

... to appease rain gods

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Dozens of women stripped naked and ploughed their fields in west Nepal, hoping to appease the gods and get some much needed rain, a newspaper report said yesterday.

About 50 women in two villages in Kapilvastu district, 190 km (120 miles) west of Kathmandu, resorted to the desperate move at night on Friday as days of prayers and Hindu ceremonies failed to bring rains for the parched paddy crop, it said.

"This is our last weapon, we used it, and there was light rain-fall," Nepali daily Rajdhani quoted one of the women as saying.

Although there is no clear religious basis for the practice, some locals believe such a move could appease the rain gods.

Officials said there was insufficient rain during the June-September monsoon season this year and vast stretches of land along the southern plains, Nepal's breadbasket, were parched.

AL won't accept updated voter list

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Hasina was speaking at a views-exchange meeting with the party's grassroots-level leaders from Habiganj and Moulvibazar districts at her Dhanmondi office in the city.

Demanding drafting of a fresh and correct voter list with photographs, Hasina said that thousands of eligible voters across the country are yet to be put on the list.

The AL chief claimed the EC's motive is to exclude AL supporters from the list and include fake names to pave the way for the ruling coalition's victory in the next general elections.

She also demanded transparent ballot boxes in every polling centre in the upcoming election so that free, fair and impartial elections may be held.

Hasina accused the ruling BNP-Jamaat coalition government of the grenade attack on her party's rally on August 21, 2004 at Bangabandhu Avenue which left at least 24 party leaders and workers dead.

"Such terrible attack could not be carried out in broad daylight without the involvement of the prime minister, her son, state minister for home affairs and members of the intelligence agencies," Hasina said.

The AL chief also alleged hundreds of leaders and activists of her party were killed after the alliance government assumed power in 2001 and there were several attempts on her life as well.

Referring to the activities of the Islamic outfits Jama'atul Mujahideen Al-Islam and Harkatul Jihad, Hasina claimed they held meetings in the capital recently even though the government had banned them in 2004. "Is this ban on Jama'atul Mujahideen Al-Islam and Harkatul Jihad a drama?" Hasina questioned, accusing her political rival Khaleda Zia of patronising the fanatic militants.

Hasina said the ruling party men had looted crores of taka from the people through syndication and hiking price of essentials. The AL president advised voters to take money from BNP-Jamaat men before the vote but not vote for them to give a lesson to BNP-Jamaat in the next elections. "The money is people's money, people should have its share, they should take it," Hasina added.

Speaking to the party chief, grassroots level leaders briefed her on latest political situation, organisational condition and preparations for the next parliamentary polls.

They also informed Hasina that Enamul Haque Mostafa Shaheed, the AL lawmaker of Habiganj-4 constituency, has not gone to his constituency for more than three years and demanded changing the candidate in the upcoming elections.

The local leaders also demanded that nomination be given to a family member of the slain former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria in the Habiganj-1 constituency.

DU Evening Masters exam begins Aug 26

The postponed course final examinations of Evening Masters programme (Part-1)-2005 of Institute of Social Welfare and Research at Dhaka University will begin from August 26, says a press release.

Elaborate schedule of the examinations is available at the notice board of the Institute.

ATTEMPT ON RU TEACHER

Agitation continues

RU CORRESPONDENT

Teachers and students of marketing department of Rajshahi University (RU) continued to boycott their scheduled classes and examinations yesterday demanding punishment to criminals who made an attempt on the life of a teacher of the department.

No academic activities were held at the department as officials and employees also observed work abstinence programme to press home the demand.

Hundreds of students and staffs of the department supported by other students staged a huge demonstration on the campus and demanded punishment to the attackers.

At a rally on Rabintra Arts Building premises, agitating students expressed grave concern over the situation as police are yet to identify and arrest the culprits.

They also threatened to call a student strike on the campus if the armed attackers are not arrested soon.

Ensure equal access

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health workforce as the region's countries are faced with unprecedented threats from emergent infectious diseases and the growing burden of chronic diseases.

She named the diseases that have posed a threat to public health, such as avian influenza, dengue, HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB, and kala-azar.

The prime minister stressed an urgent need for devising affordable methods to contain these deadly diseases. "We also need to share best practices in the control of reemerging diseases like polio," she told the inaugural function.

Khaleda noted that poverty alleviation and resolving the problems of public health are two complementary tasks. "Poverty and ill-health are intertwined. We find that poor countries tend to have noticeably worse health outcomes than better-off countries. There still remain stark inequities in access to healthcare services within and among nations."

She told the health ministers, SEAR delegations and WHO executives that this critical issue needs to be resolved without delay. "We expect that your deliberations will produce solutions in this regard."

The PM suggested introducing innovative financing methods so that healthcare is affordable and within the reach of all households. "Poor people have to be empowered to enjoy

access to modern healthcare systems, more so because ill-health accentuates poverty," she said.

She appreciated the report of the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights, Innovation and Public Health, recently published by the WHO, saying that it would go a long way in making good use of the flexibilities allowed under TRIPS.

The PM affirmed that Bangladesh, among other countries of this region, would support the World Alliance for Patient Safety initiative and be a part of the First Global Patient Safety Challenge.

She said the new theme 'clean care is safer care' would put together concerted efforts to promote the highest standards of practice and behaviour and, no doubt, reduce the risks of healthcare-associated infection.

Khaleda said Bangladesh's pharmaceutical manufacturing sector has grown remarkably and now exports medicines and vaccines to over 65 countries.

However, she noted, much more needs to be done by way of technology transfer and revision of patent laws to ensure cheap but high-quality medicines in developing countries.

Govt's failure draws flak

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eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said.

Dr Kamal, also president of Gono Forum and Jatiya Oikya Mancha told The Daily Star that the failure of the government in this case imperilled national security. He also added that if a competent government comes to power, then it will be possible to bring the perpetrators to book.

Terming the attack as 'terrorism', Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, chairman of Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) said political violence will rise if the perpetrators are not brought to book through a proper investigation.

"In addition to the political government it is also the responsibility of the bureaucrats concerned to take necessary steps to arrest and punish those responsible for the attack," Prof Muzaffer said adding that the next caretaker government will have the power to arrest the perpetrators as the incident is on the high priority list of the home ministry.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haque Inu said the BNP-Jamaat alliance government in line with its conspiracy to exterminate the opposition and the pro-liberation forces carried out the grenade attack in an attempt to kill AL President Sheikh Hasina. He termed the incident as 'a big black smear' in the history of the country's political arena.

As the government itself had been involved in carrying out the attack to destroy the opposition and to stay in power permanently, it did nothing to find out the culprits, Inu said adding that the present government failed to prove that they had not been involved in the attack.

M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government, said it is very unfortunate for the nation that the government did not take any effective measure to identify and arrest the criminals, and to bring them to book.

"As the government claimed that the criminals who carried out the grenade attack are absconding in India, it should take measures to bring them back to the country and for this it should sign a treaty with India," Hafizuddin, also treasurer of TIB Board of Trustees told The Daily Star.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh accused the ruling Jamaat-e-Islami and its 'militants' of carrying out the attack as part of their 'conspiracy against the country'. "The government has not taken any measure to bring the culprits to book, only to stay in power," Selim said demanding immediate arrest and punishment of the perpetrators.

Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, former president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association, said the present government will never bring the culprits to book as it had direct support for carrying out the grenade attack which aimed to kill the leader of the opposition in parliament.

Prof Siddique also said the nation no more expect that the four-party alliance government will properly investigate the incident or will take actions in this regard. "The present government did nothing in the last two years and we don't expect justice from it as it has only two months left," he said.