



Workers at a potato farm in Gobindaganj upazila of Gaibandha are seen trying to salvage what crops they can following excessive rain over the weekend. The picture was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Rains trigger fear of loss among farmers in north

KONGKON KARMAKER and MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Vast swathes of cropland in the northern districts have been affected due to water-logging caused by rainfall that lasted from Friday morning until early the next day, with farmers apprehending losses.

The heavy precipitation laid low full-grown fields of mustard plants, potatoes and maize while vegetable trellises also collapsed due to strong gusts in Bogura, Joypurhat, Gaibandha, Pabna and Dinajpur.

During a visit to the Biral and sadar upazilas of Dinajpur, correspondents found numerous farmers toiling away to drain excess water from their lands.

Akil Chandra Roy, a farmer of Maljhar village in Biral upazila who cultivated potatoes on two bighas of land this year, said he planned to harvest the tuber crop once they had matured after a couple of days.

However, the recent rain has left Akil's hopes hanging by a thread as he was seen busy draining stagnant water from his field on Saturday.

"The potatoes will go rotten if the water is not removed on time," he said. As such, production would decline by at least 10 per cent if it rains again.

Besides, this concern comes as a double blow for potato growers, who already suffered massive losses due to the prevailing low market price for their crops.

The situation is similar in neighbouring districts as whole fields have gone underwater.

Abdul Mannan Moldol, a farmer of Satar village under Joypurhat's Kalai upazila, said he and his brothers could



lose potatoes cultivated on 25 bighas of land this season if the water was not drained on time.

"We spent Tk 20,000 to Tk 25,000 to cultivate each bigha," he added.

Md Khaja Mia, a farmer of Milkipur village under Bogura's Shibganj upazila, said half of the potato plants he grew on seven bighas of land could be lost due to rain this year.

In Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila, Joyal Ahmed of Baneshor village said he has already spent Tk 45,000 to grow potatoes on three bighas of land.

"But I cannot recover more than 50 per cent of my investment as I cannot harvest crops that are submerged," he added.

Saiful Islam, a farmer of the same village, said he cannot store the potatoes harvested from wet fields as they would rot in cold storage.

"So, I will have to sell them in a hurry at cheap prices, and count huge losses

as a result," he added.

On being contacted, Md Anamul Haque, additional deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Bogura, said farmers in the district cultivated potato on 57,515 hectares of land this year.

"About 26 per cent of the potatoes have already been harvested but we cannot be sure to what extent the recent rain has damaged these crops," he added.

Likewise, Md Belal Uddin, deputy director of the DAE in Gaibandha, said farmers in the region have so far harvested potatoes from about 100 hectares of the 1,000 hectares cultivated this season.

"Most of these potatoes are already mature so if the farmers drain the water on time, they will remain undamaged," Uddin added.

Growers of other crops in the region are suffering the same fate.

Altaf Hossain of Maljhar village in Dinajpur said he cultivated mustard on seven decimals of land this year but the plants have suffered a beating by the heavy wind and rain.

In addition, Altaf's maize field remains underwater.

Monjurul Haque, deputy director of the DAE in Dinajpur, said farmers would be able to avert losses if they were able to clear the stagnant water as soon as possible.

The situation is similar in all five upazilas of Joypurhat, where farmers were seen attempting all means possible to remove the water.

Some were draining the water simply with dishes while others were seen picking potatoes. Similar scenes were prevalent in different areas of Joypurhat's sadar, Khetlal and Kalai upazilas on Saturday.

Rafiqul Islam, a potato farmer of Binshira village in Khetlal, said his entire field had gone under water and there was no way to fix it.

He went on to say that potato prices have been low since last season, when he suffered losses of Tk 2,000 per bigha.

"There is no respite from losses," Rafiqul added.

According to the DAE in Joypurhat, potatoes are being produced on 40,350 hectares of land in the district this year.

Shafiqul Islam, deputy director of the DAE, said some potatoes have already been picked from the field. However, farmers are making arrangements to drain the stagnant water as soon as possible.

"If the water is removed quickly and there is no rain ahead, there will not be much more damage," Islam added.

Foreign investors want 'plug and play' production setups

Says MCCI president

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Foreign investors expect hassle-free, ready-to-use industrial setups, which the country's leather sector, especially footwear and associated goods, lacks, says Md Saiful Islam, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka (MCCI).

Constraints over the availability of suitable land at proper locations and the tannery industry's compliance to environmental regulations are the main barriers to drawing foreign investment and boosting the exports, he said.



Foreign investors do not want to spend time and money building up infrastructure from scratch, said Islam while talking to The Daily Star on the sector's exports.

"But we cannot provide...this type of environment...in spite of the huge potential," he said.

The government had set a target to give a boost for the sector to earn \$5 billion from exports by 2021.

But this remained unattained for the lack of compliance, a backward linkage industry and necessary investment from home and abroad.

The sector earned \$941.67 million from export of leather, leather goods and footwear in financial year 2020-21.

The sector is still dependent on the import of raw materials, including leather, said Islam, also president of the Leathergoods & Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

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UK regulator hands Meta new fine

AFP, London

Britain on Friday ordered Facebook parent Meta to pay another £1.5 million for breaching regulatory rules over its acquisition of animated graphics startup Giphy.

The Competition and Markets Authority said in a statement that Meta had failed to alert the regulator in advance of three key staff leaving Giphy as it probed the transaction.

The penalty, equivalent to \$2.0 million or 1.8 million euros, comes after the CMA had already fined the group £50.5 million last October for failing to supply information linked to the deal.

"This is not the first time Meta failed to inform the CMA of staff changes at the appropriate time, having failed to do so multiple times in 2021," the watchdog said on Friday.

The penalty took into account the "nature and gravity of the breach in question".

In reaction, Meta said it would pay up -- but described the fine as "problematic".

"We are disappointed by the CMA's decision to fine us because of the voluntary departure of US-based employees," said a company spokesperson.

"We intend to pay the fine, but it is problematic that the CMA can take decisions that could directly impact the rights of our US employees protected under US law."

Meta had announced the purchase of Giphy -- a platform and search engine for "stickers" and other products using the graphics interchange format or GIFs -- for a reported \$400 million in May 2020. The CMA then launched an investigation into the proposed acquisition one month later.

The British watchdog then ordered Meta to sell Giphy in November 2021, ruling the deal would harm competition and advertising.

US labour market shrugs off Omicron

REUTERS, Washington

The US economy created far more jobs than expected in January but despite the disruption to consumer-facing businesses from a surge in Covid-19 cases, pointing to underlying strength that should sustain the expansion as the Federal Reserve starts to raise interest rates.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday also showed a whopping 709,000 more jobs were added in November and December than previously estimated. Wage gains accelerated last month and the labor pool expanded.

The upbeat report ended days of anxiety among economists and White House officials who had frantically tried to prepare the nation for a disappointing payrolls number.

"This is a strong jobs report," said Chris Low, chief economist at FHN Financial in New York.

"The odds of quelling inflation without a recession look better today than yesterday."

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 467,000 jobs last month, the survey of establishments showed. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 150,000 jobs would be added in January.

Estimates ranged from a decrease of 400,000 to a gain of 385,000 jobs. Employment is 2.9 million jobs below its pre-pandemic peak.

Part of the broad increase in payrolls likely reflected low layoffs after the holiday hiring season, with 10.9 million job openings at the end of December.

Though the drop in actual employment in January was in line with prior years, there were large differences at the industry level.

The government also reported that 374,000 more jobs were created in the 12 months through March 2021 than previously reported.



Workers prepare to move a piece of pipe into place as they build a new home in Petaluma, California.

PHOTO: AFP

IMF says it is ready to help Sri Lanka

AFP, Washington

The International Monetary Fund is ready to discuss "options" with Sri Lanka if the government asks for financial support, its mission chief for the island told AFP on Thursday.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a disastrous impact on Sri Lanka's economy, which has been deprived of its tourism bonanza while workers' remittances from abroad have fallen sharply.

"While the IMF has not received a request for financial support from Sri Lanka, the staff stands ready to discuss options if requested," mission chief Masahiro Nozaki said in a written statement to AFP.

On Wednesday, Sri Lanka's finance minister announced the country had sought advice from the fund and was considering seeking an international bailout. This "referred to an ongoing technical assistance mission by the IMF," Nozaki said Thursday.