

DROUGHT-LIKE SITUATION

Mango growers fear loss of production

RABIUL HASAN, Chapainawabganj

Mangoes have been falling off trees due to a prolonged drought-like situation in Chapainawabganj, the highest producer of the much-loved summer fruit in the country.

March-April is the peak time when the fruits grow out from buds to a sizeable shape before ripening but at the time of this year the country witnessed very low rainfall everywhere, including the district known as "mango capital" for producing as many as 350 high quality varieties.

Mango growers in Chapainawabganj fear that they will not meet the production target of 2.5 lakh tonnes this time due to lack of rainfall.

However, rain at the beginning of this month brought some relief to growers and owners of mango orchards, who projected the loss to be

somewhat less than what was feared before the rain.

There are over 19 lakh mango trees on 24,470 hectares of land in Chapainawabganj, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Chapainawabganj DAE records show only 18 mm rainfall in the district in the last two months.

Hamim Reza, chief scientific officer of Regional Horticulture Research Centre, Chapainawabganj, linked mangoes' dropping-off phenomenon with the scanty rainfall. Immature fruits are not getting enough water as trees are consuming most of it, he explained.

Reza advised growers to sprinkle mangoes with water to help them grow.

DAE Deputy Director in Chapainawabganj Sazzadar Rahman

said extreme dry weather condition and lack of moisture in soil were leading to a fall in the production in this session.

The production target might not be achieved, he said, adding that less rainfall also hampered natural growth of the fruits.

Growers and traders predicted that any major slump in the output would make mangoes pricey this year.

Shamim Ali, a mango grower of Gorokhkhonathpur in sadar upazila, said he was fearing 20 percent fall in the production than that of last year.

Abul Kashem, of Nayalavanga village in Shibganj upazila, took lease of a mango orchard in the village.

He earned over Tk 1.5 lakh last year selling mangoes of 120 trees of the orchard but he is not so hopeful about this year's production.

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A trader with mangoes at a market in Chapainawabganj. A huge number of mangoes, which are falling off trees amid the hot weather in the district, are making their way to such markets. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

Rahman saved canola farmers in Canada

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finally succeeded in developing the first hybrid canola cultivar, which is twice more resistant to clubroot.

The new hybrid cultivar has been approved and registered by Crop Production Services (CPS), a unit of global agricultural products, services, and solution company Agrium Inc, with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and is now available to the growers this season (May-July).

The cultivar is developed in partnership with CPS and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC).

In an exclusive interview through email, Prof Rahman told The Daily Star, "This specific cultivar carries two resistance genes; the main objective is to increase the durability of resistance against this disease."

It carries a resistance gene from Mendel, a European winter canola cultivar, and a second gene from an exotic germplasm. More than 250 sources of resistance were studied before the best two were picked, he pointed out.

The new canola hybrid cultivar offers double resistance, as opposed to all previous clubroot-resistant cultivars which only offer single resistance.

"It's common for single gene resistance to break down in time and to

become susceptible," explained Rahman. "But here, with this new cultivar, if one gene breaks down, the other one still remains there."

Asked whether his invention would have any impact on Bangladesh's edible oil market, Prof Rahman said, "The knowledge I have in the fields other than of clubroot disease resistance, such as genetic diversity and high seed yield in hybrid cultivars, earliness of flowering and maturity, can also be applied by Bangladeshi researchers for the development of improved canola cultivars."

A few months back, a researcher from Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (Bari) informed him about the occurrence of clubroot in Bangladesh. "I provided him with some information from my research."

Prof Rahman, who often travels to China (where canola is a big crop) to deliver lectures on canola genetics and molecular breeding and advise the Chinese canola researchers, said he was planning to visit Bangladesh in July.

During his visit, he is likely to deliver a similar talk at Dhaka University and at Bari in Joydebpur.

Talking to The Daily Star over phone, BARI Director General Rafiqul Islam Mondal lauded Prof Rahman's success in canola breeding. "Clubroot is not a significant disease threat in Bangladesh yet."

Currently, Bangladesh produces one fourth of the domestic requirements of mustard oil (derived from rapeseed) while depends on canola imports for the rest.

Canola is one of two cultivars of rapeseed and the word "canola" was derived from "Canadian oil, low acid". While homegrown mustard oil is rich in erucic acid that causes the pungency, imported canola has a low amount of it.

Prof Rahman is now also in an advanced stage of developing early maturing variety of canola. It is aimed at harvesting canola before the July heat strikes and causes any damage.

"Recently, I have mapped a few genes [of chromosomes] involved in the control of earliness of flowering under long-day conditions [e.g. Canada]," he said.

"I also mapped a photosensitive gene; this knowledge can be applied by the Bangladeshi researchers for the development of early flowering/maturing canola cultivars."

Prof Rahman has now two research associates (PhD), one postdoctoral fellow (PhD), four research assistants/technicians (BSc/MSc), seven graduate students (PhD or MSc level), and three casual workers under his tutelage. One of the PhD students is Bangladeshi.

Prof Rahman, who had his BSc Ag

(Hons), and MSc Ag in Genetics and Plant Breeding from Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, earned his PhD from Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark.

He worked at Danisco in Denmark for 14 years as a researcher/breeder in the discipline of canola genetics and breeding. Later, he led the company's European programme.

Danisco is a Danish company with activities in food production, enzymes and other bioproducts as well as a wide variety of pharmaceutical grade excipients.

"In Denmark, I developed over 40 canola cultivars, received a patent, and conducted cutting-edge research, and this moved me from Europe to Canada."

Prof Rahman joined the University of Alberta in 2003 and since then, he has been leading the Canola Genetics and Molecular Breeding research programme at the university.

Speaking about his dream, he said he would like to establish an educational institute in Karinganj, his birthplace, after his parents' name to provide the locals with a high-standard of education. "I also like to teach short courses at the universities in Bangladesh, and provide advice to the Bangladeshi researchers working in the discipline of canola genetics and molecular breeding."

ENGR MOSHARRAF

SC clears way to resume graft probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday cleared the way for the Anti-Corruption Commission to resume the investigation into a corruption case against Housing and Public Works Minister Engineer Mosharraf Hossain.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha passed the order after hearing a leave-to-appeal petition filed by the ACC against a High Court verdict.

The HC in November 2012 scrapped the case proceedings in response to a writ petition.

The ACC in November 2007 filed the case with Double Mooring Police Station in Chittagong against Mosharraf and two others.

According to the case statement, Mosharraf sold 1.44 bighas of government land in Chittagong city's Agrabad commercial area at a

nominal price of Tk 1.69 crore in July 2000 to the owners of Hotel Golden Inn -- Rafiqul Anwar alias Sonar Rafiq, former AL lawmaker, and his brother M Fakhru Anwar. Mosharraf was holding the same position at the time.

Violating the tender conditions, the hotel owners resold the piece of land to the owner of Hotel Salmer for Tk 4.61 crore, causing Tk 2.92 crore loss to the government exchequer, the anti-graft body said in the statement.

The HC quashed the proceedings against Mosharraf, saying the charges against him were not made specific in the case.

The ACC later filed the leave-to-appeal petition with the SC, challenging the HC verdict.

Following yesterday's SC order, the ACC can now resume the investigation into the case, ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina being presented a portrait of her made by an artist from the CHT region at a function on Bailey Road in the capital yesterday. The programme was organised marking the foundation laying ceremony of Chittagong Hill Tracts Complex. PHOTO: BSS

PM wants end to CHT land dispute

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Only four brigades would be there in the CHT, Hasina said, adding "most of the army camps in the CHT have already been closed and rest of the camps would be withdrawn."

Referring to the demand for amending some sections of the CHT act, the PM said dialogues had already been launched on this issue.

The government was ready to do everything what was possible under the constitutional framework after upholding country's independence and sovereignty.

The PM said the CHT people were citizens of Bangladesh and that was why the government took massive programmes for the benefit of the area, including developing local road communications, power supply and telecommunications.

She said CHT Development Board Act 2014 had been enacted to expedite the pace of development in the

Chittagong hill tracts. Changes were brought in the administrative system and most of the tasks were transferred under the authority of deputy commissioners.

Hasina expressed her pleasure for having laid the foundation of the CHT complex on the International Mother's Day and 155th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore yesterday.

She said the complex would bring enormous opportunities and benefits for the people of the CHT.

The PM also thanked Santu Larma for having trust in her and alleged that every political party, except the BNP, had joined hand with the peace process.

The BNP even enforced hartal on the days of the signing of the peace accord and surrendering of arms by rebels, she said.

Hasina termed the peace agreement a unique one as it was signed

without the mediation of any foreign country or third party.

She said apart from setting up bridges, pole and culverts, around 1,359 kilometers of roads were constructed in the CHT regions. Due to inaccessibility of grid line, the government took steps to ensure solar panels for the homes in the area, she added.

Deputy Leader of Parliament and Convener of CHT Peace Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Minister for Housing and Public Works Engineer Mosharraf Hossain, Chairman of CHT Regional Council Joytirindra Bodhi Priya Larma (Santu Larma), Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on CHT Affairs RAM Abaidul Muktedir Chowdhury attended the function as special guests.

Republican

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The race is still "wide open for a qualified conservative candidate," the group of activists said.

"We will not vote for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton; but we will vote."

Trump, however, said he expected even some Democratic voters to throw their support behind him to win the general election.

"I'm going to go out and I'm going to get millions of people from the Democrats," Trump said.

"I'm going to get Bernie (Sanders) people to vote, because they like me on trade," he added, referring to the Democratic candidate in an uphill fight against Hillary Clinton to clinch the party's nomination.

As the race getting to the last phase, the New York billionaire on Saturday once again resurfaced former president Bill Clinton's marital infidelities, a preview of how the billionaire businessman is likely to respond to general-election attacks from Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton and her allies about his treatment of women.

"She's married to a man who was the worst abuser of women in the history of politics," Trump said of Clinton as he addressed supporters at the Spokane Convention Center just days after becoming the presumptive Republican nominee.

Trump appeared to be responding to news that Priorities USA, the lead super PAC backing Clinton, has already reserved \$91 million in television advertising that will start next month. Much of the negative advertising against Trump is expected to focus on belittling statements he's made about women in the past.

But Trump declared Saturday, "Two can play that game."

"Hillary was an enabler and she treated these women horribly. Just remember this," he said. "And some of these women were destroyed, not by him, but by the way that Hillary Clinton treated them after everything went down," he said.

At a later rally, in Lynden, not far from the Canadian border, Trump repeated the former president's denial of a relationship with a White House intern that would later lead to his impeachment. "Do you remember the famous, 'I did not have sex with that woman?'" Trump asked. "And then a couple of months later, 'I'm guilty.' And she's taking negative ads on me!"

Panama Papers database goes public today

CNN ONLINE

From today, people everywhere will be able to see for themselves which politicians, celebrities and business executives allegedly kept secret shell companies that were exposed in the Panama Papers.

A Google-like searchable database is expected to go live at 2:00pm ET, detailing ties between 368,000 people and 300,000 offshore entities.

It's being released by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

"You'll see companies and their official owners. This is information that's never been available," said Marina Walker Guevara, ICIJ's deputy director. "We think that information about who owns the company should be public and transparent."

Don't meddle

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being tried for their crimes against humanity are Bangladeshi citizens but Pakistan is "sad" for them.

"We are disappointed with Pakistan's reaction."

The foreign ministry of Pakistan in the statement expressed "deep concern and anguish" over the Bangladesh Supreme Court's dismissal of the review petition of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Nizami.

Even though the foreign ministry was yet to call the Pakistani envoy in Dhaka, but a diplomatic source said he might be summoned today for lodging a formal protest.

Shahriar also asked Pakistan to stop misleading people with reference to the Pakistan, India, Bangladesh Agreement of April 9, 1974, in which the countries agreed not to proceed with the trial of 195 prisoners of war repatriated to Pakistan.

The agreement never implied that the masterminds and perpetrators of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity would continue to enjoy impunity and eschew the course of justice, he added.

The state minister said the people who committed crimes against humanity are working on behalf of Pakistan. "From

ICIJ said the search tool will let you type in a name of a person or company, then see how it's connected to other people and companies.

The search tool combines documents from a 2013 ICIJ investigation into the use of offshore accounts by U.K. residents with the much larger Panama Papers investigation.

The Panama Papers, published in April by journalists in 76 countries, relied on documents hacked and stolen from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca.

The firm has said it had done nothing wrong and in some cases denied that individuals named in the Panama Papers were even clients.

Rigoberto Carvajal, ICIJ's data analyst, built a version of this tool for internal use by journalists back in September.

that position, Pakistan is saddened for them [war criminals]."

He said, "I consider this a dangerous issue as these war criminals are trying to assure their future generation with the notion that Pakistan as a state will stay beside them."

ASK worried

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following discussions with all stakeholders.

On May 4, Information Minister Hasnul Haq Inu told parliament that the government would set up a "media monitoring centre" to keep an eye on news items published in different media.

But he did not clarify how and when it will be formed or how it will operate.

ASK, on several occasions, had called for taking effective steps to protect an environment where different media can work freely. The demands have not been implemented yet, according to the press release.

"On the other hand, laws and policies one after another involving the media and the announcement of keeping an eye [on the media] through a monitoring cell justify our apprehension."