

# Potato surplus puts farmers in misery

By Shahiduzzaman Khan

The price of potatoes has dropped to Tk. two per kilogram at the growers' level compelling farmers to incur huge losses as the production cost for a kilogram of potatoes is around Tk 2.50.

Cold storage owners, short of cash, are not buying adequate quantities of potatoes this year.

Potatoes are being dumped, farmers complain and this is leading to an alarming fall in prices.

Bumper harvests have been recorded in the potato-growing areas of Munshiganj, Comilla and other places and according to estimates, production has increased to 500 maunds from 350 maunds on an average in one 'kan' (1.5 acres) of land.

Increase in the prices of fertilizer (TSP), seeds and other inputs by about 25 per cent this year is one of the reasons for the increase in production cost of potatoes, the farmers said.

There are at present 160 cold storages in the country, 27 of which were being regularly financed by Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB).

The BKB has however imposed rigid conditions this year on sanctioning of Current Capital (CC) loans to the owners of these cold storages.

Other commercial banks are also maintaining a similar position in an effort to recover loans taken in 1990 and this attitude of the banks has compounded the miseries of the farmers and the cold storage owners.

The BKB's policy this year suggests that loans taken by cold storage owners in 1990 should be repaid in full before

applications for fresh loans are submitted. Twenty-five per cent of loans taken in previous years should also be paid.

The BKB has also instructed its branches in the potato-growing areas not to accept loan applications if conditions for taking loans are not met.

A cold storage owner said that he was unable to buy potatoes because of not receiving bank loan in time.

A BKB source said that similar measures in 1990 to recover loans taken the previous year had proved very successful.

Bangladesh Bank loan procedures suggest that an applicant is entitled to get loans if 80 per cent of the previous year's loans are repaid.

However the BKB follows a different policy.

The BKB head office sanctioned only three loans this year.

Many applications are lying with the bank's branches in potato-growing areas but no decisions have been taken over sanctioning loans.

Loan applications involving over Tk one crore are sent to the BKB's head office.

Agricultural experts say that the credit policy of the BKB and other banks should be more flexible as such stringent measures will put the cold storage owners in trouble rendering them incapable of purchasing large quantities of potatoes for storage.

The farmers, experts say, should also be given incentives so that they can get a fair price for their products, otherwise they will be dissuaded from growing potatoes next year.

# Khaleda seeks help

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and factories to attain self-reliance.

Khaleda Zia assured the people of all help in the development of Chittagong and congratulated the residents of Double Mooring for electing her from that constituency.

Turning to the communications sector, Begum Zia said that efforts would be made to further develop the railway service and the standard of its employees.

BSS adds: Begum Zia said, after the victory of the people against the autocratic rule concerted efforts were now needed to restore peace, stability, law and order in the society.

She said, your whole-hearted cooperation is essential in forming the government and steering the country to prosperity.

Addressing students of Chittagong Medical College at Prabartak Sangha crossing near the College she stressed the need for national unity in developing the country. She called upon the students to strengthen her hands in rebuilding the nation shattered by the misrule of now fallen

Ershad regime.

During her day-long visit to the Port City Begum Zia addressed meetings at Pahartali Shajahan Maidan, Hazrat Jalalabad Oxygen Mooring, Prabartak Sangha and Alankar Cinema Hall premises.

Earlier, tens of thousands of people thronged the airport to welcome Begum Zia and thousands of enthusiastic party supporters and workers riding motor-cycles and other vehicles waved colourful banners and posters and chanted slogans congratulating her on her election victory.

Four vehicles of the motorcade of Begum Zia were partly damaged and ten persons received minor injuries during her journey from Patenga to Fatkheri in Chittagong.

The vehicles were damaged in rash driving when a number of them failed to keep track with her motorcade. Five persons were injured.

Five other persons, mostly workers of BNP were injured when some miscreants threw stones at them while they were travelling on the roof of a bus at Katirhat of Hathazari upazila.

# Sheikh Hasina

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dent's mane to form a cabinet comprising MPs from a single party Sheikh Hasina posed a question: "If he does so then who joins whom?" — The Acting President to the party the MPs to be taken from or the MPs to the neutral, caretaker government, disowning their party.

Sheikh Hasina mentioned that under the joint framework of three alliances formulated in November last, it was clearly stated that the caretaker government should hand over power to the sovereign parlia-

ment. "Awami League was committed to honour the agreement, and any breach of this commitment by anybody would be considered as betrayal with the blood of the martyrs of the mass movement", she said.

Sheikh Hasina demanded repeal of all constitutional amendments starting from the Fourth and said that the Fifth Amendment could be repealed keeping 'Bismillah Rahaman Rahim' intact in the Constitution.

She said that there was no conflict between 'Bismillah' and scrapping of the amendment. She said that secularism does not negate 'Bismillah Rahaman Rahim' and pointed out that PLO leader Yasser Arafat also incorporated secularism as well as 'Bismillah Rahaman Rahim' in the Constitution of the State of Palestine.

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It is gathered that the brother-in-law of Ershad HG Mohiuddin, who was the representative of Bangladesh at the UN, before being suspended from the job, has sought the cooperation of a section of US Congressmen, to secure Ershad's release.

Ershad

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Hasina elected AL PP leader

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina has been elected leader of the Awami League Parliamentary Party (AL PP).

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