

# Wheat can flourish in coastal belt

BINA scientists release new, hardy variety

MD AMINUL ISLAM with ANDREW EAGLE

After six years of research, Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) scientists in Mymensingh released on October 9 2016 their first-ever wheat variety suitable for both saline and non-saline conditions. The high-yielding Binagom-1 variety promises to bring new success in wheat cultivation to the saline areas of the country's south.

According to AA Hasan, former director general at the BINA, seeds were first obtained from the Nuclear Institute for Agriculture and Biology in Pakistan and planted in both saline and non-saline conditions, including on around 25 trial plots in different districts of the south. The best panicles

Scientists hope that thousands of farmers in the coastal districts of Barisal and Khulna will benefit from the new strain.

According to BINA scientists, some 10 lakh hectares in southern districts remain fallow due to salinity and lack of rain in the winter season. The production of the new wheat variety has the potential to close the gap between current national wheat production level of 13 lakh tonnes and the country's annual demand of 40 lakh tonnes. As such it will reduce the need for imports.

"If 50 percent of that fallow land can be used in wheat cultivation, some 15 – 20 lakh tonnes of wheat will be added to the present production," one of the scientists explained.



A demonstration plot of the wheat in Satkhira.

were collected from the test crops in order to further refine the variety, with three progenies selected for their higher yields.

The salt-tolerant variety matures in 105 to 110 days, with medium amber-coloured grains, and can produce up to 3.5 tonnes per hectare with an average production of 2.9 tonnes in saline areas. In non-saline soils production can reach 4.2 tonnes per hectare with an average of 3.8 tonnes.

The variety is also resistant to diseases like black point and leaf blotch, which together with its tolerance to differing soils is a win for farmers.

At present another variety, BARI Gom-25 is cultivated in the southern region on a small scale, but the new variety promises up to 15 percent higher yields. The BINA has a target to produce one tonne of breeder's seeds and one tonne of Truthfully Labelled Seeds to hand over to the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation and the agriculture extension department, ready to reach farmers in time for the 2017 season.

The research team was led by chief scientific officer Md Abul Kalam Azad, assisted by BINA scientists Md Kamruzzaman and Sahmina Yasmin, among others.

## All 92 onboard killed

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television that Russia will observe a national day of mourning today.

The plane had been on a routine flight to Russia's Hmeimim air base in western Syria, which has been used to launch air strikes in Moscow's military campaign supporting its ally President Bashar al-Assad in the country's devastating civil war.

Among the plane's 84 passengers were Russian servicemen as well as 64 members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, the army's official musical group also known as the Red Army Choir, and its conductor Valery Khalilov. They were headed to Syria to participate in New Year celebrations at the air base.

The passengers also included nine journalists, with state-run channels Pervy Kanal, NTV and Zvezda saying they each had three staff onboard the flight.

There were also eight crew members, the ministry said.

A list of passengers published by the defence ministry also included Elizaveta Glinka, a doctor and charity worker who serves on the Kremlin human rights council.

Mikhail Fedotov, who heads the council, said Glinka was travelling to Syria to bring medication to a university hospital in the coastal city of Latakia near the air base, agencies reported.

Assad, as well as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim and the US Embassy in Moscow, expressed condolences over the crash.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Putin was being kept updated on the search operation and was in constant contact with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Konashenkov said that deputy defence minister Pavel Popov had flown to Adler along with a team tasked with clarifying the circumstances surrounding the crash.

Transportation Minister Maxim Sokolov, who is heading a state commission probing the crash, is also on his way to the region, the government said in a statement.

The ministry has not put forward any possible causes of the crash.

Konashenkov said that the aircraft had been in service since 1983 and had flown some 7,000 hours since. The plane last underwent repairs in December 2014 and was serviced in September, he said.

Russia's Investigative Committee said a criminal probe had been launched to determine whether violations of air transportation safety had

led to the crash.

Investigators are currently questioning the technical personnel responsible for preparing the plane for take-off, the committee said.

Tu-154 aircraft have been involved in a number of accidents in the past.

In April 2010 many high-ranking Polish officials, including then president Lech Kaczynski, were killed when a Tu-154 airliner went down in thick fog while approaching Smolensk airport in western Russia.

Moscow has been conducting a bombing campaign in Syria in support of Assad since September 2015 and has taken steps to boost its presence in the country.

In October, Putin approved a law ratifying Moscow's deal with Damascus to deploy its forces in the country indefinitely, firming up Russia's long-term presence in Syria.

Russian warplanes have flown out of the Hmeimim base to conduct air strikes, and the base is also home to an S-400 air defence system.

## Queen Elizabeth to miss Christmas church service

AFP, Sandringham

Queen Elizabeth II is to miss the Christmas Day church service attended by the British royal family as she continues to suffer from a heavy cold, Buckingham Palace said yesterday.

The 90-year-old, who is the supreme governor of the Church of England, will join in the family festivities later in the day, a spokesman said.

The royal family traditionally spends Christmas together at her Sandringham private estate in Norfolk, eastern England.

By custom they walk together to and from church, a rare occasion for the public to meet several members of the royal family.

"Her Majesty The Queen will not attend church at Sandringham this morning," a palace spokesman said.

"The Queen continues to recover from a heavy cold and will stay indoors to assist with her recovery.

"Her Majesty will participate in the royal family Christmas celebrations during the day."

The monarch and her 95-year-old husband Prince Philip delayed their departure from London to Sandringham from Wednesday to Thursday as they were both suffering from heavy colds.

## Magnitude 7.7 quake strikes southern Chile

Tsunami warning issued

AFP, Santiago

A powerful Christmas Day earthquake hit southern Chile yesterday, triggering tsunami warnings and an evacuation order.

The quake registered 7.7 on the Moment Magnitude scale according to seismologists at the US Geological Survey, and 7.6 for the Chilean government's national emergencies office ONEMI.

The epicenter was on the southern part of Chiloe island, in a zone of several national parks.

The closest population center was Castro, a town on the island of 40,000 inhabitants. Chile's capital Santiago was around 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from the epicenter.

ONEMI and the USGS both issued a tsunami alert.

Chilean officials called for coastal areas nearby to be evacuated.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, said in a bulletin that "hazardous tsunami waves are forecast for some coasts."

The quake had a depth of 15 kilometers (nine miles) according to the PTWC.

Chile is in a quake-prone region, lying on the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire of frequent seismic activity.

The last big quake to shake Chile was on September 16, 2015, when an 8.3 temblor followed by a tsunami hit the north of the country, killing 15 people. A coastal evacuation order had limited the number of casualties.

## Tigers

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they made it through to the quarterfinal of the World Cup in 2015, are instances that many fans and cricketing pundits have recounted.

However, the fact remains that this series is going to be a different ball game. A series win here can easily supersede all of Bangladesh's successes since it is extremely difficult to beat the Kiwis at home.

Since 2015, they have won 21 of the 25 ODIs at home. While Sri Lanka beat them thrice, Australia beat them once. On the other hand, all the other teams, including Pakistan, the West Indies and South Africa failed to win even a single ODI.

Teams like Pakistan and South Africa are known for their ability to adapt to conditions and do well abroad, but even they failed to storm the Kiwi fortress. As for Sri Lanka, two of their ODI wins came during a long seven-match series.

Bangladesh however should not be too disheartened. While they never managed to beat the Kiwis at home, they have some encouraging numbers against them.

Away from home, Bangladesh's batsmen average 21.75 against the Black Caps. The Tigers have posted better numbers only against Ireland, Zimbabwe and England.

They also have two players -- Mahmudullah Riyad and Imrul Kayes -- who have scored centuries in New Zealand, which is the highest as far as centuries scored abroad by Bangladesh cricketers is concerned.

It has been their bowling that denied them wins during the earlier tours of New Zealand. Their over-reliance on spin and the unavailability of good pacers to bowl in those conditions were crucial factors that put them down. It is not a surprise that the bowlers average 49 in New Zealand. That number basically means that Bangladesh bowlers on an average have scalped wickets in New Zealand after every 49 runs, which is quite disappointing.

However, this Bangladeshi team is different. With a brilliant pace attack, a settled top six and a bunch of young spin-bowling all-rounders, this could well be the most balanced team to have ever toured New Zealand.

Bangladesh can also take heart from the fact that they have won eight out of their last nine encounters against New Zealand, albeit all of them were secured at home.

In addition, they will also be encouraged by the fact that a number of their players have recorded their best figures against the Black Caps.

Take for instance Mominul Haque. The left-hander averages a staggering 188 in two Tests against New Zealand and he has two centuries including his highest score of 181 against them.

Shakib al Hasan's best bowling figures in a Test innings, seven for 36, was against the Kiwis. Rubel Hossain has a hat-trick against New Zealand in ODIs and has recorded figures of six for 26 against the Kiwis.

Mahmudullah Riyad has an ODI century against the Kiwis in New Zealand, as does Imrul.

Sure enough, it is going to be a difficult task for Bangladesh to win even a single ODI in this series, but this group has a habit of overcoming difficult tasks and anything can happen in the next month.



Police are keeping the road in front of the militant den in Ashkona closed to public a day after they raided the place.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Musa told wife to blow herself up

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organisation also used to visit the den.

Replying to a query, the CTTC official said "Neo JMB" still has one expert bombmaker. Other bomb experts are dead or behind bars or on the run.

A police source said a militant, aged around 18, managed to escape from the flat just before the operation.

Another woman, Jebunnahar Shila, widow of Major (ret'd) Jahid alias Murad, surrendered along with her one-and-a-half-year-old daughter and with a 9mm pistol and six bullets during the anti-militant operation codenamed "Ripple 24".

According to CTTC officials, Trisha has expressed remorse for being within militant circle. But Shila has not.

Also during the operation, a suspected militant named Shakira detonated her suicide vest while rushing to police with her four-year-old daughter Sabina in an apparent motive to blow herself up in the midst of policemen. She was, however, still a few steps away from the law enforcers.

Shakira was killed in the blast with part of her body badly damaged and Sabina suffered severe injuries. A police official was also wounded.

"Analysing our intelligence and information from the militants who surrendered, it seems that the woman [Shakira] could carry out suicide attacks with her daughter elsewhere [had she been alive]," CTTC unit chief Monirul Islam told reporters at Ashkona yesterday evening as a search was going on in the den.

Shakira first married Iqbal, father of Sabina. After Iqbal died from cancer, she married Suman.

Suman, a suspected militant, has been missing for over a month, the official added.

Around 7:30pm yesterday, a police team left the spot with the body of deceased militant suspect, 14-year-old Afif Kaderi, for Dhaka Medical College morgue. Morgue sources said the body reached there around 11:30pm.

Afif, son of "Neo JMB" leader Tanvir Kaderi, who committed suicide during a raid at Azimpur on September 10, got killed around Saturday afternoon during the operation.

Rejecting the call for surrender, Afif opened fire at police, and the law enforcers retaliated by firing shots and gas grenades.

Officials say the boy committed suicide or died in the police firing.

Monirul said the militants burnt Tk 12 lakh, a laptop, some mobile phones and documents. It seems that they were using the hideout as their office, he added.

During the search starting at 10:30am yesterday, bomb disposal unit of the CTTC recovered seven grenades, two suicide vests -- one with six bombs and the other with four -- and two unexploded bombs from the vest that Shakira detonated.

Two 9mm pistols with two live ammunition, and huge bomb-making materials were also found at the den.

Officials later defused the grenades and bombs.

Meanwhile, DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia told reporter at a city programme that Musa, a listed militant, is still in Bangladesh and police are conducting drives to arrest him.

Replying to a query about the possible motive of storing the arms and ammunition at Ashkona den, the commissioner said, "We are at the primary stage of the investigation."

But, he said, so far they know that it was the continuation of militant activities after Gulshan attack.

A case has been filed over Saturday's incident with Dakkhin Khan Police Station under anti-terrorism act.

**ZIA, MARZAN 'UNDER SURVEILLANCE'**

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said Major (sacked) Syed Ziaul Haque and Nurul Islam Marzan, who had played vital roles in the Gulshan attack and targeted killings, will be arrested anytime.

"They will be arrested anytime as they are always under our surveillance," the minister said while talking to reporters after attending a programme at Shishu Academy in the capital.

According to police, Zia, alleged military wing chief of the banned militant outfit Ansar al Islam, had a hand in the targeted killings and murders of bloggers.

Marzan is said to be a top leader of "Neo JMB".

[Rafiqul Islam contributed to this report]

## Radicalised by expat

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top leaders, including Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury, Maj (ret'd) Jahid and Tanvir Kaderi in separate operations in the capital and Narayanganj, according to the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

"He told me that he would go to Bahrain with Faisal for job," said Sufia by phone.

Just four months after the death of his father Abul Kalam Azad in December last year, he went to his village home in Buzrukkola of Gonipur union, Rajshahi.

There he stayed for a few days to sell off six decimals of land in haste, which he had inherited. He took the money -- Tk 3 lakh -- with him and told his mother that he was preparing to go to Bahrain.

Maynul passed his Secondary School Certificate exams from Mochmoil High School, Higher Secondary from Taherpur College in Bagmara upazila of Rajshahi and got admission into Rajshahi Government College in the English department. One year later, he came to Dhaka, Sufia said.

Maynul completed his master's in English from Dhaka College in 2014 and started working as a teacher at Life School in Uttara. Faisal also worked

there. Maynul's monthly salary was Tk 14,000. He used to give private tuitions as well.

He married his distant cousin Trisha Moni that same year and began living together at the Uttara house.

According to Maynul's mother, Faisal went to Bahrain.

Sufia said her son stopped all communication with her in April after he left the village with the money he got from selling the land.

Maynul's elder stepbrother Khairul Islam said Mainul's mother has been living separately with her daughter after their properties were divided among the siblings.

The sudden rise in Mainul's financial condition in recent years amazed many people of Buzrukkola village.

"He had almost nothing. Suddenly a year ago I saw him riding on a 150cc motorcycle and he started behaving like a rich man," said a villager preferring anonymity.

His response to the looks of surprise was, "I do a good job in Dhaka".

Maynul's father Abul Kalam Azad lived on farming. At the same time, he worked as an imam and muezzin of a local mosque. Maynul was a well-mannered boy in the village and often worked as muezzin in the absence of his father.

"When Maynul left the village after passing HSC, he had no beard. But I saw him with long beard, white cap and in white dresses like typical maolanas when he was back in the village a year ago," said a college teacher.

**CONNECTION WITH JAHID, TAMIM**

Tamim coordinated the July 1 Gulshan café attack that killed 22 people, mostly foreigners, while Jahid trained the five attackers, according to police.

Maynul was a neighbour of Jahid in an apartment building at sector-13 in Uttara from January last year to February this year.

He had close family ties with Tanvir Kaderi, the father of twin Afif and Tahrir Kaderi.

Tahrir was taken into custody following a raid in September in Azimpur. He is still in jail. Afif, according to police, died during Saturday's raid on a militants' den at Ashkona, Dhaka.

Mainul used to tutor Afif and Tahrir maths, English and science.

Tanvir moved to Pallabi from Uttara before renting the Bashundhara house from where the Gulshan café attack was coordinated, according to the confessional statement of Tahrir.

Maynul used to visit Tanvir's Pallabi home and shared organisational plans with Afif, police said.

## Case backlog big hurdle to justice

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[lower court judges] have to abandon the culture of wasting time unnecessarily. Courts must spend all the work hours on judicial activities," Justice Sinha said.

Sometimes some judges do not sit in courtrooms after lunch, which is unacceptable, he said, adding that cases must be included in the cause list in such a way that the court can remain active for all of its time.

"Some district judges and their subordinates live in Dhaka with their families. A few of them leave for Dhaka after lunch on Thursdays and return to their workplaces after lunch on Sundays. Some district judges travel by government vehicles outside the district without permission from the authorities. Some district judges use the cars of other courts for this purpose. Cars of some district judges working outside Dhaka can often be seen here. These are not acceptable at all."

Justice Sinha said he was shocked to learn that some district judges and chief judicial magistrates were locked into conflicts over personal matters, adversely affecting the districts' judicial system.

Judges of the Appellate and the High Court divisions, who presided over different sessions of the conference, asked the lower court judges to discharge their duties with honesty, competence, transparency and neutrality to ensure justice and quick disposal of cases.

They also instructed the lower court judges to properly follow the rules while granting bails and comply with the High Court guidelines for disposing cases filed under the women and children repression prevention law.

Justice Ashfaque Islam of the HC expressed surprise when he heard that in Kishoreganj there is only one judge for disposing of around 40,000 land survey-related cases. In Mymensingh, a single judge is dealing with 30,000

such cases.

Justice M Enayetur Rahim, an HC judge and also chairman of the SC Legal Aid Committee, told the lower court judges that the government started providing legal aid for the poor in every district, though the service is limited due to manpower shortages.

As assistant judges, who are in charge of the district legal aid office, they have also to perform judicial activities, he said, adding that there was no peon in any of the district legal aid offices.

The SC Legal Aid office has a peon, but his salary comes from an NGO, Justice Enayetur said.

He hoped that all NGOs would work for providing legal aid to the poor.

Judges of the Appellate Division Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah and Justice M Imman Ali, and Justice Quamsrul Islam Siddique of the HC Division, also presided over different sessions of the conference.