

## CLIMATE CRISIS, PARCHED LANDS AND A RAY OF HOPE

The sun beats down on Patuakhali's once fertile lands. Rising temperatures and erratic rainfall have choked the life out of these fields, turning them to dust. Farmers are forced to abandon their ancestral professions, their dreams withering under the climate's harsh grip. Yet, a flicker of hope emerges in Khulna. Innovative solutions, like climate-resilient crops, have given new life to these lands.

### FIELDS OF DUST

Low rainfall, soil salinity causing farmers to quit profession; many rice varieties disappearing



SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Agriculture was his life. But that life, like countless others, has been uprooted by the harsh reality of climate change.

As a child, Nurul Islam used to follow his father to the thriving green fields in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila. He learned the trade from his old man and took up the profession once he was of age.

Nurul was doing well, cultivating Aman paddy and other crops on his 2.5 acres of land.

But then climate change struck. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and dwindling yields forced Nurul out of his ancestral village. He was compelled to sell his prized oxen, abandon his farm, and seek work miles away as a sanitary worker.

"Struggling to make ends meet for the family, I gradually accumulated Tk 4 lakh in debt. So, I sold most of my belongings, paid back some of the debt and quit farming. Now I am working as a sanitary worker in Chattogram and living there with my wife and daughter," he shared.

Nurul's story is not unique. Across the region, farmers face the same cruel twist of fate, with their agricultural heritage slowly crumbling to changing climate.

Salim Khan, a local farmer, said, "Over the past few years, the temperature in the region has continued rising, causing one-third of paddy saplings to die. Rain is important for paddy cultivation in the region, but it doesn't rain often. Due to this, the output is low, and the rice that is produced is of poor quality, forcing us to use it for poultry feed."

In the last six years, the average temperature in Patuakhali has increased by at least 4.5 degrees Celsius – from 36.5 degrees in 2017 to 40 degrees in 2023, said Mahbuba Sukhi, in charge of Meteorological Department in the district.

"Even 15-20 years earlier, rains started from Baishakh [the first Bangla month of the year, April-May in the Gregorian calendar] and continued till around Kartik-Agrahayan [October-November]. Now it starts raining in June-July and lasts for around two and half months," she explained.

"In April 2017, there was 249mm of rain in Patuakhali. In April 2022, the number was 14.1mm. Also, the average rainfall in the district dropped by 83.75mm – from 229.22mm in 2017 to 145.46mm in 2022," she added.

Dr Md Sahidul Islam Khan, chief scientific officer at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute in Patuakhali, said, "Farmers are no longer getting the expected yield due to rising temperatures, alongside increasing

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



### Climate resilient agriculture Once barren, now thriving crop fields



DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Even three years back, vast lands would remain barren throughout most of the year in Koyra upazila of Khulna due to high level of salinity in the nearby rivers and waterbodies.

Aman paddy cultivation during monsoon was the only option for farmers to cultivate the land in absence of fresh water for irrigation during rest of the year. Many would leave the villages for cities in search of alternative livelihoods.

Koyra upazila, located in the vicinity of the Sundarbans, is among the areas most affected by salinity and climate change in the southern part of the country.

The situation, however, has changed significantly in the past three years as the farmers embraced salinity tolerant crop varieties to cultivate their lands round the year.

As such, the once fallow lands are gradually transforming into thriving crop fields.

The farmers have adapted to cultivating salinity-tolerant crops – including paddy, fruits, vegetables – as well as rearing fish varieties through training provided by government and private organisations, bringing in a shift that has not only revitalised the agricultural landscape of the region, but also improved the financial

condition of the community.

Visiting at least six villages in the upazila, this correspondent saw beans being cultivated in vast lands, while eggplants are grown in the yard of almost all houses. Fish are reared in ponds and enclosures using bamboo lofts, as well as in crop fields alongside paddy cultivation. Various other crops, including potato, garlic, corn and watermelon are also being cultivated.

Wholesalers from numerous districts come to purchase these crops, said farmers.

"We are farmers for generations. Due to salinity, we struggled to cultivate crops for most of the year over the last three decades. I was forced to leave the village to find work elsewhere for a while. After returning home, I rented three bighas of land from someone to do integrated farming of fish and salinity-tolerant vegetable varieties," said Abdul Quader of Naksha village.

"Over the last couple of years, the situation has improved. I managed to buy some land. This year, I cultivated

fish and vegetables on five bighas of land spending Tk 1.50 lakh. I am hoping to make a profit of Tk 6-7 lakh," he added.

Over 40 farmers in the village are also seeing success by doing the same.

Md Abdullah Al Mamun, upazila agriculture officer, said over 5,000 farmers are now cultivating salinity-resilient crop varieties in Koyra with support, advice, training, seeds, and fertilisers from the Department of Agricultural Extension.

According to DAE office in Koyra upazila, integrated farming of fish and vegetables has gained popularity. In the last year, a total 24,259 tonnes of vegetables were produced in 1,270 hectares of land, including 2,500 tonnes of eggplants, while 44,528 tonnes of watermelon were produced in 1,200 hectares of land.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

fish and vegetables on five bighas of land spending Tk 1.50 lakh. I am hoping to make a profit of Tk 6-7 lakh," he added.

Over 40 farmers in the village are also seeing success by doing the same.

Md Abdullah Al Mamun, upazila agriculture officer, said over 5,000 farmers are now cultivating salinity-resilient crop varieties in Koyra with support, advice, training, seeds, and fertilisers from the Department of Agricultural Extension.

According to DAE office in Koyra upazila, integrated farming of fish and vegetables has gained popularity. In the last year, a total 24,259 tonnes of vegetables were produced in 1,270 hectares of land, including 2,500 tonnes of eggplants, while 44,528 tonnes of watermelon were produced in 1,200 hectares of land.

Also, Boro rice is being produced in 4,925 hectares of land, sunflower in 88 hectares, maize in 40 hectares, mustard in 146 hectares and sweet potato in 150 hectares of land in the upazila.

The Field Research Department of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute in 2015 engaged in verifying feasibility of cultivating crops in saline fallow lands of Koyra upazila, and found the salinity level to be too high for regular crop varieties to be cultivated.

However, researchers and 37 farmers did not give up and continued their efforts, and in 2017 they successfully cultivated Brr-67, a high salinity-tolerant Boro rice variety, on 50 bighas of land in East Maharajpur area of the upazila.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

### Working to control extortion transport sector: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader has said extortion in transport has been going on for a long time.

"And efforts are underway to bring it under control," he said while speaking in a press conference at AL's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday morning.

Regarding the prices of essentials, Quader said the government is working sincerely to control the prices of goods in the market. We are working and the result will come one day."

About BNP, he said the party is daydreaming about a regime change. "There is no alternative to change the government without elections. So, if they [BNP] want to change the government, they have to wait for another election," he said.



### AL government synonymous with syndicate: Rizvi

UNB, Dhaka

People perceive the AL government as a regime of syndicators and plunderers, said BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday.

Rizvi made the comments at a press briefing held at BNP Nayapalton headquarters.

"The dummy AL government could not care less about poor people's voice," he said.

AL has been accused of corruption and abuse of power, with one of their former ministers reportedly owning over 350 assets in London valued at two hundred million pounds, alongside allegations of money laundering to various destinations including Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Europe, Australia, and America.

Rizvi said following the January 7 "dummy election", AL's sole agenda is to eradicate BNP from the political landscape.



### Ten to receive Swadhinata Padak

UNB, Dhaka

Ten individuals have been chosen for this year's Swadhinata Padak (Independence Medal), Bangladesh's highest civilian award, for their contributions to the country.

Kazi Abdus Sattar, freedom fighter flight sergeant Md Fazlul Haque (posthumous) and Freedom fighter Shaheed Abu Nayem Md Nazib Uddin Khan (Khurram) (posthumous) have been named for their contributions to Bangladesh's independence and the Liberation War.

Dr Mobarak Ahmad Khan will receive the award for his contributions to science and technology, the Cabinet Division said in a notification yesterday.

Dr Harishankar Das will be honoured with the award for his contribution to medicine.

Mohammad Rafikuzzaman and Firoza Khatun will receive the honour for their contribution to culture and sports, respectively.

Aranya Chiran, Freedom fighter Prof Dr Mollah Obaidul Baki and SM Abraham Lincoln have been picked for the award in the public service category.

Last year, nine individuals and one institution were awarded the Swadhinata Padak (Independence Award), for their contributions to the country.

Bangladesh has been honouring individuals and institutions with the award every year since 1977 ahead of Independence Day on March 26.

### Gazipur cylinder fire sees first casualty

15 more in critical condition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seventy-year-old Sultana Khatun rushed to Dhaka from Sirajganj upon receiving news that four of her family members were severely burnt in the Gazipur gas cylinder fire.

She was still clinging to the hope that her loved ones would someday return to their normal lives.

But that hope was lost yesterday morning when she was informed of the death of her fourth son Solaiman Mollah, 45.

Sultana had six sons. Two of her sons – Solaiman and Uzzal Mollah – lived in Kaliakair of Gazipur with their family members. Uzzal's wife Shilpi Akhter, 40, was admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery with 25 percent burns, alongside their two sons – Nirob, 7, and Niloy, 3 with respectively 32 and 8 percent burns.

After the death of her husband 30 years back, Sultana took it upon herself to raise her sons.

"I went through so much to raise my son. Now he's gone. Who will take care of me?" said Sultana.

"Solaiman used to sell scrap items in Gazipur. His wife Shapla Akhter works at a garment factory. They have five children" said Siddique Hossain, their neighbour.

Solaiman died around 10:00am at the ICU of the burn institute, said Mridul Kantu Darker, resident surgeon of the hospital. He had 95 percent burns on his body, Mridul added.

Thirty individuals are currently undergoing treatment at the hospital. Of them, at least 15 victims are now in critical condition.

These patients have sustained over 50 percent burns on their bodies. Almost everyone's respiratory tract was burnt, said Health Minister Dr Samanta Lal Sen.

Of the victims, seven are in the ICU and one is in HDU.

On March 13, at least 32 people were injured after a gas cylinder caught fire following a leak in Gazipur's Kaliakair.



The Daily Star was awarded at the South Asian Digital Media Awards 2023 in the Best in Audience Engagement category. Md Tajdin Hassan, chief business officer of The Daily Star, received the award on behalf of the newspaper at an event in New Delhi on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

### WAN-IFRA MEDIA AWARDS

Star wins for 6th time

STAR REPORT

The Daily Star has been awarded at the South Asian Digital Media Awards 2023, presented by WAN-IFRA (the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers), for the sixth time.

The newspaper won the special jury mention award in the category of Best in Audience Engagement for its digital campaign "What's your friendship Score?", marking International Friendship Day 2023 in partnership with local business conglomerate PRAN.

A special microsite was designed for the campaign where audience engaged in an interactive game to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1