

Cold, fog make Boro seedlings yellowish

MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT with ANDREW EAGLE

The persistent cold temperatures and regular dense fog that have marked this winter in Thakurgaon, have the district's farmers of Boro paddy worried. Many seedlings are whitish or yellowish, indicating the plants have been damaged or lost. In several areas farmers have had to purchase replacement seedlings, a situation that has led to soaring seedling prices, which will increase the overall cost of producing the next Boro harvest.

"At first I sowed the BR-29 variety of Boro paddy seeds on sixteen decimals at a cost of Tk 3,000 for the seeds," says farmer Arabindo Roy, 38, from Dangipra village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila. "Half the crop was damaged by the cold. Now I have a seedling crisis and need to buy more from elsewhere, at a high price. The cost of cultivation will be more this Boro season." Department of Agriculture Extension officials report that Boro seedlings on a few hectares have been damaged by the adverse weather; but that these will recover with more sunlight and overall cultivation will not be unduly affected.

"Farmers are advised to water the seedbeds at night and drain them off in the morning; to cover the seedlings with polythene and use sufficient fertiliser," says the department's deputy director in Thakurgaon, Md Maududul Islam. "If farm-

ers do this, and they can also spray Thiovit if required, their paddy seedbeds can be saved from the cold."

"Once the weather improves, farmers can apply a 280-gram urea and 100-gram potash per decimal top dressing to affected seedbeds, to help restore normal growth," he adds. But Arabindo's experience has not been good. "Even after applying preventative measures I failed to save the seedlings," he says. He is not alone.

"I sprayed medicines. I covered seedlings in polythene but failed to succeed in protecting them," says another farmer, Kamala Kanta Roy, from the same village. "Now there is no time left to sow seeds to raise new seedlings on my own land. My only choice is to buy seedlings." Indeed, many farmers across the district are facing a similar predicament.

The Department of Agriculture Extension estimates 60,310 hectares will be cultivated with paddy this Irri-Boro season in Thakurgaon, to realise a production target of just over 2.47 lakh tonnes of grain.

The optimal period for cultivation is usually January to mid-March, but this year the month of January has been effectively lost due to the unusually harsh winter. In such circumstances, it remains to be seen if the department's targets for the district's paddy production will be achieved.



Boro seedlings turn yellowish under the impact of persistent cold and fog in different areas of Thakurgaon. The photo was taken from Yakubpur village in Sadar upazila a few days ago.

PHOTO: MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

Girl brigades to fight early marriage, stalking



PHOTO: STAR

Members of 'girl brigades' pledge to fight child marriage and sexual harassment as they join a programme organised by the local administration on the ground of Nazrul Academy in Trishal upazila of Mymensingh yesterday.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Thirteen 'girl brigades' formed by Trishal upazila administration in the district yesterday vowed to free the upazila from the curse of child marriage and stalking.

The squad members were provided bicycles, uniforms and caps at the programme and the upazila administration gave them a specific hotline number to get help round the clock.

"Prevention is better than cure" is the motto behind formation of the brigades, involving students from classes VI to IX," said Trishal Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abu Jafor Ripon, who presided over the programme at Nazrul Academy ground yesterday. Shaila Parveen, president of Mymensingh Zila Krira Sangstha and Ladies Club, inaugurated the event.

"Earlier on October 31 last year, such a brigade was formed led by Mahbuba Alam Tripti, a Class IX student of Dhala School and College in Balipara union of Trishal. They have so far foiled 10 early marriage bid," said Abu Jafor, the mind behind the initiative.

"The brigade arranged several courtyard meetings to create awareness about the bad effects of early marriage.

"Inspired by the success, we have formed such brigades in 12 unions of the upazila involving 136 girls of 13 high schools. If a member gets the information that

a child marriage has been arranged, she will call the hot line number to get help from administration.

"It is easier to prevent child marriages through discussions with the parents as action after everything has been fixed causes social embarrassment for all concerned," said the UNO.

"Alongside working to prevent child marriage, the brigades will fight against stalking and other social crimes against women and girls," Mymensingh Deputy Commissioner Md Khalilur Rahman said in his speech as the chief guest at the event.

Such brigades will work to materialise Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's aim to free Bangladesh from child marriage, he said.

Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Trishal Ershad Hossain, upazila parishad Chairman Joyanal Abedin, Officer-in-Charge of Trishal Police Station Md Jakir Rahman, and journalists Amit Roy and Hossain Shahid also spoke on the occasion.

Later, the guests distributed bicycles, uniforms, caps, and papers regarding laws against child marriage, among the brigade members.

A good number of teachers, students and their guardians joined the programme.

'Punish bomb attackers'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) here yesterday demanded punishment to Jamaat-Shibir men for hurling petrol bomb on a passenger bus in 2015, which left eight people killed and 32 others injured.

Students and common people joined the human chain programme in the municipality, chanting slogans for punishment of the accused and help to the victims' family members.

Gaibandha Government College unit organized the rally.

As Jamaat-Shibir activists hurled petrol bombs on a Dhaka-bound night coach at Burir Ghar during an agitation on February 6 in 2015, the bus caught fire, leading to the casualties, speakers said.

District BCL Convener Abdul Latif Akanda, college unit President Asif Sarker and Vice President Sujoy Kumar spoke at the rally.

5 Chuadanga railway stations shut

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The authorities have closed five of the ten railway stations in the district due to shortage of manpower during the last one month, much to the sufferings of thousands of passengers in different areas of the district.

The closed stations are Ansarbaria in Jibonnagar upazila, Joyrampur in Damurhuda, Munshiganj in Alamdanga and Gaidghat and Mominpur in Chuadanga Sadar upazila.

"At present, 12 intercity trains and six mail trains run through the district daily while Dhaka-Kolkata Moitree train passes through Gede-Darshana international railway station four days a week. Besides, goods trains run regularly through the stations in the district," said Abdul Khaleque, stationmaster of Chuadanga railway station.

"There are no linesman, points-man and even gateman at the recently closed stations. Now only one or two employees are kept to take care of each of the five stations as no passenger trains stop there.

"Only one or two goods carrying train stop there to load and unload goods two days in a week.

"Proposal to recruit manpower for these stations was sent to higher authorities concerned in different times but to no effect," the stationmaster said.

The district has a long history of train services as train link between Chuadanga and Kolkata started way back in 1866, railway sources said.

Meanwhile, properties of the five closed down stations worth crores of taka face the risk of being stolen due to lack of adequate security and proper upkeep.

"Ansar personnel have been deployed there but it is too inadequate for the requirement," Khaleque said.

The shutting down of passenger trains has caused dissatisfaction among a large number of passengers, especially those belonging to low income groups.

"Earlier we took cheap train journey to go to the district town and adjacent upazilas for job," said Khabir Uddin, a construction worker of Munshiganj in Alamdanga upazila.

"Many people like me prefer to travel on train to avoid risks on highways but we are facing trouble due to closure of the stations," said Shukla Khatun, a housewife of Mominpur village in Chuadanga Sadar.



Locals form a human chain at Solaiman Bazar in Char Clark union under Subarnachar upazila of Noakhali yesterday protesting grabbing of the dwelling and farmland used by landless Md Abdul Karim at Char Baizid village, by a union parishad member early yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Honey production may fall this year

Reduced mustard cultivation, damage to flowers in Tangail blamed

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Honey production from mustard may fall in the district in the current season due to reduced cultivation of the crop and damage to the flowers caused by unfavorable weather conditions.

District Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Deputy Director (DD) Abdur Razzak said mustard was cultivated on 28,006 hectares of land in 12 upazilas in the district this season against the target of 38,000 hectares due to prolonged flood and heavy rain, along with dense fog.

Honey cultivators from different districts of the country come to Tangail every year and set up their bee colonies (boxes) beside the mustard fields. Over 7,000 bee colonies were set up this year, they said.

Normally, cultivation of honey from mustard starts from November every year, but it was started in December this season due to unfavorable weather, said Nityananda Mondol, a honey cultivator who comes to Boro Basalia in Sadar upazila from Shyamnagar upazila of Satkhira.

The mustard flowers were damaged by heavy rain and later attacked by diseases due to dense

fog, reducing honey production, he added.

"I had collected about three tonnes of honey last year, but this year it looks like it will be less," he added.

Producers said they get honey five times in a year; from mustard flowers from the second week of November till last week of January, guji til (oil seed) fields from last week of January to first week of March, litchi gardens during March, from keora, kholisa, goran and bain in the Sundarbans during March-April, and sada til (oil seed) fields from second week of April to second week of June. The rest of the year is off-season for honey cultivators.

There are around 2,500 honey cultivators, including 500 to 600 commercial cultivators, in the country, said Dulal Hossain, a honey cultivator of Panch Terilla village in Bhuapur upazila and also central unit President of Mou Chashi Kalyan Samity.

There are about 150 honey cultivators, including 76 commercial cultivators, in the district, he added.

Honey cultivators in the country produce around 3,000 tonnes of quality honey, with the highest amount -- 1,000 tonnes -- coming from mustard and about the same amount from litchi, while the rest come from other

crops, Dulal said.

The number of the honey cultivators in the country, however, is declining due to different problems, including unavailability of quality bees, he said.

Moreover, honey cultivators cannot get fair prices for their produce due to lack of necessary modern marketing facilities, Dulal added.

Honey bees help pollination of crops and increase yields, said Abdur Razzak, DD of DAE in the district.

Previously, mustard cultivators were afraid to allow setting up bee colonies near their crop fields, fearing reduction of yield of the crop, but they changed their mind after agriculture officials assured them that they would get 15 to 20 percent increase in yield if bee colonies were set up near their fields, Razzak said.

There is a huge demand for honey in the country, especially from the food processing industries and pharmaceuticals companies, he added.

Necessary technology-based modern trainings will be provided to the honey cultivators for increasing their number across the country, Razzak said.

The initiative will contribute to increasing honey production in the country, he said.



Bee colonies in wooden boxes set up beside mustard fields at Boro Basalia village in Tangail Sadar upazila. The picture was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR