

# Fall armyworm worries maize farmers in Chuadanga

AMANUR AMAN, from Chuadanga

Fall armyworm (FAW) has affected maize crop on 40 hectares of land in Chuadanga, much to the worry of farmers in the south-western district famous for cultivation of the winter crop.

The pest, rapidly moving through fields after eating young plant stems, has been found at maize fields in some areas of Chuadanga Sadar and Damurhuda upazilas, said officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Native to the Americas, FAW was first officially reported in Nigeria of West Africa in 2016, and rapidly spread across different countries in sub-Saharan region.

In Asia, the pest attack was first reported from some maize fields in India last year.

"The same year, we also detected fall armyworm at Gobindhuda village in Chuadanga's Damurhuda upazila," said Sufi Rafiquzzaman, additional deputy director of DAE in Chuadanga.

Abdul Hamid, a farmer of Kulochara village in Chuadanga Sadar upazila, said his three acres of maize field has been attacked by fall armyworm.

"The moth eats up leaves and stems of maize plants. We failed to control it despite applying various medicines," he said.

Almas Uddin, another farmer of the same village, said he saw the pest first time at his maize field last year.

"That time fall armyworm



Officials inspect armyworm-affected maize plants at a field in Chuadanga.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

appeared in a small scale. But now I am afraid to see its spread," he said.

DAE officials, however, said the pest will not be that much harmful as the present weather condition is favourable for the growth of maize.

Ali Hasan, deputy director of DAE in Chuadanga, said, "Some early variety of maize has been attacked in several areas. It is now under control."

"We are fully prepared to apply various methods such as basal application of neem cake, seed treatment, inter-cropping with pulses and border cropping to deal with the problem," he added.

Summit-Bangladesh in cooperation with USAID organised trainings for district and upazila level officials and staff on three occasions from November 12 to December 2 in Chuadanga to

ascertain control measures if attack by the FAW pest takes a serious turn, said DAE officials.

Agriculture experts and high officials of the departments concerned were present at the programmes.

This year, maize has been cultivated on around 45,000 hectares of land in Chuadanga while it was 49,117 hectares in last year.

# North in Nabanno mood amid concerns

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Amid allegations of meddling in rice procurement process at government warehouses and complaints of low prices of paddy at open markets, villages in the country's northern districts are abuzz with Nabanno -- a festival of harvest.

Despite farmers' complaints of low yields following pest attacks and floods, the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) is expecting a bumper yield of 60 lakh tons of paddy from 19.07 lakh hectares of land in 16 northern districts.

However, in Sirajganj, the DAE recorded a total loss of the crop on 882 hectares of land due to flood, while it recorded a reduction in yield on 16.67 hectares due to rice blast disease in Dinajpur.

Farmers and traders said they could not be much enthusiastic this harvest season as each maund of course variety paddy was being sold below Tk 670 at local markets, whereas their production cost for a maund was higher than Tk 800.

Farm labourers were busy harvesting paddy from fields while men, women and even children were stacking, separating and winnowing the paddy at their yards.

Paddy farmer Moazzem Hossain was supervising labourers winnowing and processing paddy at the yard of his house in Borboria village of Naogaon's Raninagar upazila.

He said he had to spend an additional Tk 1,500 on pesticides as rice blast disease affected many paddy fields in the area. "I might barely recover the money I invested on pajjam [fine] variety of paddy, but I am not expecting any profit from Swarna [course] variety."

Robi Dhanoar was stockpiling paddy sheaves at his yard at Kuch Kurulia village of Naogaon's Sapahar upazila. He cultivated course variety on four bighas of shared land, hoping to harvest 15 maunds from each bigha.

He said, "I cultivated paddy without expecting any profit from it. I did it for the



A worker carrying harvested paddy from a field in Borboria village of Naogaon's Raninagar upazila recently.

PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

On the other hand, the price for each maund of fine varieties they were getting at the markets were between Tk 1000 and Tk 1200 against per maund production cost of Tk 1,000.

This year's yield and price are both below the expectations of the farmers, although the situation slightly improved from that in the previous year, when price for a maund of paddy was more or less Tk 500, said, Debdulal Dhali, additional director of DAE in Rajshahi zone.

He also said harvesting of almost about 86 percent of paddy in the zone has already been completed.

Many paddy farmers said although they have been witnessing losses for the past several years, they would still continue cultivating paddy because cultivating paddy brings joy in their hearts. For many others, growing paddy has added benefits as they can use its by-products to feed their livestock.

During a recent visit to different upazilas in the northern districts, this correspondent saw the areas buzzing with different activities relating to paddy harvest.

straws that will be used as fodder for my cattle."

This correspondent met Patani Mardi, from the same village, who was on her way to a paddy field with food for her husband and son. "They went there at dawn. I stayed home to prepare meal for them. Now I will join them and help out in cutting paddy and bringing those home."

Mahbubur Rahman of Ambari area in Parbatipur upazila of Dinajpur said due to pest attacks, yield of paddy this year has been six maunds lower than that of the previous year.

He also said the government initiatives to ensure fair prices do not come to any use as ordinary farmers do not get the chance to sell their paddy to government warehouses where local political leaders influence the preparation of farmers' lists.

"I went to the warehouse, but returned after learning that the political leaders had already made their list of farmers from whom paddy would be procured," he alleged.

Kongkon Karmakar from Dinajpur and Mostafa Shabuj from Bogura contributed to this report.

## Rejoinder, our reply

The chairman of the Board of Trustees of IMPACT Foundation Bangladesh has sent a rejoinder to The Daily Star report titled 'Patients still paying for a lax eye surgery: A year later, victims of a catastrophic cataract surgery now suffering from pain' published on December 04, 2019.

In their rejoinder they claimed that Impact has been in compliance with all the directives from the High Court verdict in respect of payment of compensation to 20 unfortunate victims and also taking full care of their eye health to date.

They further claimed that even before being directed by the High Court, Impact initiated to take full responsibility of their treatment and post-operative care in 'Specialised Hospitals' and also decided to provide them financial aid for their rehabilitation within the family and community.

In the rejoinder, they provided a list of nine patients, whom Impact reimbursed a total of Tk 32,805 for operation, Tk 21,909 for treatment and medicines, and Tk 23,655 for transportation.

They claimed that four patients including Mrs Hawaton and Mr Oli Mohammad received the most recent treatment. Impact spent Tk 1,050 for Mrs Hawaton on November 18 and Tk 610 for Mr Oli on November 25.

They said that the follow-up treatment modality was jointly planned by Impact and the Chuadanga civil surgeon. It was decided that when any of those patients would report with any complaints, she/he will be examined by the eye specialist of the Chuadanga District Hospital and as per his prescription, Impact would buy all medicines. This has been the practice till to date and it is not at all any breach of verdict of the High Court.

Regarding reimbursement of surgery cost, it was decided in consultation with the civil surgeon and the Chuadanga District Hospital ophthalmologist that Impact will reimburse maximum Tk 7,000 for cataract surgery, as the rates of such operation in reputable hospitals like Islamia Eye Hospital, National Institute of Ophthalmology (NIO) are within that amount. Impact always suggests the patients to have their surgeries in these or similar hospitals in Bangladesh, the rejoinder read.

It went on to explain that Impact has an image of being a hospital for the poor, its resources are limited and it has developed a low-cost health care model to serve the greater section of the poor communities in the region. So, Impact cannot afford to pay someone for expensive eye surgery, when the similar surgery can be done in Government or NGO hospitals at a much lower cost.

Regarding the eye surgeon, Dr Shaheen, Impact mentioned that he is an experienced eye surgeon, who has operated more than 30,000 cataract patients over a period of 15 years. Such unfortunate incident has happened only once in his long career. While doing operations for 3 consecutive days in March, 2018, only the patients of 2nd day had suffered this catastrophe.

Also, as per the court verdict, there was no negligence from the part of the surgeon.

They also noted that there is no reason for the other eye to be affected due to the previously damaged eye. Besides, almost all the patients are elderly and at this age, most of the patients are likely to develop cataract in their other eyes.

If such patients come to Impact Masudul Haque Community Health Centre (IMHCH) for removal of the cataract Impact will do so free of charge, the rejoinder stated.

## 20 houses gutted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A fire gutted around 20 houses at Torra Islampur village in Haripur upazila of the district yesterday.

The fire originated from an earthen oven of one Sultan's house around 1:00pm and soon engulfed the adjacent dwellings.

On information, firefighters rushed to the spot and doused the blaze after two hours of frantic efforts, said locals.

# Risky ride on dinghy to cross canal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Local people of six villages have been suffering for long for want of a bridge over Debbur canal in Kalapara upazila.

The villagers have to cross the canal on a dinghy amid accident risk every day.

Especially schoolchildren and patients are the worst sufferers due to the communication problem, said villagers.

The villages are Debbur, Nishanbaria, Chalitabunia, Dhankhali, Choilabunia and Pachjunia in the upazila.

Locals tied trees on both sides of the canal with rope and cross the canal on the dinghy by pulling the rope amid risk of accident.

Most of the villagers cannot run the boat and due to this, local people arranged the system on their own.

As different educational institutions, a bazar, the union parishad office, a post office and several offices of non-governmental organisations lie on both sides of the canal, thousands of people have to cross the water body every day.

Tanjila Akhter, a student of Class IV of Dakkhin Debbur Government Primary School, said their books often got wet while crossing the canal on the dinghy.

Meherunnessa, headmaster of the primary school, said every day around 70 students cross the canal on a dinghy by pulling rope amid risk of accident to reach school.

Students are often absent during the rainy season, she said.

Despite repeated calls, the local union parishad (UP) chairman is yet to take any steps to build a bridge on the canal.

Champapur UP chairman Md Rintu Talukder said they have already raised the issue in the upazila development committee's meeting.



School kids cross a canal on a dinghy by pulling rope amid risk of accident in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

SM Rakibur Ahsan, chairman of Kalapara upazila parishad, said they do not have sufficient fund to build a bridge on the canal.

Abdul Mannan, engineer of Local Government Engineering Department in Kalapara upazila, said they have already informed the higher authorities about the matter but to no respond yet.

## Man stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A man stabbed by rivals in Katiadi upazila of Kishoreganj on Friday night, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) the next morning.

The victim, Saddam Hossain, 30, son of Arzu Mia of Bhitipara village in Katiadi, was a local sales representative of RFL.

"Following a feud over a Facebook post, Shahadat Hossain and his accomplices waylaid Saddam at Bhitipara around 10:00pm on Friday night," Katiadi Police Station OC MA Jalil said, quoting the victim's family members and locals.

"At one stage, Shahadat allegedly started stabbing Saddam indiscriminately. Trying to save him, Saddam's friends Rakib Hossain, 26, and Zakir Hossain, 25, also sustained stab injuries.

"Locals took them to Kishoreganj General Hospital, from where Saddam was shifted to DMCH in a critical condition. He died there on Saturday morning. Police detained one for interrogation," the OC said.

# One man's mission to protect trees

Jashore Sadar resident Wahid removed nails from 22,000 roadside trees

MOHSIN MILON, Benapole

Equipped with a pry bar, hammer, hook, some clothes and a blanket on his bicycle, Md Abdul Wahid Sardar sets out on his mission to remove nails from roadside trees in Jashore.

This has become almost a daily routine for the 57-year-old farmer cum mason, whose love for trees had won him a bronze medal at the Bangabandhu National Agriculture Award 1421 in July 2017 for planting trees spending his own money.

"I have loved trees since my childhood. I would climb up to the branches and play and think about trees and what they feel," said Wahid, who knew even as a boy that trees have life, just like humans.

As he grew up, he felt the need to do something. From 2006, he started planting trees not just on his own land but also on the premises of private and public institutions with money from his own pocket.

Since then, he has planted about 20,000 fruit and medicinal plants in different places of Jashore town, including mosques, temples, police stations and road intersections.

"I soon found that people would nail billboards and signboards on the trunks of the trees that I had planted. Once I took out a nail and noticed sap coming out from the hole," he related.

"It reminded me of how humans



bleed when they receive a cut or a bruise and how it hurts. The trees must feel pain too when we hammer nails on their trunks," Wahid reflected.

The thought set him out on his present mission of removing nailed bills, banners and signboards from roadside trees, starting from July 2018.

Between July 4 and December 25 last year, he rode his bicycle for about one thousand kilometres and pulled out nails from trees along the road.

During the six months, Wahid often did not return to his home in Sarapole village under Jashore Sadar upazila. At times, he did not bathe for several days and slept on tea stall benches or verandas of schools and colleges, he said, adding that most people were kind

to him and gave him food and water.

Till date, Wahid said he removed 250 kilograms of nails from 22,000 trees along Jashore-Benapole, Jashore-Khulna, Jashore-Magura and Jashore-Jhenidah highways.

"It is illegal to put a billboard on a tree," Wahid said referring to the Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking Control Act, 2012.

"Various organisations including political parties do not care about this law. They just use trees to hang their publicity materials," he lamented.

While locals appreciate his work, police often try to stop him from removing posters and banners of political parties during the removal of nails and pins from tree trunks, Wahid said.

"I would take out a nailed

billboard today and the next day people would put it up again," he said frustratingly. "The forest department and the administration do not look into the matter. But this work is theirs. They are responsible for implementation of the law."

Khulna Divisional Forest Officer Shah Alam admitted that they have not been able to enforce the law.

However, they will try to create awareness among people about where they can put up billboards and posters in compliance with the law, he said.

While some people call Wahid crazy and laugh at him, others like his neighbour Mohammad Rabbani feels proud of Wahid's work and tries to help him financially at times.

"Sometimes, I even accompany him on his mission to plant saplings and remove nails from trees," he said.

The tree lover also gets support from his wife and three children -- two sons and a daughter.

His daughter Nasima Khatun said, "We feel proud of our father. Although it becomes difficult for us when he stays outside for days to plant trees and remove nails, we accept it for the sake of the country."

Wahid, too, does not want to let people's criticism and disregard for the law get between him and his love for the greens.

He wishes to continue his work of planting more trees and saving them from human assaults.