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BORO HARVEST

Blast disease sinks farmers' hopes in haors

STAR REPORT

Every year, a festive mood prevails in the haor regions at this time as farmers get busy harvesting and threshing their Boro crops. But not this year.

Many farmers in haor areas are in severe distress as a large chunk of their Boro crops have been damaged by the Blast disease, caused by fungus.

The disease, one of the most devastating cereal diseases in the world, has infected vast swathes of paddy fields in Hakaluki haor in Kulaura, Barlekha, Juri upazilas; Kawadighi haor in Moulvibazar Sadar upazila; and Haili haor of Sreemangal upazila.

"All my crop is gone," said Anil Das, a farmer in Palermura area of Hakaluki Haor in Kulaura.

He cultivated the BRRI Dhan-28 on 45 decimals of land.

Amid such a situation, a group of farmers held a press conference at Sreemangal Press Club on April 8 and said almost all Boro crops in the haor region have been damaged by the Blast disease.

Of the total 1,991 hectares dedicated to rice cultivation in the haor region, crops on 837 hectares have been infected with the Blast fungus, also known as rice rotten neck, according to Md Ashraf Uddin, additional director of the Department of Agricultural Extension's Field

- BRRI 28 variety hit by blast disease
- Paddy on 2,000 hectares infected with blast fungus
- Boro cultivated on 49.9 lakh hectares
- Boro production target 2.15cr tonnes this year
- 28pc of Boro crop in haor area has been harvested

Services Wing.

"Basically, those farmers who cultivated the early variety BRRI Dhan-28 had their crops affected," he said, adding that they have advised farmers to spray fungicide in the field to avert such a situation.

Those who sprayed fungicide did not lose much.

"However, we will discourage farmers to cultivate the BRRI Dhan-28 from next season," he said.

Once a highly productive Boro variety, the BRRI Dhan-28 has now become highly susceptible to pest attacks.

The BRRI Dhan-28 is the only fast-growing variety sold by the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation outpost in the haor area, said Ranjan Talukder, a farmer of Ulukandi village in Sunamganj's Jamalganj upazila.

"I didn't want to plant BRRI Dhan-28 paddy. As I didn't get other seeds, I was compelled to plant BRRI-28 seed," said Goura Das, a farmer in Palermura area of Hakaluki Haor.

Farmers were discouraged from planting the BRRI Dhan-28 rice seed and were urged to go for the modern BRRI Dhan-88 and Dhan-89, said Md Mohiuddin, an agriculturist at Sreemangal Upazila Agriculture Office.

Besides, the DAE suggested farmers to use fungicide twice. But some farmers did not do so. Furthermore, fungicide was washed away by rain in some areas.

"That's why such a huge amount of paddy have been damaged," Mohiuddin said.

A list of affected farmers would be prepared, said Shamsuddin Ahmed, deputy director at Directorate of Agricultural Extension in Moulvibazar. If any government fund is allocated in future, they would be assisted.

Our district correspondents concerned contributed to this report.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

This road in the capital's Mohakhali area is almost empty on the first day of Eid holidays yesterday. The city traffic became less

chaotic as thousands of people started leaving the capital to celebrate Eid with their near and dear ones outside Dhaka.

Don't indulge in mudslinging over nomination
Hasina asks party leaders, warns them of possible arson by BNP-Jamaat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the party leaders and activists to refrain from mudslinging over securing nominations.

She said there is no point in being involved in internal factionalism as she will give party tickets.

Hasina, also the prime minister, gave the instruction to the leaders of AL and its associate bodies through a video call during a joint meeting of the party.

The meeting was held at the AL chief's political office in the capital's Dhanmondi.

The PM said those who are interested in getting nominations will have to work with the party's grassroots leaders and activists in their electoral areas.

She asked the leaders not to get involved in any conflict in their respective areas, two AL leaders, who were present at the meeting, told The Daily Star.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

SUDAN FIGHTING

Thousands flee capital as ceasefire crumbles

Death toll rises to 270; 2,600 injured

AGENCIES

Thousands of residents yesterday fled Sudan's capital, where witnesses said bodies lay in the street from fighting between the army and paramilitaries after a 24-hour truce failed to take hold.

At least 270 people have died and 2,600 have been injured in the five days of fighting in Khartoum and elsewhere in the country, Sudan's health ministry said.

Foreign diplomats have been attacked, and United Nations emergency relief coordinator Martin Griffiths said the UN had received "reports of attacks and sexual violence against aid workers".

Governments started planning to evacuate their citizens, among them many UN staff.

The violence erupted on Saturday between the forces of two generals who seized power in a 2021 coup: army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

It followed a bitter dispute between them over the planned integration of the RSF into the regular army -- a key condition for a final deal aimed at restoring Sudan's democratic transition.

"Life in Khartoum is impossible if this war does not stop," said Alaway al-Tayeb, 33, on her way out of the capital.

"I tried to make children not see the slain bodies on the streets," she said, adding that her children currently suffer from shock and will need treatment.

Deafening explosions rattled buildings and heavy gunfire was

heard in Khartoum, as witnesses said plumes of thick black smoke emanated from buildings around the army headquarters in central Khartoum, reports AFP.

RSF fighters atop armoured vehicles and pickup trucks laden with weapons swarmed the streets. Fighter jets roared overhead and fired on RSF targets, the witnesses said.

Civilians huddled in their homes were becoming increasingly desperate, with dwindling food

supplies, power outages, and a lack of running water.

A 24-hour humanitarian ceasefire announced by South Sudan failed to take hold at its proposed start at 1600 GMT on Tuesday.

Yesterday, the RSF said it would "fully commit to a complete ceasefire", again from 1600 GMT and for 24 hours. The army had made no comment on such a development.

Thousands of people took matters into their own hands and, according to witnesses, began leaving their homes in Khartoum, some in cars and others on foot, including women and children.

They said the streets were littered with dead bodies, the stench of which filled the air.

"We are now on our way to Madani to stay with our relatives after my family and kids lived through the terror of explosions," said Mohamed Saleh, 43, a government employee.

"We were very worried fighters would start storming homes."

Out of 59 main hospitals in Khartoum, about 39 are currently "out of service", said the official doctors' union which reported

"severe shortages" in remaining facilities.

Webb telescope captures glowing starburst



CNN ONLINE

A brilliant starburst feature shines in the latest image taken by the James Webb Space Telescope. The space observatory captured a bright burst of star formation triggered by two spiral galaxies crashing into one another.

The colliding galaxies, known collectively as Arp 220, generated an infrared glow that contains the light of more than 1 trillion suns. For comparison, the Milky Way galaxy has a luminosity that is the equivalent of about 10 billion suns.

The scintillating light show from the ultra-luminous infrared galaxy is the spiked starburst feature at the center of the new Webb image, which was released on Monday.

The telescope's Near-Infrared Camera and Mid-Infrared Instrument captured the composite image.

Arp 220 is located 250 million light-years away in the Serpens constellation, and it's the brightest of the three galactic mergers closest to Earth.

These two galaxies began colliding about 700 million years ago, and as the gas and dust combined, a tremendous flare of star birth began.

India to become most populous country by June

AFP, New Delhi

India is set to overtake China as the world's most populous country by the end of June, UN estimates showed yesterday, posing huge challenges to a nation with creaking infrastructure and insufficient jobs for millions of young people.

The seismic shift will see India's population hit 1.4286 billion -- almost three million more than China's 1.4257 billion -- at mid-year, the United Nations Population Fund's State of World Population report forecast.

China has generally been regarded as the world's most populous country since the fall of the Roman Empire but last year its population shrank for the first time since 1960, while India's has continued to rise.

The South Asian giant spreads from the Himalayas to the beaches of Kerala, with 22 official languages, and nearly half its inhabitants are under 25.

The country faces huge challenges providing electricity, food and housing for its growing population, with many of its massive cities already struggling with water shortages, air and water pollution, and packed slums.

According to the Pew Research Centre, the number of people in India has grown by more than one billion since 1950, the year the UN began gathering population data.



Firefighters tackle a blaze at Janata Cold Storage in Chattogram city's Rajakhali area early yesterday. The cold storage, which had dry fish, caught fire after an explosion on the ground floor of the building. A worker is seen carrying a sack of dry fish out of the building. Four people were injured when the blast caused a wall to collapse on them.

US ELECTION LIES Fox settles Dominion case for \$787.5m

REUTERS, Wilmington

Fox Corp FOXA.O and Fox News on Tuesday settled a defamation lawsuit by Dominion Voting Systems for \$787.5 million, averting a trial putting one of the world's top media companies in the crosshairs over its coverage of false vote-rigging claims in the 2020 US election.

The settlement, which legal experts said was the largest struck by an American media company, was announced by the two sides and the judge in the case at the 11th hour.

The jury had been selected earlier in the day and the trial poised for opening statements in Wilmington, Delaware. Dominion had sought \$1.6 billion in damages in the lawsuit filed in 2021. Dominion CEO John Poulos called the settlement "historic."

"Fox has admitted to telling lies about Dominion that caused enormous damage to my company, our employees and our customers," Poulos said in a statement. "Truthful reporting in the media is essential to our democracy," Poulos said.

At issue in the lawsuit was whether Fox was liable for airing the false claims that Denver-based Dominion's ballot-counting machines were used to manipulate the presidential election in favour of Democrat Joe Biden over then-President Donald Trump, a Republican.

Tuesday's settlement spared Fox the peril of having some of its best-known figures called to the witness stand and subjected to potentially withering questioning.