



Green Boro fields stretch as far as the eye can see at Sharishakandi haor under Khadimpara union of Sylhet. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASER

# Boro acreage rises for fifth consecutive year

Sylhet farmers show fresh interest, helped by good weather, irrigation access

SUKANTA HALDER and  
DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Boro paddy cultivation has gradually expanded over the years, thanks to factors including wider access to irrigation, supportive weather, better prices and the return of once fallow land to the farming of staple rice.

In the fiscal year 2021-22, the dry season crop, which accounts for more than half of annual rice output, covered 48.15 lakh hectares.

The acreage stood at 50.50 lakh hectares in the current fiscal year 2025-26, posting a 3.29 percent increase year-on-year, according to the provisional data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Output has risen as well. Production increased from 2.01 crore tonnes in FY22 to 2.13 crore tonnes in the last season of FY25. The DAE has targeted a production of 2.24 crore tonnes of Boro rice for the current season.

"The increase in cultivation is largely due to several government initiatives aimed at bringing fallow lands under production," said Mohammad Khalequzzaman, director general at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute.

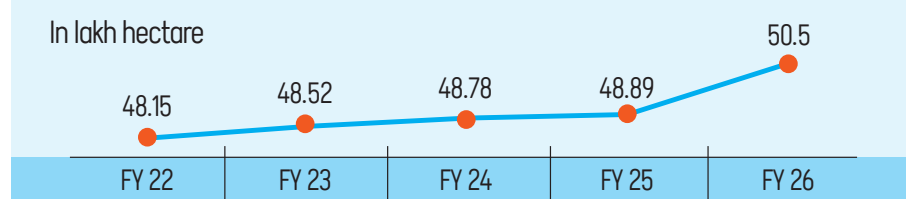
He highlighted that areas in the South, which previously had little cultivation, are now being utilised thanks to new rice varieties and increased motivation among farmers.

"Additionally, interventions by the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation, such as canal excavation and low-lift pump installations, have played a crucial role."

He also mentioned that regions in the haor belt and parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which were once unsuitable for Boro cultivation, are now being cultivated due to these efforts. These changes have occurred gradually over the last five to seven years.

Favourable weather conditions over the past two to three years have also helped maintain steady yields, he said,

## BORO ACREAGE OVER THE YEARS



DATA SOURCE: DAE

with no severe disasters impacting the crops.

Farmers have grown Boro on an increased area at a time when prices of coarse rice have fallen due to increased supply, resulting from imports and good production of the previous Aman crop, which accounts for nearly 40 percent of the total rice crop, and the US-Israel war on Iran has raised concerns over the supply of fuel and fertiliser to grow crops.

Over the last month, retail prices of coarse rice, a benchmark for rice prices in Bangladesh, dropped 4.55 percent to Tk 50-55 per kilogramme in the kitchen markets of Dhaka, according to data

compiled by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Jahangir Alam Khan, an agricultural economist, said the drop in rice prices in the market now translates to lower profit margins for intermediaries. However, this should not result in a price crash for farmers selling Boro rice this season.

"To prevent any artificial price manipulation and protect farmers

from potential losses, the government must ensure thorough and effective monitoring of the supply chain," he said.

Md Obaidur Rahman Mondol, director of the field services wing at the DAE, said the increase in Boro cultivation over the past four years is mainly due to the growing interest in farming in certain areas, particularly the Sylhet region.

Much of Sylhet's land remains fallow during the Boro season because of stones that make groundwater access difficult. However, when irrigation was introduced, even in small "pockets" of previously uncultivated land, farmers began cultivating the irrigation-based

rice. If there are no hailstorms, actual production could reach around 2.17 crore tonnes to 2.18 crore tonnes, he said.

The total Boro cultivation area in the Sylhet Division has risen slightly this season, as per DAE data.

Mosharrar Hossain, additional director of the DAE in Sylhet division, said when water levels drop significantly in haors, cultivable land increases, leading to higher cultivation. However, early rainfall quickly causes waterlogging in these areas, and drainage becomes difficult.

He added that the Boro harvesting season will begin on April 7, with full-scale harvesting expected from Pahala Baishakh. However, some farmers who planted early have already started harvesting.

Economist Khan said over the past two to three seasons, weather conditions during the Aus and Aman cultivation periods in the country have been unfavourable.

"In contrast, weather during the Boro season has been relatively favourable. As a result, farmers have shown increasing interest in Boro, which is one of the key reasons behind the expansion of land dedicated to it," he said.

However, this year, farmers may experience slightly lower than expected yields from Boro mainly due to a shortage of diesel, which has limited their ability to provide adequate irrigation, he added.

Around 70 percent of Bangladesh's irrigation system relies on diesel-powered methods. In addition, there have also been concerns over fertiliser supplies in many parts of the country, he said.

## Fuel subsidy without strategy

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

When a company runs into financial trouble, the first casualty is usually logic. The chief executive announces a budget review. Finance appears with tragic slides. Then each division begins its emotional performance. Marketing says any cut will destroy the brand, sales, and perhaps national morale. Operations insist one taka less will collapse the supply chain. HR warns that culture will die and that employees will start updating their LinkedIn profiles before lunch. After hearing 100 reasons from every department about why their budget is sacred, management often settles on the laziest solution in corporate history: everyone will take an equal cut. One solution for all. Arithmetic pretending to be strategy.

Bangladesh risks doing something similar in fuel policy. Global oil prices rise because of conflict around Iran, and the easiest political response is to keep fuel cheap for everyone. It sounds compassionate. It sounds decisive. It is also deeply lazy if it ignores which fuel matters most, which users are most vulnerable, and which demand can actually be shifted. Bangladesh should protect people, not pump prices.

That distinction matters. The diesel that powers irrigation, freight, buses, and food supply chains is not the same as the petrol used by private cars. Yet a blanket subsidy treats all litres as morally equivalent. They are not. A farmer, a bus operator, and a luxury SUV owner should not receive the same generosity from the state. Do not subsidise the product. Subsidise the user.

There is another danger in the Bangladesh context. When domestic fuel is kept artificially cheaper than across the border, the subsidy does not remain a gift for very long. It starts travelling. When a subsidised litre



can quietly cross the border, a blanket fuel subsidy stops being social protection and starts becoming export promotion for smugglers. That is not sound economics. That is a very expensive form of self-deception.

The smarter response is strategic targeting. If some support must remain, it should be concentrated where the economic and social impact is greatest. Diesel for public transport, agriculture, freight, fisheries, and essential services deserve priority. Petrol and octane for discretionary consumption do not deserve equal protection.

But Bangladesh has an even greater policy opportunity that many countries lack. It has gas. Bangladesh should not waste this advantage. While many economies facing oil shocks have limited short-run alternatives, Bangladesh already has a CNG ecosystem. Instead of using public money to make every litre of petroleum artificially affordable, the government should preserve and strengthen the economics of gas for buses, three-wheelers, delivery fleets, and commercial users who can switch to or stay on CNG.

This is where the demand side strategy becomes critical. The smartest fuel subsidy is the one that quietly reduces fuel demand. Countries facing oil shocks often do not rely only on price suppression. They also reduce consumption through better freight planning, less idling, route optimisation, ride sharing, efficient public transport, working & schooling from home like Covid days, and substitution where possible. Bangladesh should do the same.

The direct support mechanism is not mysterious either. A bus company can pay the market fuel price for the fuel, but not for CNG-based. This verified database is available with BRTA. Farmers can receive seasonal support linked to irrigation records. Fishing and freight operators can get digital vouchers or direct bank/MFS transfers based on audited need. Low-income commuters can be protected through transport support. That is how policy stops rewarding waste and starts protecting necessity.

In short, Bangladesh must cushion the pain of global fuel shocks, but with strategy, not sentiment. Relief spread blindly across all users may look fair on paper, yet in practice, it is usually policy laziness wearing the mask of compassion.

The writer is the founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd and BuildNation Ltd

## Bank of England warns of Mideast war financial risks

AFP, London

The Bank of England on Wednesday said the Middle East war had caused "a substantial negative supply shock to the global economy", increasing risks to the financial system.

Following a surge to oil prices that is set to push up overall inflation, the BoE said the fallout will also weigh on economic growth and tighten financial conditions, such as restricted lending by banks.

"Adverse impacts on the global macroeconomy increase the likelihood that multiple vulnerabilities could crystallise at the same time, amplifying their effect on financial stability," the BoE said in a quarterly update on identifying risks to financial stability.

In its previous Financial Policy Committee report in December, the BoE identified risks posed by an overvalued AI sector and elevated government debt.

"The conflict has made the global environment materially more unpredictable and followed a period in which global risks were already elevated," it said Wednesday. The BoE warned that the fallout could impact "the provision of vital financial services to UK households and businesses".

However it maintained "that the UK banking system has the capacity to support households and businesses even if economic and financial conditions were to be substantially worse than expected".

Ahead of the BoE update, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer sought to reassure the UK public over the financial fallout.

AFP, London

Here are the latest key facts about security alerts and trade impacts from the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial shipping route virtually paralysed by the Middle East war.

Around a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) passes through the waterway in peacetime.

The war erupted on February 28 when the United States and Israel began bombing Iran, prompting Tehran to retaliate with strikes across the region and restrict access to the strait.

### TANKER HIT IN QATAR WATERS

In total 27 commercial ships, including 13 tankers, have been attacked or reported incidents since March 1 in the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, or the Gulf of Oman, according to British marine security agency UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO).

In the latest incident, a tanker leased to Qatar's state-owned energy company was struck by an Iranian missile in the Gulf country's territorial waters, officials there said Wednesday.

They said 21 crew members were evacuated without any casualties.

UKMTO said the vessel had been struck by "two projectiles" north of Ras Laffan, the world's largest LNG hub. It

## Strait of Hormuz shipping blockade update

noted "one projectile caused a fire, which was extinguished, and another "remains unexploded within the vessel's engine room".

### 11 SEA WORKERS KILLED

Since the conflict began, at least 11 seafarers or dock workers have died in incidents in the region, according to the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The UN agency updated that tally Tuesday,

after formally confirming the deaths of three seafarers aboard the Thai bulk carrier the Mayuree Naree, which was attacked while transiting the strait on March 11.

### HANDFUL OF CROSSINGS

Just seven vessels crossed the strait on Tuesday and to 1500 GMT Wednesday, according to maritime intelligence firm Kpler. Since March 1, commodities carriers

made 218 crossings, according to Kpler data, a 94 percent decrease on peacetime.

Of these, 135 were by oil tankers and gas carriers and most were travelling east out of the strait.

Six out of 10 crossings involved ships coming from or heading to Iran. The United Arab Emirates accounted for 22 percent, India 15 percent, China 14 percent and Saudi Arabia nine percent.

The channel in peacetime sees around 120 daily transits, according to shipping industry intelligence site Lloyd's List.

### 2,000 SHIPS IN GULF

Bloomberg data showed Wednesday that 2,190 vessels sent transponder signals in the Gulf west of the Strait of Hormuz over the past day.

Of those, 327 were oil and gas vessels, including 12 very large gas carriers and 50 very large crude carriers.

### IRAN APPROVED ROUTE

Recent crossings appeared to have mainly used a route apparently approved by Iran around Larak Island just off the country's coast.

Leading shipping journal Lloyd's List on Tuesday estimated at least 48 ships had used it since last week, the majority with links to Iran.

The Revolutionary Guards said the route was closed to vessels travelling to and from ports linked to Iran's "enemies".



An Indian-flagged tanker carrying liquefied petroleum gas that transited through the Strait of Hormuz amid the Middle East war, remains docked at an offloading terminal along the coast in Mumbai on April 1.

PHOTO: AFP