

Prokrihi on food, fertiliser crisis Privatisation, role of bureaucrats blamed

By Staff Correspondent

The donors-sponsored privatisation in the agriculture sector and the role of bureaucrats in this regard have helped create a 'food and fertiliser crisis' in the country.

This was said by the Prokrihi-BCS Action Committee, representing engineers, agriculturists, doctors and 26 other cadres of professionals employed in the government service.

"We think that a greater national initiative is needed to face the food crisis and tackle the situation in agriculture sector," president of the committee Dr M A Majed told a press conference yesterday.

He said professionals, particularly agriculturists, engineers, economists and social scientists could suggest ways and means to overcome the crisis and make efforts for their implementation.

"It is a fact that handing over of fertiliser distribution from Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) to private traders resulted in a severe crisis in the market," he said.

The irrigation and fertiliser distribution systems of the BADC were "suspended on the plea of free market economy, as conspired by the bureaucrats," Majed alleged and also blamed the government for 'privatisation' of the bureaucracy.

The BADC had built up a countrywide network for distribution of fertiliser and providing irrigation facilities, he pointed out. But due to suspension of many of its operations, around 5 lakh hectares of land were deprived of irrigation facilities since 1991-92, he said.

Majed blamed the government for not utilising the huge infrastructure of the BADC when a drought affected the production of aman paddy last year. The fertiliser distribution network of the BADC also remained unutilised, he added.

The private fertiliser dealers and distributors collect fertiliser only in the peak season because of their shortage of godowns and lack of capital for long term investment, he said.

On the other hand, he said, a section of bureaucrats advised the government to distribute fertiliser through the deputy commissioners (DCs) and thana nirbahi officers (TNOs) so that 'they could make money from it.'

"Right people have to be in the right place to do their job. The DCs and the TNOs would never understand the needs of farmers as they have so many other business relating to magistracy and revenue collection," Majed said.

Rice price had gone up by more than Tk 200 per maund in the last five months and scarcity of agricultural inputs persists, further affecting food production.

There is not a single developed country which does not provide subsidy in agriculture sector whereas the donors suggest withdrawal of subsidy from this sector in a poor country like ours," he said.

Even, in neighboring India, the government has announced increased subsidy for food and fertiliser in the next fiscal, Dr Majed pointed out.

"Our bureaucracy is so inefficient and bankrupt that it could not make the government aware of the real scenario in the country's agriculture sector," he said. The government has no information about the food situation in the country since the activities of the Food Department have been curtailed, he added.

Held at the Institution of Engineers, the press conference was attended by among others, A N H Akhtar Hossain, Mohammad Abu Hena, Dr Kazi Shahidul Alam and Nurul Huda.



Opposition political activists who demonstrated near the Food Directorate in the city yesterday against the scarcity of fertiliser and price-hike of rice, hurled a bomb at the police on Tophkhana Road near the Secretariat. — Star photo

Nurses' strike

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and Bangladesh Student Nurses' Union (BSNU) enforced the nation-wide strike to realise their eight-point demand from Saturday.

Leaders of the nurses' organisations expressed their determination to continue the non-stop strike until their demands are met.

In the capital, many patients were seen leaving the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) due to lack of treatment. Fresh admission to the hospital also fell sharply.

Meanwhile, staff and nurses (students) of the DMCH have formed a squad to assist the physicians in emergency cases. Some 150 nurses of the squad are performing their duties in three shifts in the hospital where the number of staff and student nurses are 800.

HC issues rule

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the Director General of Bangladesh Television (BTV). The rule, returnable within eight weeks, was issued on a petition filed by advocate Dr Mohiuddin Faruq, General Secretary of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA), said a press release.

In his writ, Dr Faruq said that one-sided and distorted publicity by BTV violated Article 39 of the Constitution and also curbed his fundamental rights.

He said that despite the BNP's election pledge to make radio and television autonomous, it had violated the commitment after assuming power. Instead, the party and its allies have turned the vital national medium into a publicity machine of the ruling party.

News and information broadcast by the national medium have lost credibility because of misuse, the lawyer said. As a result, citizens were being deprived of knowing the correct news. Moreover, the rights of tax-payers and TV licence holders were being curbed, he added.

WB programme

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sustainable development. In refuting the superiority of NGO programmes in poverty alleviation, the Finance Minister cited that the government was spending Tk 4,500 crore in education during the current budget. "How much the NGOs have spent for education?"

While the Finance Minister boasted of the government efforts for poverty alleviation, he admitted he was having serious problem in reaching credits to the poor in a cost-effective way.

"How to reach credit to the poor — that is a question I have been facing as Finance Minister during the last four years. In fact, credit delivery to the poor has been the 'hardest task' of the government."

State Minister for Planning Dr A Moyeen Khan, while addressing the workshop, questioned the logic of high interest rates on rural credits, now between 18 and 22 per cent, as against 10-14 per cent on urban commercial loans.

The World Bank Chief Economist, Ms Joanne Salop, also appreciated credit programmes for poor being run by Grameen Bank and some NGOs.

Terrible tragedy

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sleeping children. Many others also met similar fates.

Two sons of Sattar Molla were also missing.

So was rickshawpuller Nuru Mia, whose wife shoved out their 14-year-old blind son Chunu when the flames spread to his tin-and-bamboo hut standing on stilts over the river Buriganga.

Nuru Mia couldn't find out if Chunu had survived or perished in the fire at the time of filing this report late last night.

AL gherao programme

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stream opposition parties' fortnight-long agitation programme announced at the end of the 48-hour hartal on March 13 demanding a caretaker government to conduct the next general elections and protesting price-hike of essentials including rice and paper.

The JP and the Jamaat demonstrated near the Food Directorate on March 18 and 16 respectively.

The next identical programme of the opposition parties includes rail-road blockade on March 23 and Dhaka Siege on March 28.

Our Correspondents from Chittagong, Narayanjan, Kishoreganj and other districts say, the opposition activists gheraoed the DC offices and submitted memoranda to the DCs. They also held rallies before and after the gherao programmes. No incident of violence was, however, reported from these places.

NSC lottery

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ners of Tk one lakh each went to ticket nos. Csa-0281092, Kha-0083783 and Csa-0261846.

Agriculture and Water Development Minister M Majid-ul Huq was the chief guest at the lottery draw ceremony.

Fire at Islambagh

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used local water supplies at 7.30 pm, when local people had already brought the fire under control to a great extent.

Many local people also complained about looting of goods by hoodlums from the affected families. A police contingent was, however, sent to the spot later to ensure security in the area.

A few years ago, two incidents of fire in the same area claimed several lives and gutted all the houses.

Talking to this correspondent last night, local people expressed their dismay at the growth of so many small plastic factories in the area, saying these had caused fire twice in the past.

They regretted that there were no broad roads in the area, for which rescue operations were hampered.

Four die, 25 hurt in Pabna road mishap

PABNA, Mar 19: Four people were killed and 25 others injured in a road accident at Sandhya in Bera thana on Nagarbari-Bogra highway today police and witnesses said, reports UNB.

600 held in Karachi in a week

KARACHI, Mar 19: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has given wide-ranging powers to paramilitary troops in Karachi to clamp down on terrorist activity, as political parties charged authorities were abusing their power, reports AFP.

Benazir gives extra powers to paramilitary troops

Benazir Bhutto has given wide-ranging powers to paramilitary troops in Karachi to clamp down on terrorist activity, as political parties charged authorities were abusing their power, reports AFP.

Deportees

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went to receive the deportees commented, "It was almost like our coaster and it should not have carried passengers more than eight or nine hundred."

The deportees also alleged that the crew had misbehaved with them on board the ship.

The deportees, after reaching here also staged demonstration and chanted slogans against the crew. At that time special police teams were deployed at the port jetty to control the situation.

Meanwhile, a deportee, Md Yusuf (27), told this correspondent that he had gone to Jeddah by collecting valid visa and other documents at a cost of Taka 73,000/- through a recruiting agency on December 19, 1993.

Yusuf, who hailed from Noakhali, said he had been working at Jeddah Sheraton Hotel at a monthly salary of 800 Saudi riyal. But he was rounded up from a market and his work permit (ekama), which he produced, was torn by Jeddah police, Yusuf said.

"Then I was taken to jail from where I was deported with others," he added.

Another deportee, Md Mozaffar (30), who went to Mecca in 1987 as a worker under a construction firm, said "I was not paid my salary as per agreement, rather, I was deported by police."

Mozaffar hails from Cox's Bazar district.

Ershad's trial resumes today

By Staff Correspondent

Defence lawyers continued cross-examining the investigating officer in the trial of former president H M Ershad in what is popularly known as the Jatiya Party Office Case.

Kartick Chandra Das, presently an Additional Superintendent of Police, will again answer defence lawyers' queries when the court resumes at 11 this morning.

Although the deposition of 20 prosecution witnesses including Das was completed earlier the police officer was recalled upon a prayer from the prosecution.

Former Works Minister Mostafa Jamal Haider and Works Secretary M A Rouf are the co-accused in this Special Case No 50, the trial of which began in 1993.

Additional District and Sessions Judge, Dhaka Zinat Ara is the presiding judge.

1.75 lakh Rohingyas repatriated

More than one lakh 75 thousand refugees have been repatriated to Myanmar till date, reports BSS.

This was disclosed by Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury to the visiting Director of United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Dennis MacNamara at the former's office here yesterday.

PM reviews

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Begum Zia was also informed that boro cultivation in North Bengal will not be affected as planting of boro seedlings starts a little late in the northern districts than in southern parts of the country.

The Prime Minister was further informed that production in Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Factory has resumed, and the finished goods will be available within a couple of days.

The Jamuna Fertilizer Factory, which had to suspend production since Saturday night due to mechanical fault, will also resume operation from tonight, the meeting was told.

Begum Zia was apprised that there are adequate stocks in the country to meet fertilizer requirements for the month of March, the peak period for boro cultivation.

The meeting also discussed in details the present crisis

Zahir's murder

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could not remember the day he had left the country for India after Zahir's murder.

Mohammad Alam said Tappash had introduced him to Akhteruzzaman Babu, the Awami League MP, and he was not aware of any pseudonym of Babu. He said it was not correct that the person with whom he was introduced was not in fact Babu, rather Barkatullah Bhulu, a BNP MP. He also denied that he had killed Babu.

Defence lawyers, advocate Khan Saifur Rahman and Advocate Mosharraf Hossain Kajal cross-examined the approver.

Three witnesses have been examined so far. Alhaj Zahurul Huq, father-in-law of the victim, was examined on October 9 last year and Abul Hossain, a guard at the residence of Zahir, on January 8 this year.

Humayun Zahir, a leading businessman, was murdered at his Dhanmondi residence in the city on April 8, 1993.

Zahir's relatives pointed the finger at Akhteruzzaman Babu, an Awami League MP and business associate of Zahir. The two later fell out.

Babu jumped bail and is now reported to be in the United States.

DSE index falls

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gainers, 34 losers and 16 remaining unchanged.

Market operators attributed the sudden fall in the DSE index to the decline in the share prices of some big issues which have higher weightage in the index because of their larger market capitalisation.

The big losers on the day include Islamic Bank (Tk 6.94 per share), Aziz Pipes (Tk 34.56), Bangladesh Lamps (Tk 18.53) and BTC (Tk 6.55). While the gainers included First ICB Mutual Fund (Tk 39.41), Singer (Tk 45.31), Monno Jute (Tk 40), Renata (Tk 27.14), and Square Pharmaceuticals (Tk 11.61).

Total market capitalisation also declined Sunday to Tk 42.45 billion from Tk 42.58 billion at the end of the previous day's trading. Turnovers, however, increased totalling 116,239 shares worth Tk 1.77 crore as against 103,006 shares valued at Tk 1.35 crore the day earlier.

The Midnight File

Chechens brace for fresh fighting

NAZRAN (Russia), Mar 19: Chechen rebels braced for new fighting Sunday after columns of Russian armor headed to the east of the breakaway republic in an apparent buildup for a military offensive. Also on Sunday, a military official said an army helicopter had crashed in Chechnya, killing all three crew members, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, reports AP.

17 to vie for each DU first yr Hons seat

By DU Correspondent

As many as 17 students will compete for each seat in the first year Honours class in the Dhaka University for the session 1994-95.

About 63,313 candidates have applied for 3,787 first year Honours seats this year, according to DU sources.

Last year, some 51,983 students applied for 3,737 seats and the ratio was 14:1 while it was 13:1 in the previous year.

Yesterday was the last day for selling and accepting the application forms for admission.

The sale of forms began on February 15 last.

This year, the highest number of candidates — about 21,319 — have applied in 'Ka' unit (Faculty of Science) in which only 15,350 students applied last year.

About 17,030 candidates have applied in the 'Kha' unit (Faculty of Arts) for which 12,600 students applied last year.

Some 10,739 students are vying for the 'Ga' unit (Faculty of Commerce) this year, while some 7,907 students applied in this unit last year.

Some 14,225 students have submitted their application for the 'Gha' unit, while the number of candidates in this unit last year was 16,126. Students willing to change their groups have to apply through 'Gha' unit.

Around 47,012 students applied for 3,727 seats in 1992-93 session, 44,400 for 3,692 seats in 1991-92, 43,000 for the same number of seats in 1990-91 and 39,000 for 3,500 seats in 1989-90, according to available statistics.

The admission tests will begin on April 7.

JFF

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out a procession in the thana headquarters and held a rally with Nazrul Islam presiding.

In Sadar thana, 20 people were injured in a clash over a bag of fertiliser selling at Tk 700 at Bahuli Bazar, witnesses and police said. The situation was brought under control with police intervention.

Meanwhile, activists of the Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami brought out separate processions in the district town protesting price hike of fertiliser, rice and paper.

They marched through the streets and staged demonstrations in front of the DC office at around 11:00 am.

The processions were led by AL district unit general secretary Abdul Latif Mirza and Jamaat district unit president Maulana Ali Alam.

They later submitted a memorandum to the DC stating the fertiliser crisis in local markets. In Kazipur, they said, a bag of urea was selling at Tk 700.

Emdad's statement

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1981 he, along with a 13-member detachment, left for Hathazari in three army vehicles.

Before leaving the cantonment he reported to the office of the Brig Aziz who, Emdad said, had been staying at his office since the night before.

After reaching Hathazari police station, Emdad told the police officials that he had been sent to take the arrested persons including Gen Manzur. After verifying the identity of Emdad the police officials contacted Brig Aziz and Brig Latif to cross check the message he was carrying. The then DIG, Chittagong Range, ASM Shahjahan, now the Inspector General of Police, was present among other senior officials. Emdad mentioned in his statement.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Health Education Bureau

Directorate of Health

Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212

Memo No. DH/HEB/95/24607/10 Dt. 15/03/1995

Sub: Essay Competition on the Occasion of World Health Day '95

Essays are invited from school and college & university students for competition in two groups on the occasion of observing World Health Day on April 7, 1995.

Group A : For students of Class VI to Class X.

Subject : "Role of students in building a polio-free Bangladesh".

Number of words : One thousand.

Language : Bengali.

Size of paper : 13.5" x 8.5" white paper.

Group B : For students of Higher Secondary Class to University

Subject : "Target 2000 — a world without polio".

Number of words : One thousand five hundred.

Language : English.

Size of paper : 13.5" x 8.5" white paper.

The essay shall have to be attested by the competitor's respective head of institution or first class gazetted officer and should reach the office of the undersigned during office hours by March 28, 1995. Attractive prizes will be awarded to the winners.

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