

# Dr. A Alim: A Man behind BRRI



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**T**here was a severe shortage of food in the country during the colonial era. In response to this, the government established an agricultural research farm in Dhaka. The first rice research began there in 1910-11 under the guidance of Dr. GP Hector. Dr. Syed Hedaytullah had been his associate since the beginning of the farm. Dr. Hedaytullah took the charge after the retirement of Dr. Hector in 1934 and continued his research for another ten years at the farm. Then, in 1944, he joined the Bengal Agricultural Institute in Dhaka as a principal. He later became the Director of Agriculture. They selected more than 50 improved rice varieties from Aus and Aman landrace rice varieties

pendent centre dedicated to rice research was in demand a long time ago. At the time, the British administration had considered establishing one, but in Cuttack, Orissa. East Pakistan needs its own institution following the country's partition. Not being a commercial crop, the then authorities were not interested in establishing an institute for rice. Undoubtedly, the policy planners of that time were not far-sighted. In any case, Dr. Alim was a brilliant young researcher.

In 1955, he submitted a scheme to the government to establish an independent rice research institute. Probably, because this scheme did not get much importance at the government level, he made another one and submitted it. Dr. MO Gani (Professor of

The actual work began in 1961. A number of recruitment processes were almost going to end. The construction of buildings for offices and laboratories began. The authorities were about to procure instruments from abroad. But unfortunately, the project terminated prior to starting in full swing due to some unexpected bureaucratic interventions. However, since then, the rice researchers of that time had continuous efforts to establish an independent and full-fledged rice research institute. At the same time (1957-58), another blow almost halted the effort. The then-government decided to hand over the entire farm area to the Dhaka Improvement Trust. The martial law administrator of East Pakistan decided to build the second capital, called Ayub Nagar, in 1962, which is now Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Within a brief period, the authorities of the Dhaka farm had to take the decision to relocate the farm first to Savar, then to a suitable place in Gazipur. Despite so many obstacles throughout the years, Dr. Alim did not give up his hope of establishing an independent setup for rice research. He re-submitted the scheme in 1965 with some revisions, which was titled "East Pakistan Accelerated Rice Research Institute Scheme (EPARR)". The scheme got approval just a year after the submission. So, Dr. Alim was the driving force behind modern rice research in Bangladesh. Though he was the initiator, Dr. S. M. H. Zaman was appointed as the Rice Specialist for the project. This EPARR was upgraded as the East Pakistan Rice Research Institute (EPRRI) on 1 October 1970.

Dr. Alim received his BSc from Dhaka University and his MSc in Botany from the University of Calcutta in 1941. He joined the Indian Agricultural Research Institute as a research scholar for the Government of Bengal. He received his Ph.D. in 1949 from the University of Illinois, USA, as a scholar of Indian government. He was associated with Dhaka Farms as a research assistant from 1943 to 1947. He started supervising rice research activities as the Economic Botanist of Dhaka Farms in 1950. At one time or another, he was the head of BRRI, BARI, BARC, and the Seed Institute. To put it in his own words: "I headed (EPRRI) BRRI, BARI, BARC, and Seed Institute and was rather the founder of them." The excellence of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute is well-known throughout the nation. But among the agricultural scientists of today, Dr. Alim is not widely recognised.



Dr. A Alim

between the years 1910 to 1944. The contribution to rice research and development during those early days of rice research must be duly acknowledged.

Nevertheless, many knew that while this contribution was significant, it would not be enough to satisfy the demand ahead. One of them was Dr. A. Alim. But we know little about him. I started my career at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute in 1983. During that long span of my career, I have not heard anyone talk about him. Even, I did not know about him at the beginning of my career. Besides his research work, he also wrote several books. That is why I came to know him. In Bangladesh, rice is an extremely important crop. This is the reason that an inde-

Soil Science, VC of East Pakistan Agricultural University, Dhaka University, Agricultural Chemist of the Government of East Pakistan and IRRRI trusty board) had a significant role to play in this aspect. He revised the scheme. After so much critical checking and rechecking, in 1959, the then East Pakistan government appointed Dr. Hedaytullah, who retired as Director from his regular service in the Agricultural Department, to lead the scheme. He revised the scheme to some extent and re-submitted it to the government under the title "A Scheme for Intensifying Research on Rice Breeding in East Pakistan." The central government approved the scheme in 1960 after getting it examined by experts from various government agencies.



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