

Down to Earth

Cement: Which have you bought — underweight bags or adulterated ones?

By Khalilur Rahman

Are you buying an underweight bag of Portland cement? There is 90 per cent chance that you are doing so. And if you are lucky enough to fall within the rest 10 per cent, it is almost certain you will get an adulterated bag of this most vital construction material.

The standard weight of a bag of cement is 50 kilograms. Either imported in paper bags or packed in gunny bags from the local factories, weight is the same. A survey of some cement shops out of hundreds in the metropolises reveal that the imported paper bags of the item are neatly stitched. The weight, the country of origin and other details are inscribed on the bag in big letters. One may wonder how manipulation, or say, bungling, with the quantity or the quality can be made when a bag is offered to the buyers in such a perfect condition.

To understand the problem, we must know details of the production, requirements and trade of cement in the country. Cement is always in high demand throughout the year and the construction sector suffers frequently due to its acute shortage as a natural consequence following scarcity, often there is phenomenal rise in price. In October last year, a bag of cement was sold between Taka 275 and Taka 300. The price fixed by the government for a bag was Taka 150. The price of each bag of cement was between Taka 220 and Taka 225 in the city market on Wednesday.

According to an estimate, the annual requirement of cement in the country is 10 lakh 50 thousand tons. We have only two cement factories now — the Chhatra Cement Factory and the Chittagong Clinker Grinding Factory. These two factories produce four and a half lakh tons of cement per year. The rest is imported mostly from the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia and India. The setting up of a new cement factory, Surma Cement Factory, in Sylhet in the public sector under the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) is progressing at a snail's pace.

The plan for setting up the factory was taken several years ago with the expectation of getting the supply of limestone from India. But India is reluctant to supply stones, a BCIC source told The Daily Star. Meanwhile, government has approved the establishment of four cement clinker grinding factories in the private sector

to meet a substantial part of the country's requirement of cement. The per capita use of the item in Bangladesh is one of the lowest in the world now.

With regard to the import of cement, about six lakh tons a year, a government official said, of the total quantity, only about 25 per cent are imported by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh

sure to supply cement both for public sector construction and private use. It can meet only a part of the demand with the very small quantity that the organisation imports. So there is no chance or need for the state trading body to supply underweight bags or adulterated ones, the official added.

A section of the unscrupulous private importers is thus



(TCB), the state trading body. The rest is imported by the private sector. The requirement of cement during the next five years may exceed 20 lakh tons, a dependable source told me.

Bulk of locally produced cement is consumed in the public sector while a small quantity is distributed among the members of the public on priority basis. Packed in gunny bags, the locally produced cement has the standard weight and the scope of adulteration is non-existent as the bags are promptly disposed of as soon as these reach distribution points. In some cases the delivery is made directly from the factory to the agencies or parties concerned by the authorities.

As regards the TCB-imported cement, a Commerce Ministry official said the TCB remains under constant pres-

engaged in selling underweight cement bags in the market, according to reliable sources. The shortage in each bag ranges from three kilograms to five kilograms. Cement imported under private sector is largely available in country's retail shops.

Moreover, an organised gang of dishonest traders, taking advantage of the shortage, procures cement which has become condensed through their agents and crush those to power and mix in bags for sale.

This practice is going on almost unchecked, some cement dealers stated. Use of adulterated cement in construction can prove hazardous in course of time.

So, better you prepare yourself for taking an underweight bag than an adulterated one.

Women seats

From Page 1 Col 8

(Naogon and Natore), Begum Selina Shaheed (Kushtia, Meherpur and Chuadanga), Shamsunnahar Ahmed (Jhenidah, Magura and Narail), Farida Rahman (Jessore and Satkhira), Syeda Nargis Ali (Bagerhat and Khulna), Raushan Ara Hena (Patuakhali, Barguna and Bhola), Selima Rahman (Barisal, Jhalakathi and Pirojpur), Anwara Habib (Tangail), Begum Rahima Khandoker (Jamalpur and Sherpur), Mrs. Nurjahan Yasmin (Mymensingh), Bani Ashraf (Netrokona and Kishoreganj), Farida Hasan (Manikganj, Dohar, Keraniganj, Nawabganj, Dhamrai and Savar), Sarwari Rahman (Dhaka district), K. J. Hamida Khanam (Gazipur and Narsingdi), Nawab Begum Shamsunnahar Ahsanullah (Narayanganj and Munshiganj), Prof. Jahannara Begum (Rajshahi and Faridpur), Hafiza Asma Khatun (Coxsagar, Madaripur and Shariatpur), Fatema Chowdhury Paru (Sunamganj and Sylhet), Mrs. Khaleda Rabbani (Maulvibazar and Habiganj), Asiya Rahman (Chandpur and Comilla), Rabeya Chowdhury (Brahmanbaria, Devidwar, Homna, Chandina Daudkandi and Muradnagar), Halima Khatun (Feni, Noakhali and Lakkhipur), Rozi Kabir (Chittagong) and Mamaching (Cox's Bazar, Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban).

Additional charge for Badruddoza

The Acting President has given Education Minister Badruddoza Chowdhury the additional charge of the Ministry of Culture.

Aggrieved officers

From Page 1 Col 7

ment Department with proportionate staff members from other cadre services.

This most vital wing of the administration, which deals with promotion, transfer and deputation of all top-level officers including secretaries, additional secretaries and joint secretaries to the government, is now staffed almost entirely by the members of a particular civil service cadre. Some of the officers told The Daily Star that how can the members belonging to other civil service cadres get fair treatment when none of them represents in the 'policy-making' section of the administration.

The officers demanded immediate transfer of 75 officers of the particular cadre outside the Secretariat as they have exceeded their quota strength of 100. As per rule up to 100 officers of that particular cadre can be placed at the Secretariat, some aggrieved officers to the posts of assistant secretary said.

The third point of the demands calls for immediate promotion of officers to higher positions from all other cadres. Many demonstrators loudly resented some actions of the general secretary of the BCS (Administration) Association. In one such case, the general

Clash at DMC

From Page 1 Col 7

The Health Minister assured the setting up of an auditorium at Dhaka Medical College and increasing the monthly stipend of students.

He also presented a colour television to the students union.

secretary has requested the concerned authorities to fill up the vacancy of an assistant secretary at the Secretariat from a member of his cadre. They condemned such an act of interference with proper functioning of the administration.

An Establishment Department source said they are aware of the problem and will look into it.

By-polls

From Page 1 Col 8

BNP Abdus Salam Talukder, told BSS that election to the 300-seat Parliament was now completed with the polls held in the Kushtia-2 constituency Thursday. "Only by-elections are left which the Election Commission may hold conveniently," he said adding that Parliament was now fully constituted.

"Without by-elections, women members can now be elected for the 30 reserved seats for them," he said.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: BNP has elected Fazlur Rahman Patal as secretary of the parliamentary party Thursday at a meeting held at the Committee Room No 1 of Bangladesh Parliament House.

Speaking at the meeting BNP chairperson advised the party MPs not to be provoked by the opposition members during the session. She said the BNP as the ruling party should maintain utmost discipline during the session.

Barrister Salam Talukder briefed the party members about the norms and procedures of the parliament.

The meeting was adjourned till March 3.

The Midnight File

Accord on draft resolution on Iraq

NEW YORK, Mar 28: The five permanent members of the UN Security Council reached agreement Thursday on a draft resolution setting conditions for formal cease-fire with Iraq. China, the United States, the Soviet Union, France and Britain met this morning to work out obstacles that remained despite agreement over the main guidelines of the draft, reports AFP.

Dissolution of WB Assembly sought

CALCUTTA, Mar 28: The West Bengal government would ask the governor to dissolve the state assembly by March 31 so that the assembly elections could be held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls. This follows the recommendations of the state government that the house be dissolved and fresh elections held, the Chief Minister Jyoti Basu told the assembly in a statement during the zero hour, reports AFP.

Fire at US embassy in Moscow

MOSCOW, Mar 28: A fire broke out in the main office building at the US embassy in central Moscow today, but a spokesman said staff were evacuated and there were no reports of injuries. Spokesman James Bullock said city fire fighters were battling thick black smoke. He said the cause of the blaze, which broke out during the morning was not known, reports Reuter.

Kadhafi favours ties with US

NICOSIA, Mar 28: Libyan leader Moammar Kadhafi favours, "with conditions," the renewal of diplomatic relations with the United States. "If the United States wants to restore ties with us, it would be welcome on condition that such relations are on an equal-to-equal basis founded on mutual respect and non-interference," JANA quoted Colonel Kadhafi as saying, report AFP.

Kashmiri women protest searches

SIRINAGAR, Mar 28: Indian police fired tear-gas and baton-charged Kashmiri women demonstrating today against alleged heavy-handed police searches for separatist militants, injuring 34. Hundreds of women took to the streets here in protest against widespread house-to-house searches over the past few days in which scores of people mostly young men, have been detained, reports Reuter.

Rajiv

From Page 1 Col 5

Police were not immediately able to say who started the trouble during a religious procession.

It was the second flare-up this week of religious violence that swept northern India last year after a fundamentalist campaign to replace a mosque in Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh, with a temple.

At least 11 people were killed in Bhadrak, a coastal town in the eastern state of Orissa in four days of violence.

State Chief Minister Biju Patnaik blamed the Hindu fundamentalist Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (National volunteer corps) for stirring up the trouble.

Meanwhile, AFP says: Indian political parties have asked New Delhi to immediately sack Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, a son of Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal, who quit the same post in disgrace twice before.

The demand for the dismissal of Chautala, one of India's most controversial politicians, has mounted since he lost his legislative majority to rule the state Tuesday, five days after he became its Chief Minister for a third time.

MPs reluctant

From Page 1 Col 8

Chowdhury told The Daily Star that Article 74(6) of the Constitution required him to conduct the business of the House till his successor entered upon the office.

The changeover may take only five minutes, and he will leave as his successor enters the House after taking oath from the Acting President at Parliament building, he said.

Those who dislike a sitting with Shamsul Huda Chowdhury say that he represents a House that has been rejected by the people through a mass upsurge. And thus the normal constitutional provisions do not apply.

However, since oath has been taken from a person designated by the Speaker taking

cognizance of his presence, the best course for him is either to resign or to designate somebody to preside over the first sitting.

Shamsul Huda Chowdhury says he has no choice. If the House does not look like functioning in an orderly manner during the first sitting, he may have to adjourn it, maybe for hours to bring order.

He said so far the changeover from the Jatiya Party rule has been in accordance with the Constitution and the change of Speaker would be the last step in the process.

MPs who vehemently oppose this view say, that they would not have insisted on taking oath from somebody other than Chowdhury, if they were mentally prepared to have a sitting of Parliament with him in the chair.

Govt, opposition should jointly solve problems

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said in Dhaka Thursday that both the government and the opposition political parties have the responsibility in solving the problems confronting the country and the people, reports BSS.

Prime Minister was talking to two Members of Parliament and a leader belonging to the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) at her residence.

The CPB leaders assured the Prime Minister that they would lend support to the government both in and outside the Parliament in its efforts to give institutional shape to democracy.

Sirajul Haque

From Page 1 Col 7

tary form of government if Sirajul Haque defends him in the court. He said, no show cause notice was received by him from Awami League till now.

Meanwhile, acting chairman of Jatiya Party Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury in a statement said his party stood for presidential form of government since its inception and he did not know anything about the letter purported to have been sent by Ershad as reported in a section of the press. Mr Chowdhury wanted a clarification from the Home Ministry as to how the former President could send a letter through Advocate Sirajul Haque without the knowledge of the Home Ministry.

Advocate Haque met the former President at the Gulshan sub-jail on Tuesday to discuss about the arms case against him. Earlier, Ershad requested him through the Home Ministry to defend his case. Advocate Haque also told The Daily Star that he is ready to defend any case since he is a professional.

When contacted on Thursday to know party's reaction to this issue, Mohammad Nasim, MP, publicity secretary of Awami League, told this correspondent that the party had no approval for Advocate Sirajul Haque's decision to defend Ershad or to meet him at the sub-jail.

"Anybody, holding a responsible position in Awami League, meets Ershad or defends him at the court, must sever his relationship with the party before doing that," said Nasim adding, "If he doesn't do that, we will take our decision in this regard."

However, Mohammad Nasim mentioned that before taking any action against Advocate Sirajul Haque, Awami League leadership would ascertain whether he met the deposed President or decided to defend him.

"A member of Awami League cannot be allowed to defend an autocrat like Ershad in the name of profession," said Nasim.

From Page 1 Col 5

stressed the need for bringing an end to all sorts of anarchy and indiscipline from all spheres of national life.

In this connection, Begum Zia referred to the programmes of the BNP government and said the responsibility of implementing these did not lie with the party alone. Since the BNP programmes had been endorsed by the people through the national polls, it was also the duty of all concerned to extend cooperation in the task of implementing them.

She said the prime objective of the BNP government was to increase production in fields and factories based on party's politics of production.

She emphasised that the people of the country should be apprised of the situation prevailing in various national institutions.

She said all ministries and departments should publish white papers so that people could understand the exact condition of the national economy when the new government took over.

Dwelling on the economic situation, Begum Zia said there were still conspiracies to cripple the national economy through black marketing, smuggling and even release of fake currency notes.

She, therefore, asked the officials to remain cautious and alert so that such designs of the conspirators did not succeed.

Begum Zia pointed out that it might not be possible to eradicate corruption from so-

ciety at one stroke but said strong and appropriate measures would have to be taken against corrupt practices. She urged them to perform their duties without any fear.

Stating the conditions in the government-owned enterprises and industrial units, the premier said it would be impossible to make the public enterprises viable if we failed to stop corruption. She said if the public organisations could not be turned into profit-making bodies, steps might be taken to hand them over to private parties.

Education and age limit

The Prime Minister referred to the situation obtaining in the educational institutions during the autocratic rule and said students were the worst victims of that period. She described how the sanctity of the campus was violated by inducting non-students there. She said educational institutions were closed for long four years out of the nine-year autocratic rule and as a result they had lost their age for qualifying to enter into government jobs.

Begum Zia said plans were under way to extend the age-limit to enable the students to enter into government services. It is necessary, she said, to provide the educated unemployed youths with jobs to bring an end to their frustrations.

The spreading course of drug addiction was yet another misdeed of the past government, she said, adding as a result, the disappointed youths lost sense of direction and resorted to drug addiction.

"If we all work together with honesty and sincerity, it will not be difficult to remove darkness and the curse of corrupt practices from the society."

Foreign policy

Referring to the foreign policy, the Prime Minister said "friendship with all based on equality and self-respect is the motto of our foreign policy."

Bangladesh, she said, wants friendship with all neighbours but none should behave like a master. She emphasised the need for closer fraternal relations with the Muslim countries.

The Prime Minister said Bangladesh needed foreign assistance but endeavours should



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing Secretaries and other top officials of the government at Usmany Memorial Hall auditorium on Thursday. — PID photo

Khaleda : White Papers

From Page 1 Col 5

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She lauded the contribution of women in the promotion of

garments industry in the country and said they could keep up their mark in every sphere of national life.

The Prime Minister sought cooperation of the officials and said their sincere cooperation could help a lot in achieving the objectives of the government.

পানি সরবরাহ ও ব্যবহার সম্পর্কিত ঢাকা ওয়াসার বিজ্ঞপ্তি

চাহিদার তুলনায় ঢাকা মহানগরীতে পানির বিপুল ঘাটতি রয়েছে। তদুপরী বরা যৌসুমে পানির স্তর নীচে নেমে যাওয়ায় পানি উত্তোলনের পরিমাণ হ্রাস পায়। শুষ্ক যৌসুমেয় পারস্পরিক রমজান মাসও শুরু হয়েছে এবং তাতে দিবসে সমগ্র পানি ব্যবহৃত হওয়ায় অন্য সময়ের ন্যায় রাত্রিকালে সিস্টেম প্রেসার স্বাভাবিক থাকেনা বিধায় পানি সংকটের তীব্রতা আরো বেশী অনুভূত হচ্ছে।

মহানগরীতে পানির ঘাটতি দ্রুত কমিয়ে আনার জন্য ঢাকা ওয়াসা ইতিমধ্যেই কতিপয় গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ও কার্যকর পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করেছে। ক্রান্তি প্রোগ্রামের অধীনে জরুরী ভিত্তিতে স্থাপিত গভীর নলকূপগুলির মধ্যে আগামী এক মাসের মধ্যে পূর্ব জুরাইন, উলন, যাত্রাবাড়ী টৌরস্তা, রাজনারায়ন ধর রোড (দালবাগ), নিকতন (তেজগাঁ), মহাবাথলি, পিসি কলচার হাউজিং সোসাইটি (মোহাম্মদপুর), বায়তুল আমান হাউজিং সোসাইটি (মোহাম্মদপুর), নয়াপাড়া (মেরাদিয়া), গোড়ান, গোপীবাগ ও দিলকুশাতে আরো ১২ টি গভীর নলকূপ চালু করার ব্যবস্থা নেয়া হয়েছে। উল্লেখ্য যে, উক্ত ১২ টি গভীর নলকূপের মধ্যে ইতিমধ্যেই অত্যন্ত জরুরী ভিত্তিতে গোপীবাগ ও দিলকুশাতে ২ টি নলকূপ চালু করা হয়েছে। ফলে গোপীবাগ, গোলাপবাগ, আর, কে, মিশন রোড ও তৎসলগু এলাকা এবং দিলকুশা, মতিঝিল ও আশ-পাশ এলাকার পানি সরবরাহ পরিধিতির অনেকটা উন্নতি হয়েছে। অবশিষ্ট ১০টি নলকূপ নির্ধারিত সময়ের মধ্যে চালু করার সর্বাত্মক ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হয়েছে। ফলে অচিরে মহানগরীর পানি সরবরাহ পরিধিতির সার্বিক উন্নতি সাধিত হবে।

সামগ্রিক সংকট নিরসনে ওয়াসার প্রচেষ্টার পাশাপাশি পানির অপচয় রোধে সম্মিলিত গ্রাহকসংগঠনের আন্তরিক সহযোগিতা কামনা করা হচ্ছে।

- * মহানগরীর বিভিন্ন স্থানে বিশেষতঃ-পুরনো ঢাকার অবস্থিত রাস্তার পাশের কলের পানির অপচয় রোধে স্থানীয় জনসাধারণের সহযোগিতা কামনা করা হচ্ছে।
- * গাড়ী ধোয়া ও ঘর-বাড়ীর মেঝে পরিষ্কার করা, বাপানে পানি দেয়ার কাজে ওয়াসার সরবরাহকৃত পানি ব্যবহার যথাসম্ভব পরিহার করুন।
- * কাছ শেষে কলের মুখ বন্ধ রাখুন।
- * আপনার জলাধারে বালক, বিপ-কক লাগান।
- * শৌসল ও শূন্যস্থানীয় অন্যান্য কাজে প্রয়োজনের অতিরিক্ত পানি খরচ করবেন না।
- * কেবলমাত্র খাবার এবং অন্যান্য অতি জরুরী প্রয়োজনে ঢাকা ওয়াসার সরবরাহকৃত পানি ব্যবহার করুন।
- * সন্ধ্যারি ওয়াসার লাইনে পাশ্প সংযোগ করে পানি উত্তোলন করবেন না।

ওয়াসা "ঢাকা ওয়াসা"