

BT BRINJAL

More farmers to get seedlings in winter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (Bari) plans to widen farming of its first genetically modified (GM) crop -- Bt brinjal -- by distributing its saplings among 100 more growers in the coming winter, said Bari Director General Dr Md Rafiqul Islam Mondal at a press briefing in the city yesterday.

The briefing was arranged mainly to dispel worries, voiced by some green groups, that the GM crop may not be environment friendly. Quite the contrary, the crop has been introduced to fight fruit and shoot borer (FSB), the deadliest pest for brinjal, thanks to insertion of a bacterial gene into the plant, explained Dr Mondal at the briefing at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (Barc).

Bt Brinjal was first introduced to a select group of 20 farmers in January for the first time in Bangladesh as a remedy to FSB attacks that can damage the crop by up to 70 percent.

The Bari press briefing came a week after Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) had demanded a stop to farming and marketing of the GM crop at another briefing at Dhaka Reporters' Unity on August 31.

Bela activists had stated that enough research has not been done to assess the impact of the crop on the environment and human health. They had also claimed that most farmers who had cultivated the crop did not get high yield as promised by the agriculture ministry and Bari.

Allaying their fears, the Bari DG at yesterday's briefing said the existing farming practice is rather more environment unfriendly.

"To save brinjal crop from FSB, farmers tend to spray an overdose (up to 160 times a season) of chemical pesticides, exposing thereby the producers and consumers to health risks," said Dr Mondal.

Interestingly, like Bela, Bari also invited the first batch of Bt brinjal farmers to its briefing. While seven of them turned up at Bela's, some 16 showed up at Bari's.

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The makeshift rack contains parts of sets of bloodstained dresses submitted to the police as evidence of torture. Police allegedly destroyed them. Rashed, 11, top right, shows scars from the torture. Yasin, top bottom, who came to light up his mother's world briefly. His mother was assaulted when she was eight months' pregnant. Yasin was born a month later, only to live for four months.



PHOTO: STAR

Cops walk the criminals' way

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hours since morning till about 11:00pm. Two other male members of the family were beaten up outside the room.

It all happened for six tolas of gold that was alleged to have been stolen by a member of the family.

In the assault, the gang used sticks, cricket stumps and metal strings.

The culprits even took photos and videos of the victims and threatened to circulate those if the gold ornaments were not given to them, despite their insistence that they did not know anything about the gold.

One of the victims was an expecting mother and another a teenage girl.

But shockingly, the only bits of evidence mentioned in the charge sheet by the police are a piece of rope and four pieces of bloodstained clothes of one victim.

"Evidence was aplenty as we saved every piece of them," said a victim. "All

of us bled after the torture. They hit me in the head with a machete."

The machete she was hit with and the scarf she used to wrap around her head to stop bleeding are "missing".

Each of the victims' dress was stained with blood. But neither those nor the ropes used to tie their hands and legs are mentioned on the evidence list.

The charge sheet also does not mention the sticks, the metal strings and the cricket stumps used in the torture.

"A few days after the incident, I carried to the police station a sack full of evidence [mostly bloodstained clothes]," said Rashed, 11, himself a victim.

He also cited television reports showing multiple pieces of bloodstained evidence.

It was Rashed who snatched the machete from Mamun by biting his hand and ran away. He wrapped it in a

piece of paper and hid it somewhere in Dewanpara and later gave it to the police.

His aunt, who was hit in the head with a machete, said she gave to the police six sets of bloodstained dresses of her daughter alone. The girl bled for three days after being sexually abused with cricket stumps.

Investigating officer Golam Nabi Sheikh admitted to The Daily Star that he failed to recover the photographs and the videos of the stripped men and women taken by the attackers on their cell phones.

Asked why did not produce all the evidence before the court, he said, "It's foolish to keep piles of evidence for proving the same crime."

But most shocking of all is perhaps the fact that the charge sheet does not specify the number of victims.

Talking to this newspaper last month, Nabi, who submitted the charge sheet, said there were only two victims -- S and S (their full names withheld).

But the victims' statements and news reports following the brutal incident make it clear that at least 11 people were assaulted that day.

They include Subel, a relative of the victims and, ironically, also a member of the same gang.

The 18-year-old has long been an accomplice of the perpetrators, who trained him up to be a robber since his childhood, ignoring pleas from the family.

The attack came after Subel allegedly stole some gold ornaments but did not share those with the gang. He denied stealing any ornaments, but upon torture by the gang for two hours that morning he said he kept those in one of his relatives' house, just to save himself from further torture. It was then that the gang began torturing his family members.

Asked why he dropped the name of

the complainant of the case, J (full name withheld), herself a victim, Nabi said, "J and S are not two different persons, rather two names of the same woman."

But they are two different girls, cousins, in fact. And while J is married, S is single and lives with her parents. J's husband was also beaten up.

Pressed, Nabi, also officer-in-charge of Bhashantek Police Station, eventually raised the number of victims to three, rejecting right away that there were 11 victims, as found in an investigation by this paper.

The Daily Star is withholding the identities of the women given the social stigma associated with it. But among them are a middle aged couple, their daughter, sisters and in-laws, two nieces and a nephew.

When seven victims' names backed by evidence were shared with Nabi, he said, "Still, you cannot give more than seven names, can you?"

Most MDGs on track

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goals, says a government report.

The country will lag behind in some key areas such as providing jobs to working age population, raising the proportion of pupils completing grade-5 and adult literacy rate to 100 percent, increasing women's participation in non-agriculture sector by 50 percent and expanding country's forest coverage to 20 percent.

These findings came up in the Millennium Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report published by the Planning Commission yesterday.

The report called for attention from the government and development partners to help the country achieve these goals.

Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal unveiled the report at the auditorium of the National Economic Council in the capital.

State Minister for Planning and Finance MA Mannan, Prime Minister's Economic Adviser Mashur Rahman and Country Director of the United Nations Development Programme Pauline Temesier were also present.

Though the report says Bangladesh is on track in reaching the first five MDGs, some indicators in the goals show that the country still lags behind, and it may fail to achieve them by next year.

For example, the country has already achieved its targets on cutting the number of poor and poverty gap ratio, and reducing under-five mortality rate under Goal-1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger.

But under the goal, employment to population ratio stands at 60 percent though the target is 100 percent by 2015.

"It is a big gap. This target may not be achieved," said General Economics Division Member Prof Shamsul Alam while presenting the report.

Disappointingly, the report doesn't contain any progress data on people living below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption.

Under Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education, the country is set to accomplish 100 percent net enrolment ratio in primary education.

But it may not be possible to increase the proportion of pupils completing grade-5 and adult literacy rate to 100 percent by the deadline, said Alam.

Under Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education has already been achieved.

In the same category, the ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education, share of women in wage employment and proportion of seats held by women in parliament may not be achieved by next year.

The country performed superbly in reaching Goal 4: Reduce Child

Mortality, where it has either achieved targets in all indicators or is on track to reach them.

The country is likely to reach targets on bringing down maternal mortality ratio, and raising contraceptive prevalence and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel.

But it might miss the targets on antenatal care coverage and family planning.

Five targets have been met while two are to be achieved under Goal-6: Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases.

But the country is far away from reaching its targets on increasing the rate of condom use among high-risk groups, raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and reducing the number of deaths from tuberculosis.

Bangladesh also lags far behind in Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability. In terms of forest coverage, the country now has less than 13 percent forest areas.

The proportion of people using improved sanitation facility stood at 55.9 percent in 2013. The target to reach 100 percent may not be attained by 2015, said Prof Alam.

The report says the country needs to develop a more open, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory trading and financial system to achieve Goal 8: Developing a Global Partnership for Development.

Under the goal, Bangladesh didn't get enough official development assistance as promised by global development partners.

Terming the report a comprehensive publication, Pauline Temesier said it clearly highlights the areas and sectors where more attention is needed to accelerate progress.

She said Bangladesh, which has been a role model in MDG achievement globally, has laudable achievements in primary education, and reducing poverty and child and maternal mortality.

"Even with the success rates, Bangladesh has struggled in the areas of environment sustainability, nutrition and in certain aspects of gender equity and hunger," said Temesier.


Finance Minister AMA Muhiith said the next goals in post-2015 should be in tune with the success of the country.

"Besides, it should be something ambitious which we can achieve by a deadline."

MA Mannan said the government is committed to achieving the MDGs which are at the heart of the government policy.

Mashur Rahman said the MDGs seem to be a wishful plan of the developed economies. They wished to help the developing countries achieve the targets but didn't live up to the expectation.

MDGs: BANGLADESH PROGRESS AT A GLANCE




ON TRACK

MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Halve by 2015 the proportion of people living below poverty line

Bangladesh showing an impressive poverty reduction from 56.7% in 1991-92 to 31.5% in 2010.




ON TRACK

MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

Significant progress is made in increasing equitable access in education where Net Enrolment Rate in primary education is currently 97.3%. Bangladesh already achieved gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment.




ON TRACK

MDG 3: Promoting Gender Equity and Empowering Women

Eliminate gender disparity in primary & secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

Bangladesh has already achieved the targets of gender parity in primary and secondary education at the national level.




ON TRACK

MDG 4: Reduce Child Mortality

Reduce by two thirds by 2015, the under-five mortality rate

Bangladesh is on track in meeting the target of this goal measured in three different indicators like under-five mortality rate, infant mortality rate and immunisation against measles.

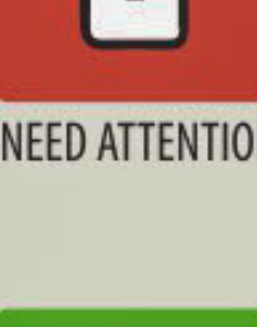


ON TRACK

MDG 5: Improve Maternal Health

Reduce by the three quarters, by 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

In Bangladesh, maternal mortality rate declined from 322 in 2001 to 194 in 2010, a 40% decline in nine years.

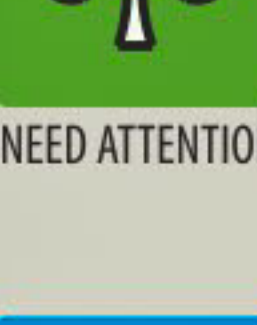


NEED ATTENTION

MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases

Have halted by 2015 & begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

Bangladesh's performance in halting communicable diseases is satisfactory. Available data show that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is still below an epidemic level.




NEED ATTENTION

MDG 7: Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies/programmes & reverse the loss of environmental resources

At present, there is only 13.20% of land in Bangladesh having tree density of 30% and above and the area having the tree density is much lower than the target set for 2015.



NEED ATTENTION

MDG 8: Developing a Global Partnership for Development

Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading & financial system

On an average, Bangladesh receives \$1,672 million ODA per year. The disbursed ODA as a proportion of Bangladesh's GDP has declined from 5.59% in FY 90-91 to 1.87% in FY 12-13, implying yearly average of 2.62%.

SOURCE: BANGLADESH PLANNING MINISTRY

ILLEGAL TRIP TO MALAYSIA

26 people detained

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

In separate incidents, 26 people and an alleged human trafficker were detained in Teknaf and Cox's Bazar sadar upazilas in the district yesterday as they were going to Malaysia illegally.

Members of the Bangladesh Coast Guard detained 22 people from the Bay of Bengal near the Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

Among the detainees, 11 are from Narsingdi, eight are from Sylhet, and the rest are from Maheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar.

Shahidul Islam, petty officer at the coastguard station in Cox's Bazar, said one of their patrol teams had intercepted a small boat carrying the 22 passengers near the confluence of Banshkhal river and the Bay in Nazirar Tek area around 3:15am Sunday.

They were going to Malaysia without any valid documents, the officers said.

The detainees were handed over to Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station and a case was filed in this regard, he added.

Distorted facts

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Supreme Judicial Council instead of Parliament substituting Article 96 of the Constitution enacted in 1972, by the military ruler through the unconstitutional means of martial law proclamation" order in 1978, reads the preamble.

The bill sought to restore parliament's power to impeach judges.

Law Minister Anisul Huq, who placed it in the House, in his scripted statement attached to the copies of the bill, also engaged in the same blame regarding introducing the SJC by changing parliament's power to impeach an SC judge.

In so doing, the Awami League-led government avoided mentioning a crucial fact in the bill about abolishing parliament's power which it had in the original constitution of 1972.

The fact is that it was none other than the AL government led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which curtailed parliament's power through the controversial fourth amendment to the constitution in January 1975.

Instead of parliament, the president alone was empowered with sweeping authority to impeach an SC judge on grounds of misbehavior or incapacity through the fourth amendment in early 1975. The amendment also introduced a presidential form of government and one-party BAKSAL rule.

The fourth amendment gave the president almost absolute authority to impeach a judge at his will as there was no provision for carrying out investigations into the alleged misconduct or incapacity of a judge.

There was only a provision that a judge would be given reasonable opportunity of showing cause against the action proposed to be taken against him for his removal.

But when parliament retained the authority until the fourth amendment, there was a specific constitutional provision of enacting a law for regulating the impeachment procedure and for investigation and proof of the misbehaviour or

incapacity of a judge.

After seizing power, Gen Zia abolished the president's authority to impeach SC judges and introduced the chief justice-led Supreme Judicial Council by amending the constitution through a martial law order in 1978.

When his attention was drawn to it, Law Minister Anisul Huq said he had meant that the SJC was introduced by a martial law order.

"I am not saying that the Supreme Judicial Council was introduced by taking away parliament's powers," the law minister told The Daily Star yesterday over telephone.

He said the constitution of 1972 had empowered parliament with the authority to impeach judges. But the fourth amendment to the constitution had empowered the president with the authority, he said.

His statement attached to the copies of the bill, however, said something different.

In the statement, he said there were provisions in the constitution of 1972 in relation to the impeachment of the president, resignation of the prime minister upon his/her ceasing to retain the support of a majority of members of parliament, removal of the speaker and SC judges.

The law minister said though the provisions relating to impeachment, resignation or removal, respectively, of the President, the Prime Minister or the Speaker still remains unchanged, the military ruler by unconstitutional means of martial law proclamation (fifteenth amendment) order changed parliament's power and conferred it on the SJC.

Asked, jurist Shahdeen Malik yesterday said everybody knew that the constitution's fourth amendment had curtailed parliament's power to impeach Supreme Court judges. "This [distortion of facts] is a fraud on the nation," he commented on the situation.