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FUNGAL 'BLAST' ATTACK IN WHEAT

Loss Tk 1,800cr a year, at least

REAZ AHMAD

The first ever attack of wheat blast in Bangladesh cost the country a financial loss of at least Tk 1,800 crore in terms of lost yield this year.

Caused by a fungus -- Magnaporthe oryzae -- wheat blast is one of the most fearsome and intractable wheat diseases in recent decades, according to the International Maize and Wheat Research Center (CIMMYT).

Hitherto mostly confined within the continent of South America, the disease's attack in Bangladeshi wheat fields this season is the first case of wheat blast in Asia. The blast directly strikes the ears of wheat and can shrivel and deform the grain in less than a week from first symptoms, leaving farmers no time to act.

The blast affected 1,08,715 hectares of wheat fields in the districts of Jessore, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Jhenidah, Magura, Barisal and Bhola, causing up to 40 percent of crop damage.

Following the maiden blast attack in the wheat fields of mostly southwestern districts in February-March, the government formed a national committee in late March to map out a future course of action to stop recurrence of the deadly disease.

The country's preeminent plant pathologist Prof Dr M Bahadur Meah heads the committee that has representatives from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), research institutions concerned, scientists, academics and experts.

At the most conservative estimate, said Dr Bahadur Meah, "We were expecting a minimum yield of 2,17,430 tonnes of wheat from the affected areas. Our estimate now shows that up to 40 percent yield worth Tk 1,826 crore is lost to the blast."

To assess the severity of the wheat blast and the extent of loss incurred, he along with some other experts has visited as many as 39 fields in eight districts in recent weeks.

Prof Bahadur, who teaches plant pathology at Bangladesh Agricultural University, SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



The file photo taken in 2009, inset, shows the dark polluted water of the Karnapara canal in Savar with a small amount of industrial garbage dumped on its banks. Now things have become worse. More garbage is dumped there, one bank has been occupied by structures and someone has built a house in the middle of the canal. PHOTO: FILE/ANISUR RAHMAN

NEWS ANALYSIS

VIOLENCE IN UP POLLS

EC passes the buck on society

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission has passed the buck to the society by making a ridiculous claim that "social instability is one of the major causes" for the widespread violence in the just concluded union parishad polls.

However, until making the claim on Saturday, its stance was different. It had been using canned words after each of the previous five phases of the polls. It kept claiming that the elections were free, fair and peaceful with the exception

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

MORSHED KHAN, HIS WIFE, SON

HC orders freezing of Hong Kong accounts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the authorities concerned to freeze the bank accounts of BNP leader and former foreign minister M Morshed Khan, his wife Nasrin Khan and son Faisal Morshed Khan with Standard Chartered Bank in Hong Kong.

The court also asked Morshed, Nasrin and Faisal to refrain from transferring 16 million Hong Kong dollars from the bank till further orders.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur

Rahim and Justice Amir Hossain came up with the order following a revision petition filed by the Anti Corruption Commission challenging two lower court orders in this regard.

ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that the authorities concerned of Standard Chartered Bank of Hong Kong will freeze the bank accounts of Morshed, Nasrin and Faisal in line with Bangladesh HC order.

There are uncut agreements with Hong-Kong and 131 other countries and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Afghan MP killed in explosion

7 more killed in Taliban shooting in court

BBC ONLINE

An Afghan lawmaker and at least three other people have been killed in a bomb explosion in the capital, Kabul.

MP Sher Wali Wardak was injured in the blast outside his house and died on the way to hospital, officials said.

No group has so far admitted carrying out the attack.

Separately, at least seven people were killed and more than 20 injured when Taliban gunmen -- reportedly in police uniform -- stormed a court in Puli Alam, capital of Logar province.

The militant group said the attack was in response to the government's execution of six Taliban prisoners last month.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has pledged a tougher response to the Taliban after an attack in Kabul in April left 64 people dead.

Peace efforts stalled this year after the Taliban refused to participate in new talks with the Afghan government until foreign forces had left the country.

The militants have been waging an insurgency

UK boys earn more than girls: study



AFP, London

British girls receive on average 12 percent less pocket money than boys -- a tenfold jump in the pay gap since last year, according to a study by the Halifax bank published Friday.

On average, boys aged between 8 and 15 years receive 6.93 pounds (\$10, 8.95 euros) per week compared to 6.16 pounds for girls of a similar age, but are more likely (44 percent) than girls (39 percent) to think they should receive more.

The gender gap has soared from 1.2 percent last year, according to the survey of 1,202 children and 575 parents.

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Teen boy killed in polls violence

Total polls death toll now 127

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A teenage boy was killed and at least 25 others were injured during a post-polls clash between the supporters of Awami League and BNP in Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj last night.

The dead is Monir Hossain, 15, son of Arju Mia of Norpati village. He was a student of class-VIII of a local high school.

With this, at least 127 people lost their lives in polls violence after the union parishad election schedule was announced in February. Of them, 40 were killed on the six voting days of the six phases of the election and the rest in pre-and post-polls violence.

Locals said around 5:30pm, the clash erupted in Ramushree village when the supporters of defeated AL

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Elderly woman murdered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified criminals killed an old woman at her Uttara house and looted gold ornaments and cash on Saturday night.

Uttara Pashchim police sent the slit body of the victim to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The victim, Monwara Sultana, 65, wife of late Dr

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



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PRAYER TIMING JUNE 6

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4-05	12-45	5-00	6-45	8-15
JAMAAT 4-40	1-15	5-15	6-50	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION