

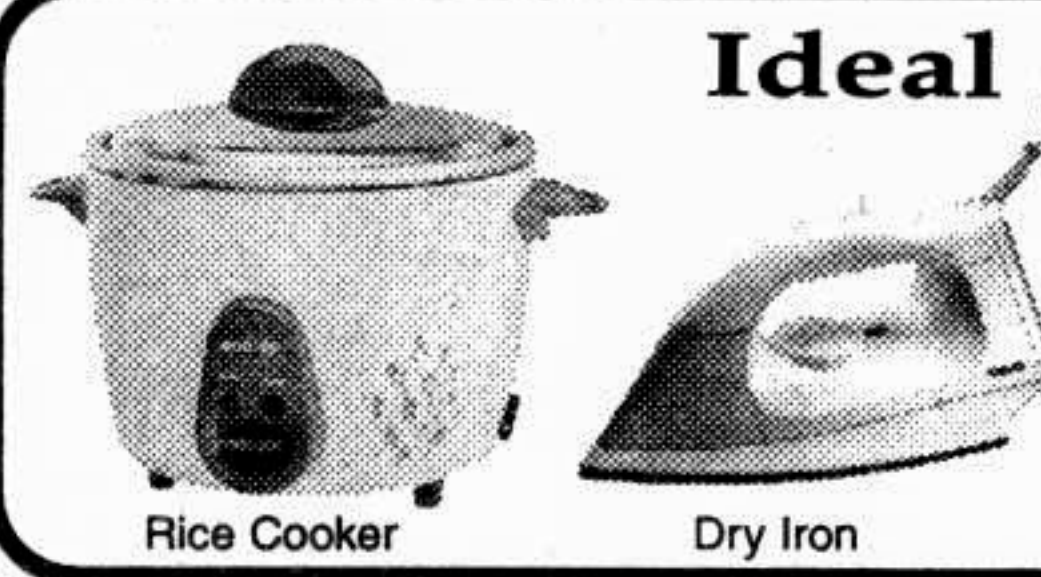
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PHILIPS

# Sonia-Jayalalitha meeting worries BJP camp

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Mar 31: The meeting between two powerful ladies of Indian politics — Congress President Sonia Gandhi and AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha here on Monday was billed as the barometer of the current political mood and possible realignment of forces.

The meeting between Sonia Gandhi and Jayalalitha lasted for barely eight minutes but political analysts are already busy studying its long-term political implications.

The tea party, hosted by maverick politician Dr Subramaniam Swamy, the Janata Party president, considered close to Jayalalitha, has set off speculations about political realignment involving the AIADMK, a key constituent of India's ruling BJP-led alliance which provides life-blood support to the government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Sonia-Jayalalitha meeting took place in the backdrop of reports that the main opposition Congress, which has been prodded by a sizable chunk of anti-BJP camp to pull down Vajpayee government, is willing to take the plunge.

After the meeting, Sonia Gandhi said "we are old friends and this meeting at the tea party is continuation of that friendship." She refused to elaborate if there would be a more concrete political outcome of renewal of old friendship.

Jayalalitha, on her part, told waiting newsmen "politics is never static. It is always shifting. Let us wait and see. This can be termed a political

earthquake." No doubt, the Congress has of late showed signs of aggression seeking to pin down the Vajpayee government the issue of charges of corruption levelled against Defence Minister George Fernandes by sacked Navy chief Vishnu Bhagwat. True, the Congress had joined most of the other anti-BJP forces in forcing the government to revoke federal rule in Bihar where Rashtriya Janata Dal President Laloo Prasad Yadav's wife Rabri Devi is at the helm.

But non-Congress opposition sources and analysts wonder what could be the basis of a Congress plan to topple the Vajpayee government, assuming it has one.

They say the number game in Lok Sabha, lower house of parliament, is simply not in favour of Congress even if it received the support of all anti-BJP parties and a breakaway group of BJP's ally Samata Party, which suffered a split recently, unless BJP's major allies like AIADMK, which has 17 MPs, are weaned away.

Analysts say Jayalalitha appears to have achieved a main objective of her meeting with Sonia Gandhi — to focus the fragility of the ruling coalition and her own importance in present coalition politics.

The implications of the meeting between Sonia Gandhi and Jayalalitha are not lost on the BJP central leadership even though it sought to play down the event by saying "it is a social occasion. Anybody can

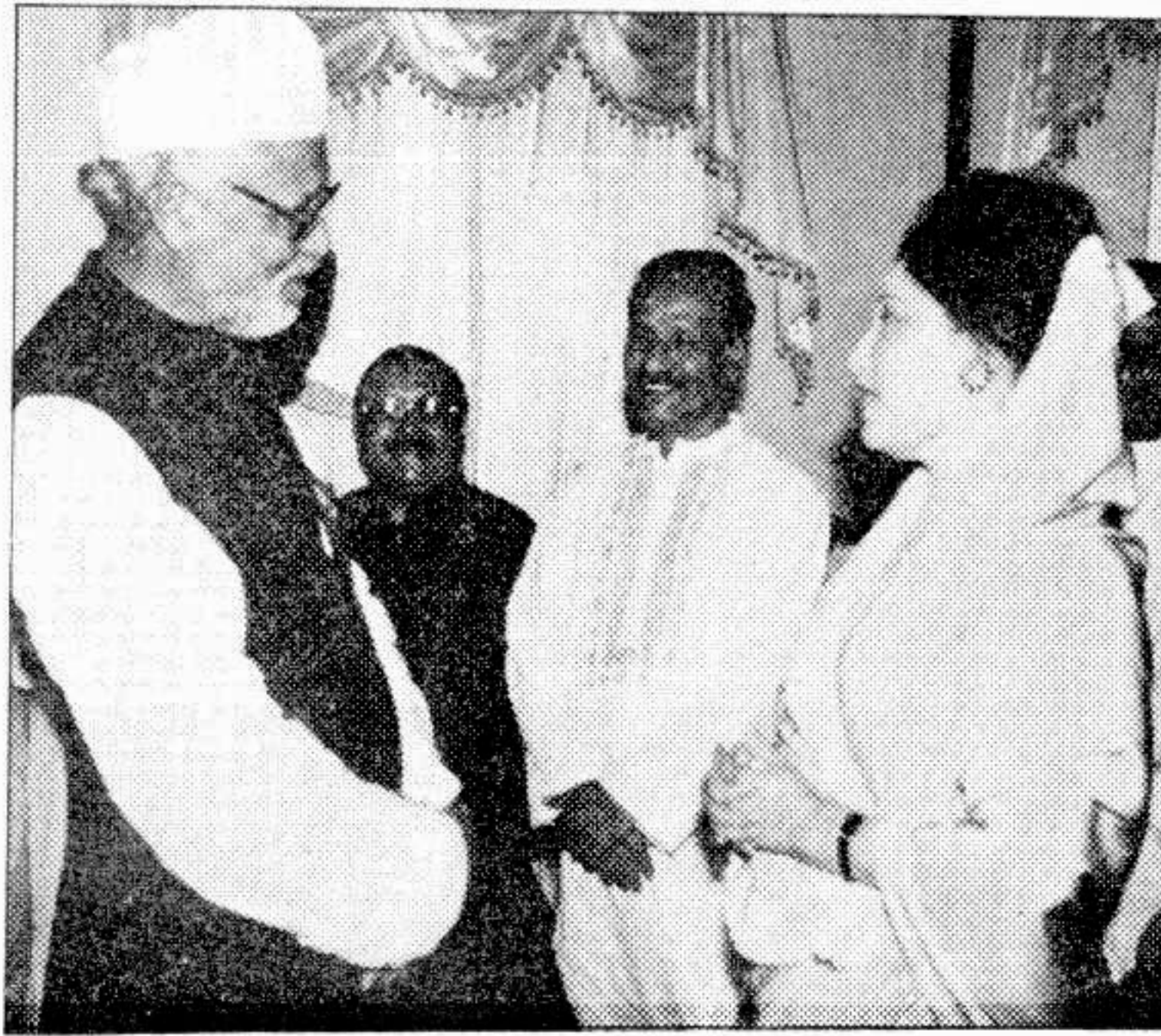
meet anyone in a democracy." There are signs of worry in the BJP camp on the convergence of views between the Congress and AIADMK at least on one current major issue: The demand for a probe by Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) into Bhagwat's charges against the Defence Minister.

What has caused Vajpayee government an embarrassment is that AIADMK has demanded shifting of Fernandes from Defence portfolio to a "less sensitive" ministry or reinstatement of the dismissed Naval chief, a demand rejected by the Prime Minister.

Even though the AIADMK has said that it is ready to go along with the BJP and its other allies which rejected the demand for a JPC probe, it remains to be seen if Jayalalitha's party implements it especially on the floor of parliament where the opposition is certainly to take up the issue next month.

Analysts say the fact that Jayalalitha decided to differ from the Vajpayee government on a crucial issue indicated the not-so-smooth relations between the AIADMK and the BJP.

Meanwhile, all constituents of the BJP-led alliance, barring AIADMK, rallied behind Vajpayee government yesterday in opposing the demand for a JPC probe into charges by Bhagwat and reinstatement of the Naval chief. These allies, at a two-hour meeting yesterday evening, conveyed to Vajpayee not to yield to "pressure" tactics of Jayalalitha.



BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia exchanging Eid greetings with Awami League leader Bangabir Kader Siddiqui at her official residence in the city on Monday. — Star photo

## BNP extended council session postponed

By Staff Correspondent

The two-day extended council session of the central executive committee of BNP scheduled for April 6-7 has been postponed due to 'unavoidable reasons'.

Fresh date for the council will be announced later, said a press release yesterday.

However, all the city, district, municipal and thana units have been asked to send lists of their respective full-fledged committees to party central office by April 8 instead of April 6.

The units have also been asked to send lists of leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations killed during the last three years, arrested members and those accused in various 'politically motivated' cases with brief description by April 8.

## Attack on BNP meet in Rajshahi: 25 injured

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Mar 31: At least 25 people including Kabir Hossain MP were injured in an attack on a public meeting organised by BNP at Dharampur College playground in Durgapur thana on March 27 evening.

BNP blamed Awami League for the attack and filed a case against 26 leaders and activists of Awami League including Tajul Islam Mohammad Farooque, general secretary of the district unit of Awami League.

However, police could not arrest any of the accused till filing this report.

## Ctg BCL activist gunned down

From page 1

A Chhatra League activist was gunned down and an old man beaten to death at Chittagong yesterday, reports UNB.

Police said unidentified assailants came in a taxi and fired on Mohammad Shafiq, 25, on the Bangla Bazar road in Doublimooring thana in the morning.

## DB office

From page 1

from home. Since he is a very senior driver, he used to go around the country without giving us any prior notice," said Abbas, also a driver.

Abbas added that while going out for the last time Shafi had told the family that he was going to the DB office.

DB sources said that Shafi was quite "close" to Anwar Hossain, the canteen lease holder, and Kabir, the family friend, and that there might have been some "serious disagreement" among them. They strongly suspected the killing had been committed "with the help of some DB personnel".

After finding the driving license, he showed the picture to Anwar but he categorically denied knowing Shafi. He even warned the canteen boys not to say anything about Shafi," said a DB source.

Another source said Anwar Hossain went to Shafi's house yesterday and asked his wife "to go away" because "some bad problem has come up".

CID officials said last night that the wife and daughter had formally identified the body. The body would be handed over to the family, they said.

The decomposed body was found in the roof-top water tank at the Detective Branch office in the city under Ramna thana at around 4-30pm on Thursday.

Apart from normal investigation, the authorities also formed a five-member probe committee to look into the mysterious death after the body had been discovered.

Earlier, police had suspected the dead to be a DB source and that it could be somebody named Akhter or Mazfuz or Nurul Islam alias Nuru.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanging Eid greetings with people from all walks of life at the Ganabhaban in the city on Monday. — PID photo

## Li Peng due in city Apr 12

From page 1

Li Peng, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China, will arrive in Dhaka on April 12 on a two-day official visit, reports BSS.

Li, second man in the Chinese hierarchy, is coming here at the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, official sources said yesterday.

The NPC leader will be here on the fifth leg of his six-nation tour that will also take him to Greece, Turkey, Syria, Pakistan and Thailand.

## Chhatak blast

From page 1

of getting "important information" from him. Two persons were killed and another suffered serious burn injuries in the blasts.

Mamuk, at a press conference at Sylhet Circuit House earlier, alleged that some influential quarters have long been involved in a "foul play" against him. Even police officials also joined them, he alleged. He also demanded a judicial enquiry into the incident.

However, an Army team of explosive experts led by Maj Nurul Mohaimen recovered some live bombs, a good number of inoperative bombs, bomb making materials and sharp weapons from the house.

## Hangover

From page 1

Dhaka Stock Exchange but a few share traders came for business.

The capital wore a deserted look yesterday as most shops and business centres remained closed. City traffic was not chaotic and buses were not crammed, a usual scene on other days. There were few pedestrians on sidewalks. With a thinner traffic since Friday, the city dwellers felt somehow relieved from the hustle and bustle that they are usually subjected to.

Rickshawpullers and autorickshaw drivers charged higher fares. The air in some parts of the city remained filled with bad smell from piled up remains of sacrificial animals and garbage. City dwellers in some areas alleged that the city corporation did not remove the garbage.

Meanwhile, the holiday makers have started returning to the capital. The Gabtali, Mohakhali and Syedabad bus stations, Kamalpur railway station and Sadarghat launch terminal were seen crowded yesterday.

## Hides & skin

From page 1

purchaser for Lexco Tannery. Azizur Rahman, a trader, however alleged that traders could not buy leather due to cash crisis as their money was stuck up with tanners. They got only 30 to 40 per cent of the payments against their last year's supplies, he said.

Only a few tanners cleared payments against last year's supplies, he said. He said the market will pick up if the government withdraws the ban on export of wet blue leather and banks increase loans to tanners and leather traders.

According to him, the four nationalised commercial banks disbursed around Tk 175 crore loans this year for procurement of leather against Tk 250 crore last year.

He said out of a total of 170 godown owners at Postagola, only around 30 have started buying leather. "The rest are inactive due to crisis of funds".

## ALPP meets April 4

From page 1

A meeting of the Bangladesh Awami League Parliamentary Party (ALPP) will be held at Sangsad Bhawan at 3:00 pm on April 4, reports UNB.

Leader of the House and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will preside over the meeting.

## Khaleda

From page 1

dent. Begum Zia said the government is yet to implement the four-point agreement signed with the Opposition.

Asked about the next course of action, she said, "Wait and see. We would fix up programme after discussions with other parties."

BNP Chairperson said she did not shift the party's stand from five-point demand including resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner and scrapping the result of February 23-25 municipal polls.

"We have just expressed our opinion about holding elections to City Corporation, Upazila Parishad and parliament in close succession under caretaker government," she said referring to her recent discussion with the representatives of donor countries and agencies.

About law and order situation, Begum Zia alleged that the government did not take any action against the ruling party MP from Chhatak though investigation had proved explosion at his residence caused at the time of manufacturing bombs. Two persons died in the explosion.

"The explosion was not an isolated incident in the house. It was a result of long process," she said.

On the death in the DB office, Begum Zia wondered how the real cause of the gruesome murder would be unearthed when investigation was entrusted with the police.

She said her party demanded judicial inquiry by a sitting Judge of the High Court to probe the incident.

## Rajshahi

From page 1

ected, did not get a single tubewell this year. The thana authorities have repeatedly been demanding their annual quota from us", the executive engineer says.

Meanwhile, arsenic contamination of ground water has been detected in some areas of the district. At places, the amount of arsenic in water is 1.02 Parts Per Million (PPM), while the acceptable limit is .05 only.

Water from almost all the private tubewells in Miapur village of Charghat union under Charghat Thana of the district contain arsenic.

Arsenic has been detected in tubewell waters in Dhama Hata village of Hujuripara union, Hariarion village of Hariarion union under Paba thana and some areas in Bagha Thana.

The situation is worst in Hujuripara union where the amount of arsenic is 1.02 PPM, the executive engineer says.

He, however, points out that arsenic-free water is available at a depth of 100 to 120 feet. In case of sinking new public tubewells, government officials concerned examine the water from a nearby tubewell. If arsenic is found, they either change the place of sinking a tubewell or sink it deeper into the earth, claims the executive engineer. Asked what happens in case of the private tubewells, he says that they are trying to create awareness among the people.

(With Abdul Wadood in Rajshahi)



President of the opposition Congress (I) Party, Sonia Gandhi (R), gestures as she speaks to AIADMK leader Jayalalitha Jayaram (L) during a function in New Delhi on Monday. — AFP photo

## Naogaon AL

From page 1

murders, local Awami League leaders at a meeting at the thana headquarters burst into tears, reports the visiting UNB correspondent.

They told the Home Minister that a particular party in a planned way was carrying out killings one after another as part of a "blueprint".

In Atrai, known as a den of outlaws for long, five activists of the ruling party were killed in last year.

Former MP Wahidur Rahman said, although the terrorists raised slogans in the name of an underground group, they were carrying out these killings under the shelter of a particular party and an influential person in the area.

"Yes, these are preplanned murders being committed to create instability and embarrass the government," the Home Minister agreed in the meeting.

He ordered the local police and civil administration to track down on "the killers as well as the masterminds."

"Plans to kill a ruling party leader can't come out from the head of an ordinary criminal," Nasim said and urged the people to cooperate with the law-enforcers in arresting the killers.

He assured the local people that the killers would be brought to justice, no matter how much powerful they are, but appealed to them to remain calm in this situation.

IGP AYBI Siddiqui told the meeting, "the criminals, after being arrested, were coming out on bail from the courts and getting involved again in crime."

Awami League presidium member Abdul Jaill and Shahn Monwara Huj MP were present in the meeting.

The Home Minister later visited the house of Advocate Raja where a pall of gloom descended amid wails.

He also attended the namaj-e-Janaza for Raja at Ahsanganj High School ground. Thousands of people attended the funerals.

## Killing of BCL leader: One held

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Mar 31: Police arrested one Ghazi, an activist of Chhatra League, in connection with the killing of Golam Murshid, a central leader of Awami League-backed Chhatra League.

Meanwhile, city unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League in an emergency meeting on March 27, expelled 12 members for their alleged involvement in the killing. They included Mijanur Rahman Roni, executive committee member of city unit, Babu, general secretary of Rajpara thana unit and Ghazi.

Golam Murshid was killed by some armed youths on March 26 evening near Keshabpur police station in the city. He was killed as a sequel to intra-party conflicts over toll collection, police said.

## 4 murdered

From page 1

pur of Shailakupa thana was shot in the early morning of Monday, police said.

His body was recovered from village Subashpur in Hariarion thana. Reason behind the killing could not be known, police added.

Meanwhile, Sirajul Islam alias Mantu Master of Shahabpur in Shilakupa thana was kidnapped and shot dead on the bank of a river at Hariarion thana the same morning, police said.

Earlier, Mantu Master was kidnapped by his rivals, from a local bazar, police informed.

Another person was hacked to death following a dispute over distribution of sacrificial meat at Shailakupa thana here on Monday, police said.

Abdus Sattar, 45, died on the spot when the villagers clashed at village Kazirpara in the noon, police added.

His body was sent to hospital for autopsy. A case was filed.

## Gold seized at Ctg airport: One arrested

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 31: Customs officials today seized two kilograms of gold worth about Tk 15 lakhs at Chittagong airport from a passenger who returned from Dubai by a flight of Bangladesh Biman.

The passenger, Yeer Mohammad, was handed over to police after recovery of the smuggled gold.

Customs officials at the airport said they marked the suspicious movement of Yeer Mohammad after his arrival at 9 am. They searched his body and recovered 311 gold chains from inside his underwear.

About a week ago, 400 tolas of gold were seized at Chittagong airport from another passenger who also returned from Dubai.

## Maid killed in 'accidental' firing in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 31: A maid servant was killed yesterday morning when a bullet from a shot gun of a police constable hit her at Kotwali thana office mess, police said today.

The constable was immediately arrested and sent to custody. Police said it was an accidental fire.

However, sources in the police said that Alamgir, unaware that his shot gun was loaded, pulled the trigger jokingly at Saleha in front of other servants.

A high-powered probe body was formed, headed by CMP deputy commissioner.

## Russia to send warships to Mediterranean

MOSCOW, Mar 31: Defence Minister Igor Sergeev said today Russia was sending a reconnaissance ship to the Mediterranean Sea to gather information about the Yugoslav conflict, reports Reuters.

He told a news conference Moscow had already requested its passage through the Bosphorus and was considering sending more ships to the region.

# Growers struggle to save boro crop

## Fallout of drought in N-dists

By Reaz Ahmad

As a spell of drought continues in the country, farmers in the northern districts have taken to extensive irrigation of Boro fields to save the crop.

Sources concerned, however, pointed out that this has made Boro cultivation more expensive this season and would result in further depletion of ground water in the region.

While visiting different villages in the rice-rich Dinajpur and Rangpur districts this week, this correspondent found that the farmers were virtually crying for rains.

Hakimuddin cultivates both paddy and wheat this season. Standing in his paddy fields at village Alokait in Chirribansadar thana of Dinajpur district, the experienced farmer said that rains were so badly needed now and that paddy growers were praying for it. Boro cultivation was more expensive this season because it needed much more irrigation due to prolonged absence of rain, he said.

Paddy growers in Kaharol, Birganj, Pabratpur, Mahiganj, Nasnia and other areas of

Rangpur-Dinajpur region had the same story to tell.

Quoting farmers in Natore district recently, leading life science company Novartis reported that growers, in some cases, borrowed money from local mahajans to meet the additional cost.

Talking to The Daily Star in Rangpur, an expert said "A prolonged dry spell would cost the growers dearly before the harvesting of Boro". He further noted that those who planted late were engaged in using chemical fertiliser at the stage of 'top dressing' and could save little money for more irrigation.

Dr S A Sattar of the regional station of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) in Rangpur, however, sees good prospects for boro production as there was a lesser pest attack this time.

He said that farmers in the northern region had to pay more for urea as there was dislocation in fertiliser transportation due to hartals and unscrupulous traders tried to



Boro fields in the northern districts are being extensively irrigated. —Photo by Reaz Ahmad

take advantage of it. As Boro acreage rose significantly this season, so did the demand for irrigation. If the drought continues further, the pressure on ground water would be tremendous and many pumps would become inoperative due to fall in water level, sources pointed out.