

# Farmers harvesting half-ripe paddy

## Around 500 bighas of crop fields submerged in Pabna



Farmers harvesting half-ripe paddy at Fechuan village in Pabna's Sathian upazila.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna**

Several hundred bighas of Boro fields in Pabna's Bera and Santhia upazilas have been submerged due to torrential rains and farmers are fearing loss while they are harvesting half-ripe crops.

Moreover, the unavailability of farm labourers is badly hampering the harvest from the waterlogged fields, farmers said.

Farmer Golzar Hossain of village Koromza in Santhia upazila cultivated Boro paddy on his five bighas of land in Eitkata beel expecting a bumper yield but suddenly the rainwater has wreaked havoc.

"I need at least one week more to complete harvesting as the paddy field has gone under water," Golzar said.

"Due to unavailability of farm labourers, I could not complete harvesting my paddy till now," he said.

Farmer Omor Mollah of village Chakla in Bera upazila, however, said that he cultivated three bighas of land in Sondah beel this year but the paddy field has completely gone under.

"I have been harvesting half-ripe paddy since last week and half of the cropland is yet to be harvested," he said.

"If I cannot complete harvesting paddy within this week, most of the crop will be damaged," Omor added.

Talking with the affected farmers, it could be learnt that over 500 bighas of crop fields in Koromza, Sonatola, Vitagara, Patgari, Shorisha in Shanthia

upazila and Chakla, Pachuria, Koitola areas of Bera upazila have submerged.

Some of the farmers claimed that the waterlogging situation has been created as fish farmers have obstructed the drainage of rainwaters.

Worrying about more rains in the coming days, many farmers have started harvesting half-ripe paddy in low-lying areas in both upazilas.

Talking with The Daily Star, Md Mizanur Rahman, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Pabna, said, "We have taken prompt steps to flush out stagnant water from the waterlogged crop fields."

The official, however, said that it was a temporary problem and there was nothing to be worried.

## Doctoring EVMs almost impossible

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subsequent occasions said the EC was yet to make a final decision regarding the use of EVMs in the next general election.

When a reporter yesterday asked Prof Zafar whether there was a scope for anyone to customise the machine, he said, "I would request those who are saying this to make a specific complaint..."

Asked whether the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) should be added to the devices, Prof

Zafar said such an addition would create more hassles.

VVPAT is a system which dispenses a slip with the symbol of the party for which an individual has voted.

Brac University Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) Distinguished Professor Mohammad Kaykobad said that it is tough to have 100 percent trust in a machine.

"But the machine has been customised in such a way that... it is almost impossible to manipulate."

Buet CSE Professor Mohammad Mahfuzul Islam said the EC could urge tech experts from different political parties to discuss the issues related to EVM.

University of Asia Pacific CSE Prof Aloke Kumar Saha said, "EVM is a stand alone machine without an internet connection. It is not possible to manipulate it."

He recommended the EC launches a mass awareness campaign in villages to let people know how to use

the devices.

CEC Habibul told reporters that the commission would urge technical experts representing the political parties to review the EVMs.

The parties that are against the EVMs may be invited to inform the commission what problems they were facing in written form, he added.

"We have to trust the people who understand these things, the ones who created these products," he said.

## Don't put any extra burden

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prime minister, foreign minister and ambassadors of the donor countries in Dhaka.

Grandi said there is a risk of humanitarian assistance for the Rohingyas declining in the wake of the crises in Ukraine and Afghanistan.

Therefore, he has appealed for sustained and predictable support for Rohingyas and their local host communities in Bangladesh while emphasising the need to maintain refugees' hopes for voluntary return to Myanmar once the situation allows.

"The world must

remember the crisis that Rohingya refugees and their hosts have been facing for the last five years. The refugees' lives depend on how the international community responds in caring for them," Grandi said.

He said Bangladesh, which has led in assisting nearly a million refugees, remains a priority partner for UNHCR, but continued international support is crucial to provide life-saving assistance and build hope.

The high commissioner said the solutions to the Rohingya crisis lie within Myanmar. While UNHCR

and UNDP continue to work on community projects in Rakhine under a tripartite agreement with Myanmar, initiatives must be scaled up to create conditions for voluntary returns in a just, safe, and sustainable manner.

Grandi said while in Bangladesh, it is important that Rohingya refugees can live in safety and dignity, that they can send their children to school and learn from the Myanmar curriculum, which is being rolled out in the refugee camps.

"Skills development and livelihood activities in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char are extremely

important in allowing the refugees to build peaceful communities, contribute to a safe environment and support their sustainable return."

## A welcome

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during sessions has been increased from Tk 200 to Tk 300.

Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Law Minister Anisul Haq, and Chief Whip Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury among others were present at the meeting at the Sangsad Bhaban.

## One in 4 healthcare professionals had it

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taking sedatives.

Prof Baizid Khorshid Riaz, the principal investigator of the study and director of the National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), told The Daily Star that the affected healthcare professionals could start self-isolating or quit

their jobs or have suicidal tendencies if they go through another traumatic experience.

This health problem should be addressed by the authorities concerned so that they could avoid the consequences of PTSD, he added.

The study suggested strengthening and

introducing measures for the psychological well-being of healthcare professionals, their recovery, and counselling programmes.

He said they have no information regarding how the affected healthcare professionals are doing now as the data was collected last year.

NIPSOM conducted

the study with the financial assistance of the Directorate General of Medical Education.

Bangladesh detected its first coronavirus patient on March 8, 2020, and recorded its first Covid death on March 18 that year. Since then, 1,953,298 people were infected and 29,130 died of Covid.



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### JANO ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON

# Food fortification towards sustainable nutrition security

A study titled "Scoping of fortified and nutritious food products for the targeted households and strengthening the distribution network to the last mile" was commissioned by Joint Action for Nutrition Outcome (JANO), CARE Bangladesh, and conducted by icddr,b. JANO is a consortium project being implemented by CARE Bangladesh, Plan International Bangladesh and Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO). The project is funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation. Based on the study findings, a roundtable titled "Food Fortification towards Sustainable Nutrition Security" was jointly organised by JANO and The Daily Star on April 26, 2022. A panel of experts from different fields and organisations came together to discuss findings, challenges, and solutions as a way forward to tackle the challenges related to food fortification.

**Ramesh Singh**, Country Director, CARE Bangladesh

The name of the project, Joint Action for Nutrition Outcome, itself sets the tone that any action regarding nutrition can be done jointly only. If you look at the available evidence, it is clear that where all the stakeholders join hands and work in collaboration, malnutrition decreases significantly. The Covid-19 pandemic affected every aspect of our lives, including the nutrition situation. Considering this new reality, we have to chalk out effective plans to improve the nutrition situation in Bangladesh.

**Dennis O'Brien**, Country Director, Plan International Bangladesh

The JANO project has been working closely with the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education of the Ministry of Education. There is a need to work with the Ministry of Education to consider mainstreaming nutrition along with food fortification messages in the main curriculum. I also recommend that a long-term mass media campaign on food fortification is undertaken.

**Nazneen Rahman**, Senior Team Leader, JANO, CARE Bangladesh

The overall objective of the JANO project is to contribute to ending malnutrition of children under five years of age. We are implementing JANO by following multi-sectoral approach and strengthening nutrition governance in Rangpur and Nilphamari.

The study findings show that males are

the key decision-makers when food from the market is selected and purchased. Thus, the awareness program on food fortification should include them in the intervention. Also, there should be more research on the impact of overconsumption of iodine using universal iodized salt.

**Bidhan Krishna Sarker**, Assistant Scientist, Maternal and Child Health Division, icddr,b

In our study, we have found that people generally do not have a comprehensive idea about fortified food but they have a perception that fortified food is a mixture of food with vitamins and it is something good for health. However, there is a severe lack of trust regarding the quality of fortified food products. Most of the respondents think that local suppliers sell adulterated products as 'fortified foods'. We have also found that the contamination of fortified foods products and fake brand names are rampant in the local markets.

The respondents have identified poor economic condition, poor education and a lack of awareness as the three key challenges to accessing fortified foods.

**Ashek Mahfuz**, Portfolio Lead, Large Scale Food Fortification and Value Chain Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

Seventy percent of the edible oil is packaged in bulk and this bulk oil is not adequately fortified. Moreover, bulk oil is transferred using repurposed drums which are not food-graded. The bulk oil consumers are at the bottom of the pyramid. Despite the government enacted a law in 2013 that all edible oil must be fortified, the bulk oil in the market is still not fortified. The government must ban sales of bulk edible oil in the local market.

**Dr Zeba Mahmud**, Senior Advisor, Strategic Partnership and Knowledge Learning, Alive and Thrive

Although we have the required knowledge, we have not been able to increase access to fortified food in rural communities. Therefore, we need advocacy campaigns which target urban, rural and slum areas.

**Saiqa Siraj**, Country Director, Nutrition International

Food fortification has emerged as a potential solution of achieving sustainable nutrition security. It can be

a crucial strategy in decreasing the risk of malnutrition. Fortified food could be included in school meal programs.

**Dr. Md. Khairul Bashar**, Country Manager, HarvestPlus-Bangladesh

We are working for establishing a successful biofortification program that will operate on the basis of a long-term plan. Since biofortification requires huge investment, the government and donor agencies should come forward to support this initiative.

**Mostafa Faruq Al Banna**, Associate Research Director, FPMU

We should promote the cultivation of more enriched varieties of biofortified crops. Research should be conducted on the impact of biofortified crops on a diversified farming system. The government

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Fortified food products need to be made affordable for the poor community.
- » Mass media campaigns should be organised to make people aware of fortified foods.
- » An extensive advocacy campaign should be undertaken.
- » Producers should introduce smaller packaging options for fortified oil.
- » Fortified food products should be included in food support programmes, including primary and secondary school meal programmes.
- » Cultivation of new and more enriched varieties of biofortified crops should be promoted.
- » The supply chain of fortified food should be monitored regularly

and related organisations may take measures to popularise biofortified varieties to encourage farmers to produce biofortified crops.

**Md Mizanur Rahman**, Business Manager, ACI Seed

The biofortified rice varieties are not gaining popularity due to yield and grain quality. We have to create market for biofortified rice varieties. If the biofortified rice is procured at a slightly higher price, farmers will be encouraged to adopt biofortified varieties.

**Rezaul Karim**, Head of Programme Planning and Implementation, World Food Programme (WFP) Bangladesh

The country, now, can produce about 1 million metric tonnes of fortified rice. Considering the consumption pattern of our countrymen, it should be around 29 million metric tonnes. We should work for reaching this gap. Lastly, the price of fortified foods should be reduced while the production of these products needs to be increased.

**Dr. Sheikh Shahed Rahman**, General Secretary, CSA for SUN, BD

We have seen in the study that customers have increasingly lost trust in fortified foods due to widespread adulteration.

Both public and private sector should work for gaining consumers' confidence back and ensuring that they get value for money.

The promotion of nutrition in media is very little in Bangladesh. Media is critical in the promotion of nutrition.

**Aamanur Rahman**, Director-ERPP, CARE Bangladesh

The public food distribution system should be effectively used to reach fortified food products to the poorest sections of the society. Price constraints imply that subsidized foods are required. The emphasis must be given on allocating subsidies for farmers which may well lead to food fortification.

**Dr. Salah Uddin Ahmed**, Head of Training & Service Delivery, Social Marketing Company (SMC)

We have focused on processing iron and folic acid, zinc and vitamin D applying a World Health Organisation (WHO) formula. The products will help children grow intellectually and physically. Accessibility, cost, quality and safety have been the issues that have hindered our progress.

**Dr. Md. Shahid Uz Zaman**, Executive Director, Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO)

In compliance with the JANO food fortification study findings, I recommend that triggering points be identified to determine the best food fortification processes. It is important that coordination among different stakeholders involved in the food fortification sector is enhanced. Research-based nutritional messages need to be disseminated through

media platforms.

**Dr. Ferdousi Begum**, Lead of SRHR, Plan International Bangladesh

Quality food fortification mechanisms should be integrated with the various food distribution programmes.

Consumers want small, portable packs. Considering this need, policy-makers may request producers to produce sachets.

**Gulshan Ara**, Associate Scientist, Nutrition and Clinical Science Division, icddr,b

'Geographical' targeting is very important. Iodized salt should be heavily promoted in vulnerable regions.

**Meher Nigar Bhuiyan**, Programme Manager, FNS, Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh

The JANO study indicates that poor people are interested in consuming fortified oil and salt but affordability is a critical factor. This is an area of consideration for the government and relevant stakeholders.

We need to counsel people about the incremental costs and benefits of fortified food. The supply chains of fortified foods should be monitored regularly to ensure that bottlenecks are cleared and the availability of quality fortified food is ensured.

**Md.Ruhul Amin Talukder**, Additional Secretary, PPC Wing, Ministry of Agriculture

I must congratulate JANO members. The way they have engaged different stakeholders, from the community to the policymakers, and ensured nutrition governance is fabulous.

Policy-making is now a participatory process where all the relevant stakeholders are involved. Similarly, we should all work together in implementing these policies.

The government has allocated a significant amount of money for conducting research on food fortification.

We are nearly self-sufficient in producing macronutrient enriched foods but access to these food products, viz. affordability, is still a big concern. The government has taken various social protection programmes to address this issue and the coverage of these programmes have been increasing progressively.