

Approval of Golden Rice a threat to farmers' rights Say speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Farmers across the country could lose their rights over paddy seeds if the government approves the cultivation of Golden Rice, experts said at a programme yesterday.

Farmers can now store seeds or purchase them from markets traditionally. However, they will be bound to depend on the company that would provide Golden Rice seeds if it gets approved for cultivation, they added.

The speakers also raised concerns about the lack of authentic research and documentation proving that the genetically modified Golden Rice variety is free from environmental or health hazards.

"If Golden Rice is approved, crores of farmers may lose their fortunes to foreign companies," said Farida Akhter, executive director of Policy Research for Development Alternative (UBINIG).

The discussion was jointly organised by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, UBINIG, Anti-GMO Morcha, Nayakrishi Andolon, and Nagorik Uddyog, bringing together environmentalists, farmers, leaders and rights activists.

Golden Rice, which is claimed to contain Vitamin A, has been developed through genetic engineering by inserting maize genes into BRRI-dhan-29 rice variety.

Mentioning that Golden Rice is controversial globally, Farida said only the Philippines had approved it briefly before canceling it amid farmers' movement.

"Why should we hand over our conventional BRRI-dhan-29 to a company? If its patent is given to a company like Syngenta, won't it undermine the rights of crores of farmers to cultivate this variety?" she asked.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of BELA, said, "Health and environmental impacts of the rice should be determined through impartial study, not by the company. We don't know if it's safe to insert genes from one species into another."

"It cannot be accepted that a company takes our seeds, brings other varieties and takes away the patent," she added.

"Syngenta has made Bangladesh an experimental centre for its rice. Political and economic pressure is involved to get approval for Golden Rice. Moreover, the decision-making process is not participatory and transparent," she alleged.

BETAGI-SANKIPUR PRIMARY SCHOOL Risky, but still in use

Students attend classes in dilapidated structure as new building remains incomplete for nearly 4yrs

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Students of Betagi-Sankipur VDC Government Primary School in Patuakhali's Dasmina upazila are attending classes in an old, dilapidated school building as the construction work of the new school building remains incomplete even after four years.

The Local Government Engineering Department started the construction of a new two-storey school building on September 10, 2020 at a cost of Tk 99.57 lakh. The deadline for the project was June 30, 2021.

Md Gias Uddin, a contractor and incumbent president of Patuakhali District Chamber of Commerce and Industries, got the contract for the work.

Following the contractor's application, the deadline was extended till January 2023, upon failure to meet the original deadline.

However, even a year after the last deadline, the building's construction still remains incomplete.

As such, students are compelled to attend classes in the old single-storey building amid risks, despite the building being deemed unsafe.

Established in 1988 in a small tin shed house, the school became a single-storey building in 2000 with three classrooms. Over the next two decades, the building gradually became unsuitable for conducting classes.

Sometime after construction work for



the new building began, the contractor abruptly halted the work, forcing school authorities to continue using the old one.

Moreover, children have not been able to use the school's playground, as it remains occupied by construction materials since the work began.

"The plaster of the old building's ceilings and walls is falling off. We attend classes amid fear that it might collapse any time. We cannot play during recess as the playground is occupied with stones and iron rods," said Apan Chandra Adhikari, a fifth grader at the school.

Abdur Rab, headteacher of the school, said, "At present, there are 130 students in the school. Academic activities of the school have been gravely affected as the new building remains incomplete. The ceiling leaks water during the rain, the plaster is decaying, and the structure

seems fragile and may collapse at any time. Students are being compelled to attend classes in the old building amid such risk."

Expressing concern, Marium Parvin, assistant education officer in the upazila, urged authorities concerned to take urgent steps.

Contacted over phone, Gias Uddin said the construction work could not be completed due to shortage of workers during the pandemic. Later, the delay lingered due to personal reasons of the chief mason.

Maqbul Hossain, LGED engineer in Dasmina upazila, said the contractor was sent several letters to complete the work, but he did not comply.

"A letter has been sent to the higher authority on March 12, 2023 to cancel the existing contract. We are trying to complete the building's construction by appointing a new contractor," he added.



Students of Betagi-Sankipur VDC Government Primary School are forced to attend classes in this dilapidated school building as the construction work of a new building remains incomplete even after four years.

PHOTO: STAR

Rain brings relief but triggers waterlogging

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, City

A nor'wester hit the port city and adjoining areas yesterday, triggering a thunderstorm alongside torrential rains that dropped temperature in the region.

The nor'wester or "kalbaishakhi" struck around 3:00pm, and the downpour followed soon after, said an official at Patenga Met Office.

The storm stopped people on their tracks alongside vehicles on many city streets as low-lying areas were submerged in rainwater. People in Chakbazar, Sholoshahar No 2 Gate, Probartak Mor, Katalganj, Muradpur, Bahaddarhat, Panchlaish, Saltgola Crossing, and Barik Building areas suffered the most due to waterlogging.

Due to strong stormy gusts, several large trees fell in Sitakunda, blocking traffic on the Chattogram-Dhaka highway. Meanwhile, a Chattogram-bound US Bangla flight from Kolkata was diverted to Cox's Bazar Airport, said Group Captain Taslim Ahmed, director at the Chattogram airport.

Chattogram Met Office recorded 97.7mm of rainfall in three hours from 3:00pm to 6:00pm, while a total of 129mm of rainfall was recorded in 24 hours till 6:00pm yesterday, said Meghanath Touchagya, assistant meteorologist.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Though the rain would come as a relief from the heat, it caused suffering for commuters. Many were found stuck on the roads for hours searching for vehicles.

Till the filing of this report at 7:30pm, many were stuck in traffic either due to the waterlogging or trees blocking roads.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Bangladesh Forest Department. Establishment of Sheikh Russell Aviary and Eco-Park. Rangania, Chattogram (2nd Phase) (1st Revision) Project. Corrigendum for SRAEP /23-24/GD-2

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Project Director Development of an Improved Agarwood Inoculation Technique Bangladesh Forest Research Institute, Sholoshahar, Chattogram-4211. Request for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for Research Fellows

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