

Another variety of zinc-enriched rice released

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new high-yielding rice variety rich with higher zinc content has been officially released to farmers for growing from the next Boro season.

National Seed Board (NSB) in a meeting yesterday released 17 new varieties of rice, including the high-zinc Brri dhan-64, potato and sugarcane, said SM Nazmul, agriculture secretary.

A year after releasing the world's first zinc-enriched rice variety Brri dhan-62, Bangladeshi breeders developed the second one -- Brri dhan-64 -- which contains as high as 25 parts per million (ppm) zinc and is highly productive in Boro season with an average yield potential of 6 to 7.5 metric tonne (MT) per hectare.

Brri dhan-62 contains around 19 to 20 ppm zinc against 14 to 16 ppm in other high-yielding rice varieties. Zinc, iron and vitamin-A are the three most vital micronutrients, deficiency of which hampers children's natural growth and decreases their disease prevention capacity.

"Zinc biofortified rice contributes to the reduction of infant and child mortality associated with diarrhoea and pneumonia," said Khairul Bashar, Bangladesh Country Manager of HarvestPlus, a global

biofortification mission launched in 2004 under the Washington-based global agro-science coordinating body Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) breeders developed the high-zinc rice varieties with support from HarvestPlus, through application of biological fortification (biofortification).

Dr Alamgir Hossain, the main BRRI breeder behind the zinc-enriched rice varieties, told The Daily Star yesterday that 10,000 sachets of seeds of Brri dhan-64 would be distributed among farmers across the country in the coming Boro season.

In yesterday's meeting, the NSB also released three more fine quality high-yielding rice varieties developed by BRRI (Brri dhan-63) and by Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (Bina-14 and Bina-15), said Anwar Faruque, additional secretary of the ministry of agriculture.

Faruque, also the member-secretary of NSB, said three private organizations -- Brac, Petrochem and Bayer -- have also been permitted to introduce three new hybrid rice varieties. Besides, seven potato varieties and three sugarcane varieties were also released yesterday.

"Of these varieties, one particular potato variety has the feature of late blight resistance and one of the three new sugarcane varieties is saline-tolerant," Faruque added.

QUESTION PAPER LEAK Govt mulls stricter punishment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In an attempt to prevent the menace of question paper leak, the government is planning to amend the existing laws to increase punishments for the offence.

Provisions of penalties for spreading rumours of question paper leak will also be incorporated in the amendment.

The decisions were made at an inter-ministerial meeting at the education ministry yesterday.

After the meeting, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said, "We are taking various strict managerial steps to stop question paper leak. The existing law is being amended to include provisions for prison sentence, fines and confiscation of property of offenders."

Under the Public Examinations (Offences) Act-1980 and its amendment in 1992, disclosing, publishing or distributing questions, by any means whatsoever, before any public examination is a punishable offence. And the offenders may face jail terms between three and 10 years, in addition to fines.

The minister said operating mobile courts to hand down instant punishment to the offenders was also being considered.

Besides, 32 sets of questions for public exams will be prepared, instead of four sets as done now, he added.

The meeting stressed the need for building a three-tier security system in the BG press, where the question papers are printed, and increasing intelligence watch on coaching centres before the exams.

The measures will be put in effect from the upcoming Junior Secondary Certificate examinations scheduled for December, said ministry officials.

Minutes after massacre

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and sandals. Broken wooden boards, heaps of rubbish and pieces of burned torn clothes. I could see limbs -- an entire fist with three fingers intact wedged under a wooden chair. Half a leg with tendons and ligaments mangled like some soggy fish lines.

And then the bodies -- dead and alive. By now almost all of them had been rushed along to the hospitals. The last few were being packed inside two white minibuses. Sirens screamed.

I saw the grenades, still intact and lying in the rubble. In their haste, the killers had forgotten to pull off the pins. The bottle-green metal, grooved like Kit-Kat chocolate, gleamed at me.

There was an eerie late afternoon silence in the air. People were standing at a distance without speaking or listening.

Then there was the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Wards 29, 30, 31, 32.

It was a strange scene one wished one had never witnessed. People were lying everywhere. Bleeding and limbless. A terrible thing had happened to them, by some dark magic their skins had vanished. A whitish coat covered their bodies. It was not even pink.

The doctors and the nurses were running around. Every minute was valuable to them and they just worked like some machines. Bandaging, applying medicines, stitching up.

I saw this man sitting silently on a bed, his whole body turned white. He did not cry, he did not scream, he just

looked blankly in front.

I listened to the human voice here. It had a syncopation, a terrible prosody. I could hear approaching death in their high and shrill cries that dipped into deep groans.

On a corridor I saw Awami League's then general secretary Abdul Jalil sitting on the floor. His back to the wall. A deep blank look in his eyes. Terror and tragedy written all over his face. His white punjabi was blood smeared.

Just beside him lay the body of a woman, dead. Her legs were touching Jalil. But he simply was not noticing that. Blankness was all.

More bodies started coming. More cries. More blank looks.

That was what August 21 looked like.

And then one must question what role the BNP-led government had played in this terrible massacre. Two of its top leaders -- Tarique Rahman, son of Khaleda Zia, who was then prime minister, and Lutfozzaman Babar, who was her state minister for home, are implicated. It is now clear how the state machinery, including some officials of the DGI and NSI, were used in this orchestration.

And one must ask about the role that Khaleda herself played. The cruelty with which she showed indifference to this heinous crime is unpardonable.

Remembering that fateful day of 2004, one can also wonder what minds had created this tragedy and whether they repent it.

ACCIDENT IN MALAYSIA

Bodies of 3 Bangladeshis arrive today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The bodies of three Bangladeshi workers, who were killed at a construction site accident in Malaysia on Monday night, will reach Dhaka today.

A flight of Bangladesh Biman carrying the bodies will land at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 6:30am, Musharrat Jebin, second secretary (labour) at Bangladesh high commission in Kuala Lumpur, told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"The victims' employer Malaysian company has borne the cost of sending the bodies. Besides, the company will compensate the victims' families," she said.

Khondaker Showkat Hossain, secretary of expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry, said the bodies would be handed to the families at the airport.

The ministry will give each victim's family Tk 35,000 as burial costs and Tk 3 lakh each as financial assistance, he mentioned.

Inqilab

FROM PAGE 16

general (AIG) of police, filed a case under the Information and Communications Technology Act against four journalists of the daily, including Robi, for running a report on its online version.

The other accused are Inqilab editor and publisher AMM Bahauddin, city editor Sakhawat Hossain Badsha and the reporter concerned.

Although the news headlined "A police official enjoying unchallenged authority using the prime minister's name" was published in the print edition on August 18, the case was filed under sections 57(2) and 66(2) of the ICT act for publishing it in the online edition.

According to the act, if the accused are found guilty, they will have to serve 14 years in jail and face a fine of Tk 1 crore.

Praloy in his case statement termed the report a blatant lie, baseless, defamatory, ill-motivated and tantamount to character assassination.

The report was an attempt to hurt his religious sentiment and break the chain of command in police force as it stated that Praloy was creating divisions among senior police officials, he mentioned.

The report falsely accused him of amassing huge amount of money by exercising illegal power in transfer and recruitment in police and sending police personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, alleged Praloy, an assistant superintendent of police and now posted as AIG (Planning and Research) at the police headquarters.

Praloy had earlier served as the protocol officer of the prime minister.

The case was shown to have been filed with Wari Police Station at 8:30pm on Tuesday.

Interestingly, neither the duty officer of the police station nor the additional deputy commissioner of the DMP's Wari division could confirm the filing of the case till 2:30am yesterday.

Deputy Commissioner (Public Relations) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Md Masudur Rahman said drive is on to arrest the other accused.

Earlier, police produced Rabiullah Robi before the Cyber Crime Tribunal in Dhaka court and sought a 10-day remand for him.

The defence lawyer argued that Robi was not in charge of the daily's online section and so he should be freed on bail.

The court, however, allowed the police to take him on a five-day remand.

In a reaction, acting chief reporter of the Inqilab Rafique Muhammad said the raid on the Inqilab office and Robi's arrest shows the extent of Praloy's influence in the police force and this supports what was stated in the news report.

It was the second raid on the newspaper house since January 16. In the previous raid, the office was sealed off following the publication of a report, for which the daily later apologised to readers.

Meanwhile, the Detective Branch (DB) of police yesterday seized two computers from the Inqilab office.

A team of around 10 detectives went to the office around 7:30pm and seized the computers.

Earlier, the BNP and its ally Jamaat-e-Islami criticised the government over Robi's arrest, saying the government has begun "indiscriminate and heinous" attacks on journalists before the implementation of the National Broadcast Policy.

In a statement yesterday, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the government is repressing journalists as they are revealing various misdeeds and corruption of the government.

Mujibur's driver found in hotel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police found Rezaul Haque, driver of BNP leader Mujibur Rahman, at a hotel in the capital's Gulshan yesterday, nearly 49 hours after he went missing for the second time.

He had been told to go to his ancestral home in Sunamganj soon after abductors freed him and Mujibur in Tongi Monday morning, said Mujibur's brother-in-law Anwar Hossain.

Instead of going there, Rezaul had stayed at a modest hotel for the last two days, a source in Gulshan police said.

Neither police nor the families of Mujibur and his driver could tell why Rezaul had not gone home.

Meanwhile, police took them to Sunamganj yesterday. They will be placed today before a court in Sunamganj to record their statements, said the district superintendent of police, Harun-ur-Rashid.

Mujibur, 56, a former vice-president of the BNP, UK chapter, and now a member of the advisory committee of the party's Sunamganj unit, was kid-

napped along with his driver on May 4 in Sunamganj.

They were held hostage in separate places. Mujibur could see his driver only when they were freed, said Anwar, quoting the BNP leader as saying.

The abductors blindfolded Mujibur and Rezaul and made them wear burqas before dropping them off in Tongi. They had demanded Tk 12 crore ransom from Mujibur and called his son Ripon living in the UK asking for the money, which was never paid. Anwar claimed.

Proficient in both Bangla and English, the kidnappers quizzed Mujibur about BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman and asked him if he had any link with Tarique. They also grilled Mujibur about BNP politics in the UK.

After their release, Mujibur and Rezaul headed towards the former's residence in Gulshan around 10:00am on Monday.

Mujibur was admitted to United Hospital that day with deteriorating health condition.

Truce talks over

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"We are calling on the Palestinian delegation to withdraw immediately from Cairo and not to return," he said in a speech broadcast on Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV channel.

"There will be no return to talks after today and any move in this direction will never achieve any result," he added.

"The enemy lost a golden chance to reach a ceasefire with limited demands, for which it will pay after today."

The bloodshed pushed to 2,047 the number of Gazans killed in six weeks of the most violent confrontation between Israel and Hamas militants since the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising (2000-2005).

Another 67 people have died on the Israeli side.

The UN says around three-quarters of

the victims in Gaza are civilians. Sixty-four of the Israeli dead were soldiers.

Deif heads Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, which vowed to open the "gates of hell" on Israel in retaliation for the killings.

The mourners, firing Kalashnikovs, buried Widad and her son Ali, who died alongside another woman and a teenager when a missile slammed into a six-storey building in Gaza City late on Tuesday. It was the first deadly air strike since August 10.

In Israel, Interior Minister Gideon Saar justified the attack, calling Deif a legitimate target.

"Mohammed Deif deserves to die just like (the late al-Qaeda leader Osama) bin Laden. He is an arch murderer and as long as we have an opportunity we will try to kill him," Saar told army radio.

Verdict any day

FROM PAGE 16

Qaisar, also the alleged local leader of Razakar and Peace Committee, two anti-liberation forces, was arrested in the capital on May 21 last year. He was granted bail in August the same year on health grounds.

Son of Muslim League leader Syed Soeed Uddin Ahmed of Itakhola in Madhabpur of Habiganj, Qaisar was affiliated with Muslim League, BNP and Jatiya Party in his political career. In 1988, he became a state minister of Bangladesh, the birth of which he vehemently opposed in 1971.

According to the prosecution, the accused formed Qaisar Bahini, a local militia force, comprising 400-500 people to assist the Pakistan army and he and his force took part in and abetted commissioning of crimes in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria during the nine-month war.

One of the 16 charges says, Qaisar had "participated in and abetted" an act of genocide in 22 villages under Nasirnagar upazila in Brahmanbaria that left 108 people, mostly Hindus, dead.

While countering defence arguments yesterday, Prosecutor Tureen Afroz said Qaisar Bahini had worked as an auxiliary force of the Pakistan army in 1971 and it had an "operational, administrative, static relationship" with the army.

"Qaisar was the gang leader of the 1971 Qaisar Bahini and as such Syed Mohammad Qaisar must be found guilty of the atrocities committed by him personally as well as by the Qaisar Bahini on which he had the commanding authority," she argued.

Prosecutor Rana Dasgupta said Qaisar had played the "role of a dragon" in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria during the war. On behalf of the inhabitants of the area, the prosecution sought his capital punishment.

The prosecution produced 32 witnesses, mostly freedom fighters and victim family members, and documents to prove the charges.

Qaisar's defence claimed that their client did not form any force named "Qaisar Bahini" and that there was no such force in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria during the war.

Incidents of crimes mentioned in the charges might have been committed but their client was not involved in any war-time crimes, they claimed.

The defence did not produce any witness saying they did not feel the need since the prosecution could not prove any charges, they said.

QAISAR SICK?

Qaisar has been enjoying bail since August last year but the prosecution yesterday raised questions about his sickness. Qaisar usually appears before the court in a wheelchair.

Prosecutor Rana Dasgupta said Qaisar walked into the courtroom

after his arrest last year but he started using wheelchairs after seeking bail. "We saw his hand trembling inside the courtroom, but it all stopped when he came out," Rana said.

After the court proceeding, Rana said they assume that the accused "faked being sick" to avert the capital punishment, as the court usually does not hand down capital punishment to a sick person.

In March, the prosecution had asked for his bail to be cancelled for allegedly threatening a prosecution witness but the tribunal did not cancel the bail.

As per tribunal's order, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University submitted a report on Qaisar's health in April.

The content of the report could not be known.

Qaisar's lawyer SM Shahjahan said they had a medical certificate in support of this illness.

FIVE PENDING

The case against Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami has been waiting for verdict delivery since November last year. As the defence repeatedly failed to show up in court for closing arguments, Tribunal-1 concluded the case proceedings.

The court later allowed the defence to place arguments and the trial finally ended on November 20.

In January this year, chairman of Tribunal-1 Justice ATM Fazle Kabir retired without delivering the judgment. The tribunal was reconstituted on February 23 with Justice M Enayetur Rahim as its chief.

The new chairman decided to hear the closing arguments again. The verdict was kept waiting again on March 24.

Tribunal-1 fixed June 24 to deliver verdict but could not deliver as Nizami suddenly fell sick hours before.

The tribunal has also not delivered the judgements of cases against Faridpur BNP leader Zahid Hossain Khokon and Brahmanbaria Awami League leader Mobarak Hossain. The cases ended on April 17 and on June 2.

Tribunal-2 kept the case against Jamaat leader Mir Quasem Ali waiting for verdict since May 4.

Veteran war crimes researcher Shahriar Kabir told The Daily Star, "The justice-seeking nation and families of the martyrs are frustrated."

"The delay may affect the entire trial proceedings as people will lose interest in testifying," said Shahriar, also the executive president of Ekatturer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, which campaigns for the trials.

"We hope the verdict of the pending cases will be delivered soon," he said, adding that the delay would benefit Jamaat-e-Islami, which has been opposing the trial.