

What protections for haor crops?

SHYKH SERAJ

At the moment, there is green vibrancy in rice fields of haor region. Lands after lands across the wide area, rice fields have turned picturesquely green. The only crop of the year, Boro rice is being grown. After one and a half months, the fields will turn golden with ripened rice and the crop will be ready for harvesting. The green colour of paddy this season tells the tale of yet another great production for the nation. However, farmers dreaming of getting this golden crop have doubts on whether they will be able to take it home. Will it submerge again due to a flash flood?

Ali Nur, farmer from Khaliajuri, Ntrakona says that his two and a half acres of paddy land went under floodwater last year. He couldn't harvest anything from his golden fields. This is the situation of every haor farmer. Back in 2016, farmers couldn't take their entire crops home. Thousands of hectares of ripe crops submerged. Farmers of Khaliajuri, Shalla, Shamarchar, Mithamoin, Itna, Tahirpur and many other haor areas had to face Nayanbhaga. Even though the word Nayanbhaga sounds nice, only the haor people know how much pain and nature's cruelty are dealt with it. Talking to haor area people, I learned that two kinds of field workers work in the two seasons of paddy planting and harvesting. The ones who work during paddy planting are called Jirati. On the other hand, the ones who do the harvest works, are called Dawali or Bhagali. These field workers are available during the planting and harvesting seasons. When the crops go under water due to



Shykh Seraj at a green paddy field in a haor area of Mohanganj.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

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BRRI 29 more than the others as it gives more yield. However, it takes half of the month of May for BRRI 29 to be harvested and taken home.

Recently, Director General of International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) Matthew Morell visited Bangladesh and we met for a discussion. I raised the issue of submergence-tolerant rice variety. He said IRRI is experimenting on bringing in a rice variety for haor areas. If everything goes alright, within one or two years, they will be successful in introducing a short-term and high yielding paddy variety. IRRI researcher Dr Md Rafiqul Islam says in many plots of Sunamganj, Kishoreganj and Habiganj, research for a new variety is going on but they couldn't still get an appropriate variety. IRRI, BRRI and many varieties from Nepal are being crossed. If it becomes successful, then they will be able to get a short-term and high-yielding variety with 2-3 years, said Dr Islam.

There was a time when Aus used to be the most popular paddy. The word Aus came from Ashu, which means quick or within a short time. Aus became so popular because of its short-

term production feature. I heard that we even had varieties that could be reaped in 60 days. However, those varieties were not high-yielding.

My experience tells that farmers need a variety which is both short-term as well as high-yielding. It is only a matter of time now to make one for the haor people. Technology and modern science can join hands to bring this as soon as possible.

It is evident that haor farmers are becoming victims of climate change. We need to take effective measures to save the farming in haor areas. I wanted to know from Dr Md Rafiqul Islam what more is there to do for the haor farmers. He said that until a new variety is brought in, farmers will need to carry on cultivating BRRI 29 on higher grounds and BRRI 28 on low lands. Researchers need to conduct multidimensional research.

There is another question of adding any alternatives. I talked to globally renowned geneticist Abed Chowdhury. He talked about aquatic paddy which grows with the increase of water and it can be cultivated in waterlogged regions. In China, there is

such a variety called Zizania. He also talked about green blue agriculture. Many countries cultivate 'sea-weed' in seaside areas. Besides, water chestnut, wasabi, many kinds of herbs: sage, parsley and different kinds of hydrophytes are also possible to cultivate in haor areas.

An alarming scene is that the construction works of the embankments to protect the haor area is not completed yet. The ones which are being completed in a hurry are more worrying for farmers. Haor people doubt if these embankments of soft soil can actually stop the wild water. Tahirpur's Boyalmara embankment was supposed to be finished by February. Sadly, the construction work started in March. The contractor, Water Development Board, administration -- all blamed each other. Farmers complain that every year construction works for embankments start right before the water comes. In Sunamganj, Tk 122 crore was allocated for 964 projects to make a total of 1,400 km embankments. However, the project wasn't completed in time. The picture

remains the same in other haor areas too. After visiting different haor areas, I felt like their farming method is moving far behind technology. They don't use any technology to plant or harvest crops even though they use tractors for ploughing. They could use drum seeder to get planting done in a short time. Similarly, they could use reaper machines to harvest more crops in a little time. Thus technology can curb the loss.

Dear readers, for the protection of farmers' crops and the living of farmers, not only in haor areas but all over Bangladesh, the government should think seriously about crop insurance. There will be more investment in agriculture sector if crop insurance is ensured to provide financial security for the growers. We need to take the haor people along in the road to sustainable development. Public and private research institutions and agriculture extension department have to come forward together not only with a specific plan but with a project with deadline.

Let the dream that the green crops of haor is showing turn into gold.

Five-year-old girl beaten dead in front of her father

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A five-year-old girl was beaten dead in front of her father during a clash in Ghughudah Beel area of Santhia upazila on Tuesday night.

The deceased was Sadhona Khatun, daughter of Ratan Fakir of the village.

Shadhona went to an onion field along with her father on Tuesday afternoon.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ashish Bin Hasan said Ratan's rival Iman Sheikh and his family members started arguing with Ratan over harvesting onion from the field. At one stage, Iman and his sons beat up Ratan.

Ratan's family members rushed to the spot to save him. Shadhona took shelter in her father's lap but the criminals beat the girl mercilessly in front of her father, the ASP said.

Sadhona was admitted to Santhia Upazila Health Complex where she succumbed to her injuries about 8:00pm.

Victim's father filed a case with Santhia Police Station, accusing Iman and his sons. The accused went into hiding after the incident.

Police sent the body to Pabna General Hospital morgue for autopsy yesterday.

Schoolboy murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A teenage school student was murdered in the town on Tuesday night.

Deceased Rakib Hossain, 17, son of Khalilur Rahman, was a tenth grader at Manikganj Technical School and College.

Victim's family and locals alleged that Shakil Ahmed Mithu, 18, son of Md Monnaf, called Rakib out of his home on Tuesday night and stabbed him indiscriminately in a maize field beside Pouli Government Primary School ground.

Locals rescued Rakib and took him to Manikganj Sadar Hospital. He was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, but he died on the way to Dhaka the same night.

Another Natore Jubo League man killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

A Jubo League activist was hacked to death in front of Natore central mosque in Kanaikhali area of the town yesterday.

The deceased was Saiful Islam Ripon, 35, son of Sayed Sheikh of Kanaikhali Chaulpotti area in the municipality.

Earlier, criminals stabbed to death Jubo League leader Imran Ali, 26, in the same area on March 18.

Jubo League Ward No 4 unit President Rafiqul Islam Babu said some criminals hacked Saiful with sharp weapons and injured him critically. Later, locals rushed him to Natore Sadar Hospital where the on-duty doctor declared him dead. "We demand punishment of the criminals who hacked Saiful to death," he added.



Alauddin works at his makeshift eatery in Baishari area under Naikkhongchhari upazila of Bandarban.

PHOTO: STAR

Indomitable Alauddin

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

Thanks to his indomitable spirit, a physically challenged man overcame all obstacles and achieved financial independence at Baishari in Naikkhongchhari upazilla.

Since his birth, Alauddin cannot move his left leg and had to take his parents' help to meet his daily needs. Born in a poor family, the physically challenged man has to use crutches to move around.

Because of his willpower, Alauddin, 32, is now a self-reliant man. He has been running an eatery in Baishari area with the help of his wife for nine years. He has six employees in his hotel.

"I don't want anyone's pity. Though I have no strength in one leg I never feel frustrated," he said, adding

that he was earning enough to run his family of five.

"Earlier I worked at a hotel in Cox's Bazar for six years and saved some money," he said.

"We must change our mindset. We should think that physically challenged people are not a burden on the society and if they get an opportunity they also can contribute to their families and also to the society," Alauddin said.

"It was a life of hardship but I was always hopeful. I have three daughters and they are studying in a primary school," he added.

"I don't know how long I can run this eatery with one leg, but the thought of my daughters' education and their bright future inspires me to go ahead," Alauddin said.

Litchi trees in full bloom

Growers in Dinajpur hope bumper production this season

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Litchi trees in the district famous for different varieties of the popular fruit sees profuse flowering amid favourable weather conditions, making the growers hopeful of a bumper yield this season.

Growers said they are expecting a bumper production if the weather remains favourable for couple of weeks more.

Usually, flowering starts by the end of February every year but it started in early March this year.

According to Department of Horticulture in Dinajpur, there are as many as 3,500 small and big litchi orchards on 5,000 hectares of land in the district, which is increasing every year as it has become a profitable crop for the growers.

Most of the orchards are located in

Sadar, Biral, Chirirbandar and Khansama upazilas alongside many homestead litchi trees in all 13 upazilas of the district.

According to Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Dinajpur, farmers in the district are expecting about 5,000 tonnes litchi production this year.

Although the mouth-watering seasonal fruit is grown abundantly across the country, those from Dinajpur are always special for their unique taste, shape, flavour and colour.

Moreover, the fruit from Mashimpur in Sadar upazila and Madhabbati in Biral upazila are tastier compared to others due to favourable soil condition.

Among many other varieties of litchis, Bedana, Bombai, Madrazi and China varieties are more popular.

Many litchi growers said the flowering was delayed due to severe cold and foggy weather this season but around 95 per cent trees have already bloomed.

During a visit to Mashimpur and Madhabbati villages this correspondent saw farmers busy in taking care of their plants.

Rafiqul Islam of Madhabbati village said they are worried of being deprived of fair price of the fruit this season as its harvesting and holy Ramadan may coincide this year.

Usually litchi is available in the markets from early May every year but this year it may be delayed by 20 days, the said.

DAE Deputy Director Proddip Kumar Guha said they urged the growers not to spray chemicals in a bid to ripen the litchis earlier than the usual time.



A litchi garden at Mazadanga village in Biral upazila of Dinajpur. The photo was taken a few days ago.

PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER