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EARLY AMAN SEASON High costs, low prices worry northern farmers

PINAKI ROY, MOSTAFA SHABUJ and KONGKON KARMAKER

As farmers start harvesting and threshing early varieties of Aman paddy in the northern districts, the fear looms that their profit could be negligible due to higher production costs than last year.

In some cases, the price of paddy is even lower than last year, farmers said, adding that it is hard for them to make a profit of even Tk 50 per maund.

But the production cost increased this year as they have had to spend more on irrigation and pesticides.

Officially, a maund is equivalent to 37.32 kilogrammes, but it has become the practice in local markets to measure a maund as 40kg.

Visiting the Tengamagur seasonal paddy market in Bogura's Shajahanpur upazila last week, The Daily Star found paddy traders buying BRRI-49 (a fine variety of Aman) between Tk 1,120 and Tk 1,180 per maund.

Abdur Rouf, a paddy trader, said, "Last year, we bought BRRI-49 paddy for Tk 1,300-1,400 per maund. This year, prices are down a little due to the countrywide blockades. Traders from different districts are not coming due to fear of arson attacks."

Faridur Rahman, sub-assistant agriculture officer of the Bogura Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said, "We estimated the production cost of one kg of Aman paddy at Tk 28 for this season (Tk 1,120 per maund)."



- Paddy production costs have increased from 2022
- Price remains largely the same, in some cases lower
- Middlemen controlling the market

Last year, the production cost was Tk 26.50 per kg, he said.

Sarowar Hossain of Palsa village of Dinajpur's Ghoraghat upazila said he spent Tk 23,500 -- up from Tk 17,000 last year -- to cultivate Aman (BRRI-49 and Swarna-5) on 50 decimals of land this year and harvested 23 maunds of paddy.

He spent Tk 2,000 to purchase seeds and prepare the seedbed, Tk 3,000 on ploughing, Tk 2,000 on irrigation and weeding, Tk 2,500 on labourers, Tk 7,000 on fertiliser and pesticide, and Tk 7,000 on harvesting and threshing.

His production cost came out to Tk 1,021 per maund.

"Last year, the yield was better and the paddy price in our upazila was almost the same, but production cost increased as we had to irrigate land during cultivation [September] due to less rainfall. Also, it rained heavily throughout October and so there were more pest and insect attacks than last year," Sarowar said.

"I spent Tk 2,200 on pesticides last year, but this year it was Tk 5,000," Sarowar added.

Sarowar said he found the price of BR-11 was Tk 1,000 a maund, Swarna-5 Tk 1,100, and BRRI-49 Tk 1,150 when he went to the market on Thursday.

Abdur Rouf, a farmer in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila who cultivated Swarna-5 on five bighas this season, said, "Due to increase in fuel and fertiliser prices, production costs in our area increased too."

He said the price of urea fertiliser increased by Tk 300-350 per sack this year.

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PHOTO: REUTERS

A Red Cross vehicle, as part of a convoy believed to be carrying Israeli hostages, arrives at the Rafah border, amid a hostages-prisoners swap deal between Hamas and Israel, in southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

Israel-Hamas ceasefire takes hold in Gaza Strip

13 Israeli hostages, 39 Palestinian detainees released under
truce deal; aid trucks enter enclave from Egypt

AGENCIES

A temporary ceasefire between Israeli and Hamas forces took hold in the Gaza Strip yesterday, the first respite in 48 days of conflict that has devastated the Palestinian enclave, but both sides warned that the war was far from over.

No big bombings, artillery strikes or rocket attacks were reported although Hamas and Israel both accused each other of sporadic violations.

The ceasefire, which began at 7:00 am (local time), involved the release of 13 Israeli women and children held hostage by Hamas in exchange for 39 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

Two sources close to Hamas told AFP that 13 Israeli hostages were handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross for return to Israel.

"Half an hour ago, the prisoners were handed to the Red Cross who will take them to the Egyptians" at the Rafah crossing, said a source. Their release came after 10 Thais and a Filipino national were also freed by Hamas.

Israeli security sources later confirmed that 13 Israeli hostages

were handed over to Israeli forces.

In exchange, Israel released the first 39 Palestinians from its jails later yesterday, among them 24 women and 15 teenagers, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman said in a post on X.

Additional aid is to flow into Gaza, which has been gripped by a humanitarian crisis under weeks of Israeli bombardment that has

families displaced from the north, streets filled with people venturing out of home and shelters.

Hamas confirmed that all hostilities from its forces would cease. But Abu Ubaida, spokesperson for Hamas' armed wing, later stressed that this was a "temporary truce". The Israeli military also said fighting would resume soon.

The Israeli military also told Palestinians not to try to return to homes in the northern part of Gaza, which it described as a "dangerous war zone".

Palestinian health authorities said that since October 7, Israel has rained bombs on the Hamas-ruled aGazans.

Arab media reported that Israeli forces were preventing residents from returning to their homes in Gaza's north. Soldiers opened fire in one incident, Al Jazeera said, but there was no indication that it resulted in casualties.

Sirens sounded in two Israeli villages outside the southern Gaza Strip, warning of possible incoming Palestinian rockets. An Israeli government spokesman said Hamas had fired rockets in violation of the truce but there were no immediate reports of damage.

- Israel, Hamas say truce is temporary
- Gaza death toll nears 15,000

killed thousands of Palestinians.

Reuters journalists saw Israeli tanks moving away from the Gaza Strip at the northern end, and aid trucks rolling in from Egypt at the southern end. There was no sound of Israeli air force activity above northern Gaza, nor any of the contrails typically left by Palestinian rocket fire.

In Khan Younis town in southern Gaza, housing thousands of



Workers loading Aman paddy on to a truck along the Natore-Bogura regional highway in Bogura's Shajahanpur upazila. Traders at Tengamagur paddy market have bought the crop from farmers for Tk 1,000 to 1,200 per maund, depending on quality. Farmers say the prices, Tk 100 to 300 lower per maund compared to last year, cannot cover their production costs. Traders blame the lower prices on the lack of buyers and ongoing political unrest. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Help keep stability in the region Bangladesh foreign secy urges diplomats in India

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Expressing the Bangladesh government's commitment to free and fair polls, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen has urged foreign diplomats stationed in India to support regional stability.

He said Bangladesh is preparing for a national election, which takes place every five years in a festive mood.

Most of the political parties are taking part in the election and the people are expecting free, fair, and peaceful polls in early January, Masud told the envoys.

About 60 heads of missions, who are accredited to Bangladesh but are staying in New Delhi, attended the event at the Bangladesh High Commission yesterday evening.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Mustafizur Rahman moderated

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DEFERRING POLLS Two election commissioners not on the same page

STAR REPORT

Two election commissioners have differed on the rescheduling of the upcoming national election.

One of them said the deferring of the schedule is not in their consideration while another said, without mentioning the name of BNP, that they have the scope for rescheduling it if one major party decides to join it.

Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman yesterday said a major political party and its allies are not taking part in the electoral process.

"If the party and its allies express their desire to participate in the polls, we will consider that. There is the scope for the EC to reschedule the election," Anisur told reporters after a meeting with administration and election officials of Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts at the Moulvibazar Circuit House.

He, however, said the EC has not received any request from any parties regarding pushing back the date of the election, which is slated for January 7.

"It is not for us to see who participates in the election and who does not. If anyone does not accept our invitation and join the polls, we have nothing to do," he added.

The BNP and some other political parties have taken to the streets

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INDIAN TUNNEL Drilling snag delays rescue of 41 men

AGENCIES

Hopes for the imminent rescue of 41 men trapped in a highway tunnel in the Indian Himalayas for nearly two weeks were dashed by a problem with the drilling equipment, officials said yesterday.

The men, construction workers from some of India's poorest states, have been confined in the 4.5-km (3-mile) tunnel in Uttarakhand state since it caved in early on November 12. Authorities have said they are safe, with access to light, oxygen, food, water and medicines.

Attempts to pull them out by drilling through the debris of rock, stones and metal and pushing through an evacuation pipe have been slowed by snags, reports Reuters.

Rescuers had hoped to finish the drilling late on Thursday but had to suspend it after the platform on which the auger machine is placed was damaged, and subsequently a metal pipe was found stuck to the machine, requiring it to

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Prehistoric women hunted as often as men



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Prehistoric women frequently engaged in hunting as much as men and their anatomy also made them better suited for it, suggests a new review of studies.

For decades, historians and anthropologists have held the popular view that prehistoric men were hunters while women from these times played their roles in groups as gatherers.

Popular culture has also spread portrayals of men as hunters with spears in hand, accompanied by women with babies strapped to their backs and carrying baskets.

But a growing body of evidence has suggested many of these conceptions about early women and men are not accurate.

Prehistoric women not only engaged in the practice of hunting, but their female anatomy and biology likely made them intrinsically better suited for it, revealed two new studies.