



Although it may seem like these farmers in Pabna's Chatmohar upazila are carrying paddy across a river on a makeshift boat of polythene, they are actually trying to salvage what is left of their crops from a field submerged underneath.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Floods ruin paddy yield prospects in Chalan Beel

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Paddy farmers in the Chalan Beel region of Rajshahi, Pabna, Sirajganj and Natore are concerned about whether they can achieve their expected yields this year as early floods have badly damaged their crops in the vast wetland.

"I cultivated five bighas of paddy at a cost of Tk 62,000 to get about 110-120 maunds of paddy worth around Tk 85,000 but my dreams have gone belly up as the entire field is submerged," said Md Aiyub Ali, a farmer of Chatmohar upazila in Pabna.

"In order to salvage what I can, I need to engage double the number of workers for harvesting," he added.

Making matters worse, labour costs have risen to about Tk 850 per worker while it was Tk 650 to Tk 700 last year.

Ali has spent about Tk 12,000 on labour costs to harvest just 30 maunds of paddy from two bighas of land so far, putting him at a loss of between Tk 4,000 and Tk 5,000 per bigha considering a selling price of Tk 750 per maund (37 kilogrammes).

"I cannot even get a good price for what is harvested as the crop is damaged," he said.

Like him, most farmers in the country's northern region are fearing poor production this year due to the untimely rains that have damaged crops while also creating additional harvesting costs.

Similarly, officials the Department of



Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Pabna, Natore and Sirajganj expect yields to fall short of their estimated targets.

"Last year, we cultivated Boro paddy on 55,221 hectares of land across nine upazilas in Pabna to get 2.52 tonnes of rice with an output of about 4.57 tonnes per hectare," said Md Saiful Islam, deputy director of the Pabna DAE.

"This year, we cultivated 55,388 hectares and expected to get 4.59 tonnes of rice but after harvesting about 80 per cent of the crop, we got only 4.1 to 4.12 tonnes of rice," he added.

During a visit to various villages in the Chhaikhola and Beel Cholon

unions in Chatmohar upazila, this correspondent found that most farmers were struggling to save what they could from submerged croplands.

"After harvesting the paddy, we take them back home in a boat made of polythene bags as nothing is available in such a sudden disaster," said Arman Hossain, a farmer of Afradah Beel in Chalan Beel.

Even after harvesting the paddy though, farmers need to employ workers to assist in drying the crop, he added.

Md Ahsan Shahid Sarkar, additional deputy director of the Sirajganj DAE, told The Daily Star that Boro paddy had been cultivated on a total of

141,050 hectares of land this season to get 5.98 lakh tonnes of rice.

"We have already harvested 85 per cent of the paddy to get a production of 4.01 tonnes per hectare this year while it was 4.23 tonnes per hectare last year," he said.

Production has fallen as early flood water due to incessant rain has broken the banks of rivers in the wetland, Shahid added.

Lutfunnahar Luna, agriculture officer of Tarash upazila in Sirajganj, said farmers in her region cultivated paddy on 22,360 hectares of land but production has been less than adequate.

"We are only getting 3.09 tonnes of rice per hectare, which is much too poor considering the inputs," Luna added.

Dr Md Easin Ali, deputy director of the Natore DAE, said the highest yield of paddy comes from Chalan Beel's Natore region every year but this year, production is falling short due to water invading the wet land.

"Last year, we got 4.72 tonnes of rice from each hectare but now we are getting a maximum of 4.66 tonnes of rice from the same amount of land," Easin added.

Floods usually hit Chalanbeel in June, when most of the paddy crops are already harvested but heavy rains came just when harvesting began in mid-May this year, raising threats of a potential production shortfall that has already started pushing up prices in local markets.

Making budget for life and livelihood

MUHAMMAD ABDUL MAZID

In the last two years, many expected that the budget would be framed keeping three perspectives in mind: economic aspect concerning people's lives and livelihoods; ethical aspect regarding legalising black money at a substantially reduced rate of tax, without any question and penalty; and the need for thinking out of the box of a conventional annual budget.

First of all, we urgently needed a budget for life and livelihood as the Covid-19 pandemic raged on. It has been the need of the hour. Not only in Bangladesh, but countries throughout the globe are also compelled to formulate extraordinary budgets.



As external trade activities are facing serious disorders due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic and the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war, countries are busy looking for ways to protect their own homes.

One good news for us has always been there that we are getting inward remittances.

Our expatriates are sending money home, but the money is not being spent. Remitted money is being stockpiled in bank vaults and contributing to the surplus liquidity in banks.

The construction of houses has stalled and festival sales during Eid and Pahela Baishakh slumped for two consecutive years. Though in recent times, we are seeing a return to buying and selling, tours and transfers and online sales have seen a surge, it can't alone drive the economic recovery.

UPCOMING BUDGET

A national budget can't be separately viewed from a budget of life and livelihood. The budget must show the pathways for life and livelihood of people.

Usually, a national budget deals with all aspects of human life, but all the issues are not adequately focused on. The upcoming budget should have started this practice. It should have been framed like an emergency-cum-recovery time budget. It should not be more like a business-as-usual budget.

In the last two years, some priority sectors were given additional allocations, but those could not be utilised properly and those were not enough to revive an economy, hit hard by the pandemic.

The stimulus packages announced by the government were well-thought-out and praiseworthy. But the purpose of the intervention was not fully realised as big businesses could not utilise the money they received. Most of their loans are turning bad now.

On the other hand, small businesses, which were in urgent need of the money to survive and restart, did not get access to the stimulus money as banks could not disburse the money in full due to procedural limitations.

Banks were not the right choice for the job as they do not have direct links with small-scale businesses scattered across the country that are more connected with microfinance institutions. These are the businesses that needed the money most.

A financial insurance scheme could be developed to take money to small entrepreneurs as quickly as possible. They are the driving force of the economy.

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Asia's factory activity loses steam in May

REUTERS, Tokyo

Asia's factory activity slowed in May as China's heavy-handed coronavirus curbs continued to disrupt supply chains and dampen demand, adding to woes for some countries in the region that are already struggling with surging raw material prices.

Manufacturers slowed activity last month in economies ranging from Japan to Taiwan and Malaysia, business surveys showed on Wednesday, a sign of the challenge policymakers face in combating inflation with tighter monetary policy - without crippling growth.

China's Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) stood at 48.1 in May, improving slightly from 46.0 the previous month but staying below the 50-point threshold that separates contraction from expansion, a private survey showed. The outcome was in line with Tuesday's official data that showed China's factory activity fell at a slower pace in May.

While Covid curbs are now being rolled back in some cities, suggesting the country's manufacturing slump has bottomed out, analysts do not expect a rapid economic rebound like that in early 2020, saying fears of fresh outbreaks will continue to weigh on confidence and demand.

"Disruptions to supply chains and goods distribution may gradually ease as Shanghai's lockdown ends. But we're not out of the woods as China hasn't abandoned its zero-Covid policy altogether," said Toru Nishihama, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute in Tokyo.

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Employees are seen working on the production line of a Schneider Electric factory in Beijing. Disruptions to supply chains and goods distribution may gradually ease as Shanghai's lockdown ends, say economists.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

India growth slows in Q1

AFP, New Delhi

India's growth slowed further in the first three months of 2022, the National Statistics Office said Tuesday, with inflation and higher oil prices denting a post-pandemic recovery.

Asia's third-largest economy grew 4.1 per cent, year-on-year, in the last quarter, NSO data showed.

Annual growth for the 12 months to the end of March stood at 8.7 per cent. Rising global commodity prices have sparked concern among policymakers, with India's central bank announcing its first interest rate hike in nearly four years this month.

The country of 1.4 billion people imports more than 80 per cent of its crude oil and the cost of meeting domestic fuel demand has soared since Russia invaded Ukraine in February.

India is also the world's largest importer of edible oils, prices of which are at record highs since the conflict began.