAR

Cracks appear in litchis in different orchards of Ishwardi upazila under Pabna district, causing massive damage to the popular summer fruit mainly due to continuous hot spell this season.

Hot spell takes toll on Ishwardi litchis

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPI, Pabna

Popular summer fruit litchi sees serious production fall this season as continuous hot spell wreaks havoc on the short duration fruit.

The yield has virtually fallen by half in Ishwardi upazila under Pabna district, one of the biggest litchi producing areas of the country, as most of the litchis got damaged in the trees when the fruits grew old enough for sale.

"As usual, I had expected four lakh litchis from 40 trees on my two-bigha orchard this year. But now I can hardly get 1.5 lakh litchis from there as the continuous hot spell this season caused massive damage to the litchis in the trees even before the fruits grew old enough for sale," said Sheikh Mehedi Hassan of Shahpur village in Ishwardi upazila.

This year 2,400 hectares of land in Ishwardi upazila has been brought under litchi cultivation with target to produce 26,500 tonnes of litchi, said sources of Ishwardi upazila agriculture extension

office.

In last year, around 25 thousand tonnes of litchi was produced from 23,000 hectares of land in Ishwardi and farmers earned Tk 350 crore from it, said Md Khurshid Alam, Ishwardi upazila agriculture officer.

The earning could be Tk 400 crore this year but the production has fallen by 50 percent due to the hot spell, he said.

Visiting different litchi orchards and markets in Salimpur, Shahapur, Autapara, Lakhmikhunda, Pakshi and Dashuria unions of Ishwardi upazila, this correspondent saw cracks on most of the fruits.

"There are 65 litchi trees in my orchard and I expected Tk 7 lakh litchi this year. But suddenly the litchis developed cracks," said Md Channu Miah, a litchi grower.

The upazila produces local variety of litchi as well as famous Bombay Litchi.

The short duration popular fruit is in the market but the prices are too high for common people.

A hundred of Bombay Litchi is selling for Tk 350 to 400 and the other varieties for Tk 250 to 350.

Man to die for killing woman after rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A court on Monday sentenced a man to death for killing after violating a young woman in Nagarpur upazila of Tangail district in 2005.

District and Sessions Judge's Court Judge Al-Mahmud Faizul Kabir also fined the convict Tk 20,000.

The convict is Anwar Hossain, 37, who is still at large, is son of Jalal Shikdar of Bekra-Baratia village in the upazila.

The court acquitted two other accused Aynal Mia, and Ruhul Amin of the same village as the charges brought against them could not be proved.

According to the case statement, Anwar, a married man developed an illicit

relation with Aklima Khatun, 20, daughter of Dhalai Mia of Pir-Baratia village.

When Aklima became pregnant and was putting

pressure on Anwar to marry her, the latter killed the girl and dumped her body at a sugarcane field taking her to Khalisa-Dahara village in Daulapur upazila of

Manikganj on September 13 in 2005.

The investigation officer of the case pressed charges against three people on March 5 in 2006.

26 BNP men sent to jail in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A court here on Monday sent 26 BNP men to jail after rejecting their bail prayers. They were held on charges of vandalism, arson and crude bomb explosions.

The accused include acting secretary of Dhunat municipality BNP Mostafizur Rahman Bachchu, Jubo Dal municipality secretary Jahangir Alam Liton, organising secretary SM Halim, upazila JCD president Mohammad Ali, its leader Firoj Ahmed and Sramik Dal leader Ziaur Rahman.

Judicial Magistrate Tofael Ahmed passed the order after the BNP men were produced before the court at noon.

According to the case, the accused carried out vandalism, arson attack and cocktail explosions in Dhunat upazila during the hartal on November 11 last year.

Contacted, BNP Dhunat municipality unit president Alimuddin Harun Mondal termed the case false.

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