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Hope and fear in the haor

Farmers expect good boro yield but apprehensive
about flash floods, dyke quality

**DWOHA CHOWDHURY and
MINTU DESHWARA**

As farmers across the Sylhet division prepare for the boro paddy harvest, they aim for a good yield due to favourable weather and increased cultivation.

However, fears of flash floods and concerns over the quality of haor protection dykes threaten to dampen these expectations. Additionally, heat waves have triggered pest attacks and neck blast infections in some areas, raising further concern.

Israil Miah from Biraimabad in Moulvibazar Sadar upazila expressed hope for a good harvest after the last harvest was devastated by floods. "The paddy looks promising. I cultivated BRRI-29 and BRRI-89 varieties on 10 acres, and I'm expecting a good yield," he said.

Farmers cultivated boro on 497,219 hectares across Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Sylhet, and Habiganj districts, slightly



exceeding the target of 496,745 hectares. The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) estimates a production of around 2,051,000 tonnes, valued at approximately Tk 10,250 crore.

The harvest will begin on a small scale from today, with full-scale harvesting commencing from April 15.

For many farmers in haor areas, boro is their only major crop, making this harvest crucial for their livelihood.

Abdul Hossain, a farmer from Fulbari village in Sunamganj's Bishwambarpur upazila, said, "The sheaf of paddy has come out well due to the recent rainfall, but the threat of flash floods remains.

The dyke that is meant to protect my harvest is still under construction and I am worried."

The haor regions are particularly vulnerable to flash floods, which originate from upstream areas in India. Heavy rainfall in Meghalaya and Assam can



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

An excavator digs and loads soil into a dump truck, which then takes it to the brick kilns seen in the background. Even though extraction of fertile topsoil from agricultural land is prohibited, such acts continue unabated. The photo was taken in the Boliyapur area of Savar yesterday.



Rat earns world record for sniffing landmines

AFP, Phnom Penh

A landmine-hunting rat in Cambodia has set a new world record by sniffing out more than 100 mines and pieces of unexploded ordnance, a charity said Friday.

Ronin, a giant African pouched rat, has tracked down 109 landmines and 15 other potentially deadly war remnants since his deployment to northern Preah Vihear province in August 2021, the Belgian charity APOPO said in a statement.

Five-year-old Ronin has been named the most successful Mine Detection Rat (MDR) in the organisation's history.

"His exceptional accomplishments have earned him the Guinness World Records title for most landmines detected by a rat, highlighting the critical role of HeroRats in humanitarian demining," APOPO said.

Ronin beat the previous record, held by hero rodent Magawa who found 71 landmines and 38 UXOs during his five-year service before retirement in 2021.

Magawa, who was awarded a gold medal for heroism for clearing mines from about 225,000 square metres of land – the equivalent of 42 football pitches – died in 2022.

EARTHQUAKE READINESS

Unprepared Dhaka at grave risk

ISSUES

- Unregulated urbanisation
- Weak enforcement of building codes
- Rampant construction on fragile, land-filled wetlands
- Poor construction materials, designs
- Flawed planning, lack of oversight



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Retrofit vulnerable buildings
- Enforce strict adherence to BNBC
- Engage third-party inspectors for oversight
- Strengthen critical infrastructure systems
- Establish emergency response protocols

HELEMUL ALAM

The recent 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar and parts of Thailand serves as yet another warning for Dhaka.

While Myanmar reels from the devastation, with over 3,000 lives lost and thousands injured, experts say Bangladesh remains frighteningly unprepared for a similar disaster.

Given its location in one of the world's most tectonically active regions, Dhaka's vulnerability to a catastrophic earthquake is not a matter of if, but when.

According to the earthquake disaster

risk index, the capital tops the list of the 20 most vulnerable cities in the world.

A study by Rajuk estimates that a 6.9-magnitude earthquake along the Madhupur Fault Line could flatten over 850,000 buildings in the capital, causing over two lakh deaths and leaving another two lakh injured.

The survey was conducted for four years, from 2018 to 2022.

Financial losses could surpass \$25 billion, with an additional \$44 billion required for reconstruction.

The Comprehensive Disaster Management Plan (CDMP) identifies

five major fault zones in Bangladesh – Madhupur Fault, Dauki Fault, Plate Boundary Fault-1, Plate Boundary Fault-2, and Plate Boundary Fault-3 – each capable of generating earthquakes between magnitudes 7 and 8.5.

Despite these alarming projections, earthquake preparedness in Dhaka remains almost nonexistent, said Dr Mehedi Ahmed Ansary of the Department of Civil Engineering at Buet.

Experts point to unregulated urbanisation, weak enforcement of building codes, and rampant construction

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

YUNUS-MODI MEET A ray of hope for Dhaka-Delhi ties: Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The meeting between Chief Adviser Prof M u h a m m a d Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created a "ray of hope" for both countries, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said yesterday.

Fakhrul made the remarks while responding to journalists' questions at the BNP Chairperson's office in Gulshan, in reaction to the high-level talks between the two nations.

"A sideline meeting took place during BIMSTEC... It's a matter of joy. We believe that, given the current geopolitical and global political context – as well as the regional dynamics between Bangladesh and India – the meeting between our Chief Adviser Dr Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Modi has created a ray of hope for us," said Fakhrul.

Stating that there was some bitterness in Bangladesh-India relations, the BNP leader said the meeting holds the possibility of preventing further escalation or even curbing that bitterness.



SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Israel expands Gaza 'security zone'

Air strike on a school building sheltering displaced families kills at least 31

AFP, Gaza City

Israel announced the launch of a new ground offensive in Gaza City yesterday, with rescuers saying military operations had killed at least 30 people across the Palestinian territory since dawn.

Israel has pushed since the collapse of a short-lived truce in the war with Hamas to seize territory in Gaza in what it has called a strategy to force the militants to free hostages still in captivity.

Simultaneously, Israel has escalated attacks on Lebanon and Syria, with a strike in the south Lebanese city of Sidon killing a Hamas commander along with his son, who was also a member of the militant group's armed wing.

In Gaza City, the Israeli military said ground troops had begun conducting operations in the Shujaia area "in order to expand the security zone".

Gaza's civil defence agency said that Israeli military operations had killed at least 30 people in the Palestinian territory since dawn.

A single Israeli strike on Khan Yunis killed at least 25 people, a

medical source at the southern city's Nasser Hospital told AFP.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the army was dividing Gaza and "seizing territory" to force Hamas to free the remaining Israeli hostages.

On Thursday, Gaza's civil defence agency said at least 31 people, including children, were killed in an Israeli strike on a school serving as a shelter for displaced Palestinians.

"It was like Judgement Day. They bombed us with missiles and everything went dark. We started looking for our children and our belongings but everything was gone. We couldn't find our children," sobbed Raghda al-Sharafa, who was among the displaced civilians sheltering in the school buildings.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said 1,249 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory since Israel resumed intense bombing on March 18, bringing the overall death toll since the war began to 50,609.

The Israeli military said Thursday it had struck more than 600 "terror targets" across the Gaza Strip since fighting resumed.



Palestinians carry the body of a victim after it was dug out from the rubble of a destroyed school yesterday, a day after it was hit by an Israeli strike, in the al-Tuffah neighbourhood of Gaza City.

PHOTO: AFP

Mob beats murder suspect to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A man was stabbed to death inside a tea stall at Ronshibari Bazar in Jhikra union in Rajshahi's Bagmara upazila yesterday.

Following the incident, a mob beat the alleged attacker to death, defying police intervention. At least six policemen, including a sub-inspector, sustained injuries while trying to protect and detain the murder suspect.

Both the victim, Abdur Razzak, 35, and the murder suspect, Aminul Islam, 22, were residents of the Goalbari village of Naogaon's Atrai upazila, said Bagmara Police Station Officer-in-Charge Touhidul Islam.

"Razzak was stabbed by Aminul inside a local tea stall where the former was having tea in the afternoon. Witnesses said Aminul entered the shop and suddenly attacked Razzak with a knife, stabbing him multiple times. Razzak collapsed on the ground and died on the spot," OC Touhidul told The Daily Star.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3