



Standing Boro paddy on around 50 acres of land at Sachiya village in Pirojpur's Nazirpur upazila got damaged due to the impact of hot toxic gas emitted from a brick kiln set up close to croplands.

PHOTO: STAR

Brick kiln on croplands damages Boro on 50 acres

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Toxic gas from a brick kiln set up close to agricultural lands damaged standing Boro paddy on 50 acres of land belonging to nearly one hundred farmers in Nazirpur upazila during the last two weeks.

Moreover, a large number of fruits bearing trees including litchi trees were also affected by the toxic gas emitted from the brick kiln at Sachiya village under Malikhali union in the upazila.

Affected farmers said several farmers of the village cultivated Boro paddy on around 50 acres of land, but toxic hot gas from the brickfield totally damaged their crops.

If the paddy did not get damaged during this time of the cultivation period, they could have harvested the crops within the next two to three weeks, farmers said.

"Around a week ago, farmer of the village suddenly noticed that their standing paddies on vast tracts of land were gradually turning blackish," farmer

Protish Dutta of the village said.

Not only Boro paddy but many fruits bearing trees were also affected by the toxic gas from the brick kiln, another farmer Sanatan Choudhury said.

A number of farmers of the village said usually they can cultivate only Boro paddy once in a year as the entire area is geographically a marshland and remains waterlogged round the year.

"I have cultivated Boro paddy on several bighas of land by taking loans from different NGOs and local money lenders," farmer Milton Bala said, adding that he does not know how he will repay the loan and bear his family expenses throughout the year.

Local farmers alleged that there is



brick kiln along the bank of the Madhumoti river at the village and Malikhali Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Mohammad Ruhul Amin alias Bablu Daria is its owner.

"During the brick burning season this year, the brickfield owner burnt huge quantity of coal and wood," farmer Sanjeet Kumar said, adding that the excessive heat generated from the brick kiln spread all over the village and affected the standing crops and other fruit bearing trees.

"The toxic gas from the brick kiln has damaged a huge number of fruits at my litchi orchard," fruit grower Uttam Bala said.

While talking UP Chairman Bablu Daria claimed that the paddy fields were

not damaged due to the toxic gas from his brick kiln, rather it has been affected due to the ongoing heat waves.

"I have been running the brick kiln for the last 20 years, but none has raised such allegation before," the UP chairman added.

Recently a team from Bangladesh Rice Research Institute's Gopalganj Regional Office visited the spot and they did not found sign of any disease or natural calamities behind the crops damage, Nazirpur Upazila Agriculture Officer Esratunnesa Easha said.

"Primarily we assume that the toxic gas from the brick kiln has affected the nearby paddy fields and other fruit bearing trees," she said, adding that the brickfield has been constructed close to agricultural lands, violating the Brick Kiln Establishment Act. If the ongoing heat wave is the reason behind the crops damage, symptoms would have been visible in other areas as well, she further said.

Char haats on Brahmaputra river bed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Char haat, a weekly market, is a place where char farmers sell their produces at a low price and buy the essentials at a high cost.

Farmers said there are 12 such Char haats located at different river basin villages on the Brahmaputra river bed in Kurigram.

Usually, most of the char haats take place twice a week, where trading goes on from early morning till noon.

A number of char farmers said they sell their products at low prices in the char haats as it is quite difficult for them to carry the agricultural goods on foot and sell those to the mainland markets.

On the other hand, farmers buy seeds, fertiliser, diesel, pesticides and other essentials like sarees, lungis and all kinds of clothes and cosmetics from the char haats at high prices.

They, however, prefer to sell their cows, goats, horses and buffaloes to the mainland markets.

Traders at char haats said they purchase different items from char farmers at a cheaper price as it costs them Tk 100 to Tk 120 to transport each maund of goods from char markets to the mainland.

Horse drawn vehicles are the only mode of transportation as each horse cart can carry 12 to



PHOTO: STAR

15 maunds of goods, they said.

Farmer Dilu Sheikh, who came to Jorgachh Haat in Chilmari upazila, said as they have to walk a long way through the sandy land to go to the mainland market, they were compel to sell their produces at the char haat and that too at a low price.

Farmer Nuru Mandal, who came to Jatrapur Haat in Sadar upazila, said they prefer to sell their products at char haat as buyers from different areas come here to buy and sell their goods.

Trader Jobaidul Haque said every char haat on the Brahmaputra river bed runs for four to five months during the dry season every year.

Myanmar

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In a rare in-person interview, Colonel Nadeh Htoo, an operational commander of Brigade 6 of the KNU's military wing that captured the army base, said junta forces have tried and failed to retake the area.

"They have been unsuccessful in making a breakthrough twice now," he said.

He added that the rebels controlled most of the area and would continue to consolidate authority before handing over administration to the KNU's political arm. "Our military operation will end at the end of April," he said.

A spokesman for the military government did not answer calls from Reuters.

Faced with the rebel assault, several hundred junta soldiers tasked with defending Myawaddy withdrew from their positions, with a group of less than 200 retreating to near a bridge connecting the Myanmar town with Thailand's Mae Sot.

These soldiers must either surrender to Thai authorities or to the KNU, failing which they may be targeted by resistance troops, Nadeh Htoo said.

Thailand's Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara said last week that the junta soldiers would be allowed to cross the border if they gave up arms and requested refuge.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing said in a speech last month that the forces fighting the military were "destroying the path towards forming a Union based on democratic values and federalism".

But for the allied resistance forces in Myawaddy, yesterday was a day to celebrate.

"We are very happy that our revolution has come this far. If we can take more Myanmar bases we will achieve our objective (of overthrowing the junta)," said Myo Myint Keyaw, a 26-year-old fighter in a People's Defence Force, a militia allied with the KNU fighters.

Upazila chairman aspirant

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had a brain haemorrhage."

According to sources, Delwar submitted the nomination form online and then went to the district election office to submit a copy of the form in person.

On his way back home, Antor Parvez Mohon, general secretary of Awami Swechasebak League's upazila unit, and also a supporter of Rubel, intercepted Delwar. The two had an altercation.

At one stage, several other supporters of Rubel reached the scene. They shoved Delwar on to a black microbus and drove away.

An hour later, they dropped off Delwar in front of his house.

Delwar's elder brother Emdadul Haque said, "Antor Parvez Mohon and his men abducted my brother from in front of the election office and tortured him."

Natore Superintendent of Police Md Tariqul Islam said they were examining CCTV footage to identify

the culprits.

"Delwar and his family members are not cooperating in the investigation. They are not even willing to file a complaint with police," he said.

Asked about filing a complaint, Emdadul said they would think about it later.

Natore District Election Officer Abdul Latif Sheikh confirmed that Delwar submitted his nomination papers online.

"There was no need for Delwar to visit the election office. The Election Commission has been informed about the abduction and the local administration has been asked to take necessary action," said Latif, also the returning officer of Natore.

Contacted, Lutful Habib Rubel said he learnt about the abduction incident from media reports and that he did not know who was behind it.

The Daily Star could not reach Mohan for comments as his cellphone was found switched off.

Udichi ignored govt directives

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position in the government is unfortunate," said Udichi in a statement.

Despite claiming that there was no security concern, the decision to restrict the Pahela Baishakh programmes to the evening is akin to surrendering to fundamentalists and religious bigots, said the statement signed by Kongkan Nag, publicity and information technology secretary of Udichi.

Earlier, the state minister told reporters that many people were killed and many others were paralysed following the bomb attacks at Ramna Batamul in the capital and a Udichi's programme in Jashore on Pahela Baishakh.

He mentioned that as the government remains always vigilant to ensure the safety of people's lives and property in every event, no terrorist attack or terrorist incident has occurred in Bangladesh in the recent past.

The state minister urged everyone's cooperation, pointing out that the government bears the responsibility of ensuring security so that happy celebrations do not turn into tragic events.

He asked who would be held accountable in the event of an accident at the location where Udichi held programmes defying the government's directives.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) in a statement early yesterday said, "It is very unfortunate and never expected from a progressive cultural organisation like Udichi to hold an event without following the necessary instructions to ensure security."

"In the past, Udichi has seen extremist attacks at different programmes, so it is expected that Udichi will respect various security instructions given by the DMP in the future for the sake of their own and the people's safety," the statement added.

"We think that those who hold

1,891 aspirants

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aspirants of the upazila elections to submit nomination papers online.

"We have not received any news of untoward incidents centring the submission of nomination papers", he added.

The last date for withdrawal of candidature is April 22, and the nomination papers will be scrutinised on April 17.

In the first phase, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMS) will be used in 22 upazilas of Shariatpur, Chandpur, Jamalpur, Pabna, Sirajganj, Jashore, Pirojpur, Manikganj, and Cox's Bazar districts.

The sixth upazila parishad polls will be held in four phases.

The second phase of the elections will be held on May 21 in 61 upazilas around the country.

The commission is likely to hold the third phase of the election on May 29 and the fourth phase on June 5.

programmes without following rules or directives should take that responsibility," Arafat said.

On March 31, Udichi issued a statement condemning the government's decision to restrict the timing of the Pahela Baishakh celebratory programme to 6:00pm.

Its leaders said the decision to stop the programmes at 6:00pm was unwarranted and could not be acceptable. They demanded reconsidering the government's decision.

Heatwave

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at isolated places in the 24 hours from 9:00am today.

Besides, Rangpur, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions may experience rains or thundershowers in 24 hours from 9:00am tomorrow, it said.

The country's highest temperature was recorded in Rangamati at 40 degrees Celsius yesterday.

Kejriwal's custody extended

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Kejriwal has challenged his arrest saying it is unlawful and in a separate hearing yesterday, the Supreme Court of India asked the ED to respond to the challenge in the week of April 29, after which it will hear the case.

Kejriwal is a fierce critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and rejects the charges against him and other opposition leaders as politically motivated.

Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) deny the accusations and say law enforcement agencies operate independently.

Kejriwal's March 21 arrest sparked protests in Delhi and in the northern state of Punjab governed by his decade-old Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and also drew the attention of the United States and Germany.

His detention has united the 27-party opposition alliance called INDIA, which includes AAP and the Congress party, but opinion polls suggest that BJP has a strong lead over them and is likely to easily win a historic third term.

India starts voting in a seven-phase general election on April 19. Votes will be counted on June 4.

Economy in for a double whammy

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However, farm production grew 4.65 percent in the October-December period from 4.22 percent a year ago.

Economist Zahid said the decline in manufacturing sector growth could be because imports are becoming more difficult due to the central bank's restrictions. It is difficult to keep up the pace of production if machinery cannot be imported, he said.

The country's manufacturing sector is both export-oriented and domestic-oriented, he said, adding that manufacturing aimed at the domestic market saw a decline because of a lack of demand caused by the reduction of people's purchasing power.

Zahid identified three factors behind the overall decline in economic growth: macroeconomic mismanagement, import restrictions, and a distressed financial sector.

He said macroeconomic mismanagement became evident as inflation could not be controlled, which resulted in people's reduced purchasing capacity.

Also, imports had to be restricted because of the crisis in the foreign currency reserves, he said, adding that such a crisis could not be overcome as the foreign exchange

market management was not proper.

Besides, good borrowers do not get loans from the financial institutions. Instead, bad borrowers are entertained as per their requirements, he further said.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, echoed Zahid and said high inflation, low investment, and import restrictions have adversely affected the country's economy, especially the manufacturing and service sectors.

"Domestic factors are more responsible than outside factors behind the slow economic growth," he said.

He also said the country's exports and inward remittances were turning around slightly, however, fresh escalation in tension in the Middle East might add to Bangladesh's economic stress.

Already fuel prices in the international market have started to increase. If fuel prices increase, then shipping costs and other commodity prices will also increase, he added.

How much Bangladesh's economy will be affected depends on how long the tension persists, he said.

In this context, the Bangladesh government has to beef up its measures to control inflation and encourage investment, he added.