

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 Boro dhan-64, potato and sugarcane, said SM Nazmul, agriculture secretary.

A year after releasing the world's first zinc-enriched rice variety Boro dhan-62, Bangladeshi breeders developed the second one -- Boro 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.

Boro 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 Boro 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 (Boro 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

FROM PAGE 1

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 microbuses. 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 DGFI 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.

Back from death

FROM PAGE 1

Untold sufferings are a daily companion of not only Ruma and Parvin, but also of most of the injured who survived the 2004 attack.

It was 5:22pm that day when Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, the then leader of opposition, finished her speech at an anti-terrorism rally organised by her party on Bangabandhu Avenue. Suddenly, at least 13 grenades were hurled at the crowd, killing 24 leaders and activists and injuring more than 300 others.

Hasina, now prime minister, narrowly escaped death.

Talking to The Daily Star on Tuesday, Ruma, women affairs secretary of ward-69 unit of the AL, and Parvin, women affairs secretary of Dhaka Sweekchhasebok League, recalled the fateful day and the brunt they still bear and will do so for the rest of their lives.

"I would have been saved had I died on August 21. Escaping death that day, I now taste the pain of death each and every moment of my life," said Ruma, who carries nearly 700 splinters in her body.

She exposed herself to a shower of incoming splinters trying to save Ivy Rahman by embracing her.

Ruma was so badly injured that after she was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, doctors had initially declared her dead.

"But later a young woman named China from Mirpur saw my body moving under the shroud and informed [AL leader] Saber Hossain Chowdhury.

"He [Saber] informed the doctors and I was later shifted to Bangladesh Medical College Hospital for treatment," she added.

From there she was shifted to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor), popularly known as Pongu Hospital, and then to a hospital in Kolkata.

But life has never been normal for Ruma again.

"When pain from the splinters intensifies, I go mad and break things. I cannot sleep at night," she said, adding that she had become a

burden for her two daughters, whom she had to marry off at their early ages.

"I could not pay for my daughters' education, as I was crippled by the terrorist attack and I lost my husband [who died of natural causes a few years after the attack]."

Ruma, whose stomach was injured and later underwent surgery several times, cannot digest rice and has to live on bread.

Mahbuba Parvin is the woman whose photo appeared in many newspapers. She was seen lying among the corpses on Bangabandhu Avenue in a blood-stained golden silk sari, a black handbag lying across her chest, her mouth slightly parted and with a blank, lifeless look in her eyes.

She lives with 1,800 splinters in her body and two in her brain, which remains inoperable still today. She had come to the rally from Savar, where she lived.

"People thought I died on the spot. But my body showed signs of life after 72 hours," she told The Daily Star.

"I regained full consciousness after 25 days at a hospital in India," said Parvin, adding, "I survived but I still cannot sleep at night."

Describing how she keeps her family members awake all through the night with her howls of pain, Parvin said, "The 24 people who died in the attack are the lucky ones."

"I would have been the luckiest if my name too appeared on the death list. But I am an ill-fated woman as I survived and am living a cursed life. Those who died in the attack escaped from life-long sufferings."

Thanks to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Ruma and Mahbuba have been able to carry on their medical treatment. But expect for Hasina, no one ever cared to ask after them, they said.

They said party leaders and journalists contacted them a few days before and after August 21 every year.

On the trial of the grisly attack, both the victims demanded exemplary punishment of the perpetrators, saying it would bring some solace for them if they found justice in their lifetime.

It will weaken

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policy in the first week of this month.

"The Editors Council thinks the government wants to control the media through these steps," says the statement issued by the council after a meeting at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday.

Daily Samakal Editor Golam Sarwar, who is the chairman of the council, presided over the meeting.

The broadcast policy conflicts with the Right to Information Act ensuring people's access to information and the constitution that guarantees media freedom and other civil rights, the council said.

It would welcome any initiative by the stakeholders to frame an internationally accepted code of conduct to ensure an environment of responsible journalism and free flow of information, the statement says.

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

The council also condemned the police raid on the Daily Inqilab office and arrest, harassment and attack on media workers in various places of the country on Tuesday.

It expressed deep condolences for the deaths of senior journalist and columnist ABM Musa and former editor and Editors Council member Mahbubul Alam.

Newspaper editors Mahfuz Anam,

Matiur Rahman, Reazuddin Ahmed,

Tasmima Hossain, Matiur Rahman

Chowdhury, Mozammel Hossain,

Shyamal Dutt, Alamgir Mohiuddin,

Khander Muniruzzaman,

Moazzem Hossain, Imdadul Haque

Milon, Naem Nizam, Shahjahan

Sardar, Saiful Alam, Amir Hossain,

M Shamsur Rahman and Dewan

Hanif Mahmud were present at the

meeting.

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