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## Plan to increase fertiliser, diesel price under fire

No hike before IRRI-Boro harvest: MOA

By Reaz Ahma

Experts have reacted sharply to a government plan to increase fertilizer and diesel prices, saying it will adversely affect agricultural production.

However, sources in the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) told *The Daily Star* that there would be no price rise before the IRRI-Boro harvest this year. MOA will put forward its own thoughts on the crucial issue for consideration by the Cabinet before any decision is taken, they said.

"We will have our considerations on the issue before the Cabinet takes any decision that will have a direct bearing on agriculture," said a top official.

But Agriculture Minister Motla Chowdhury did not make any comment on the probable impact of a price rise on the farming community who were instrumental in early recovery of the economy after the 1998 devastating flood.

The government has to govern. The Cabinet will consider and reconsider the current price structures and do the needful adjustments. It will be premature to say anything now," she said when her attention was drawn to the Finance Minister's recent indication about price rise of fertiliser and fuel.

Finance Minister SAMS Kibria recently said that the government was seriously thinking of increasing fertilizer and fuel prices.

The experts said, government subsidy on agriculture is nominal and any fresh move to increase prices of the two vital agri-inputs will be a 'show of complacency'.

"This is sheer complacency that after subsequent bumper crops, the government jumps for such price rise of fertilizer and diesel. First of all, the government should make sure whether the growth in agriculture is weather-induced or policy-induced," said Dr Kazi Shahabuddin, a Research Director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

The Finance Minister had said that subsidy to any sector is not good for the economy, as there are chances of distortion.

"The government has to take some very unpopular decisions for the greater interest of the economy," he had said.

But experts refuted the argument. In Bangladesh, subsidy and price support to agriculture is one of the lowest in the world

although the sector employs two-thirds of the country's workforce and generates one third of the national income, they said.

If the government suffers from liquidity crises why it does not go for recovery of defaulted loans from white-collar businessmen and improve its revenue collection instead of coming down so harsh on the poor farmers?", one expert asked.

According to the MOA, subsidy on agriculture amounts to only 3.3 per cent of the total farmgate value of agricultural products in the country. The aggregate measure of support (AMS) to agriculture is estimated at Tk. 981 crore.

This is nowhere near the subsidy and price support given in many other countries, the expert said.

Another expert said the public support programmes are pretty small compared to the value of agricultural output.

The experts say, while preparing the budget for submission to Finance Ministry, MOA should clearly mark subsidy and support proposals within the World Trade Organization (WTO) framework.

Normally, budgetary allocations are made for Tk. 100 crore subsidy on fertilizer, but the amount crosses Tk. 200 crore annually.

The experts argued that while in India, the subsidy is over seven per cent of total farmgate value, there should not be any question of further reduction of subsidy in Bangladesh where only 18 per cent of the population possess farmlands over one acre and of 82 per cent are either landless or possess less than one acre of land.

**Stars parade**

From Page 1

Ajay Jadeja, Robin Singh and Anil Kumble -- are due in the afternoon.

Pakistan captain Moin Khan, Abdul Razak and Zimbabweans -- Andy Flower and Neil Johnson -- are expected to fly in from the Caribbean in the same flight.

Flamboyant Australian Mark Waugh will land later tonight.



Speeding minibus runs over a man ... angry people go on a rampage ... police use force to get things under control ... that was the story in the city's Kataban area yesterday.

—Star photo

## Unconstitutional rule an enemy of democracy

Hasina tells function at Harvard University

BOSTON, Apr 6: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cautioned people Wednesday against any unconstitutional rule and vowed to make democracy count for peace and people's welfare, although the task is tough due to inimical factors, reports UNB.

"We in Bangladesh shall continue to do our very best to do away with all that stand in the way of democracy and peace," she said during a speech at the famous John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Kim Campbell, former Canadian prime minister and chairman of the Council of Women World Leaders, chaired the function. She introduced Sheikh Hasina to the scholars, academics and the students of Harvard University who come to listen to Hasina's speech on "Leading a Country in Transition: Challenges and Opportunities," which was followed by question-answer session.

Hasina identified unconstitutional rule, coupled with muscle power, poverty and illiteracy, as the three enemies of democracy.

She said some of Bangladesh's past governments were toppled by unconstitutional means.

The experts argued that while in India, the subsidy is over seven per cent of total farmgate value, there should not be any question of further reduction of subsidy in Bangladesh where only 18 per cent of the population possess farmlands over one acre and of 82 per cent are either landless or possess less than one acre of land.

"We do not wish such events to occur again," said Hasina.

"No one should have unconstitutional political ambitions. No one should be encouraged to have these. No one should try to take advantage of the might of some by misleading them."

Hasina said a hundred and one excuses might be used to justify unconstitutional measures but these are nothing more than excuses. The justification of democracy is democracy itself and nothing can replace it.

If a government is bad or not up to the expectation of the people, there must be constitutional means of replacing it. That is the means that should be adopted, no other, said Hasina.

Hasina recalled how democracy was trampled by military and quasi-military rule and people's voting right denied with the assassination of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

Democracy need to be closely watched all the times, since it has many enemies and they are powerful ones."

Expressing her unflinching faith in democracy Hasina said peace is the paramount reason why democracy is important

for Bangladesh. "We are fully committed to it."

However, Hasina said that by peace she didn't mean a mere absence of a state of war or of conflicts.

"Peace is the blissful state in which all people can lead a worthwhile and meaningful life in accordance with their own choice, their talents and ability of flourishing unhindered."

The prime minister pointed to Bangladesh's decision to ratify Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and support the establishment of International Criminal Court as evidence of the country's commitment to peace.

Hasina also referred to the peaceful settlement of long-standing disputes with India over the sharing of Ganges waters and the end of the ethnic conflict in the CHT by signing the peace accord with tribal insurgents leaders without any external help or mediation.

Hasina cited her anti-nuclear peace mission to New Delhi and Islamabad in May 1998 when the two rivals staged tit-for-tat nuclear blasts.

"We worked for diffusion of tensions in South Asia following nuclear tests by India and Pakistan," said Hasina.

## Rajshahi by-polls will be an intra-party showdown

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Apr 6: Two persons withdrew their candidatures from the race of by-election of Rajshahi-5 constituency comprising Chorghat and Bagha thanas today, the last date for withdrawal of nomination paper. District Election office sources said. Voting will take place on April 22.

They are Saidur Rahman, general secretary of Rajshahi Press Club and Advocate Shaded Ali Jinnah, both were independent candidates.

A total of 12 persons submitted nomination papers on March 29 for contesting the by-election.

The final candidates are: Nurul Islam Thandu (Awami League), Rajahul Hug Rajah (Independent), general secretary of Awami League Chorghat

Symbols will be allocated tomorrow for the candidates.

Sources said that all attempts of Awami League for convincing AL leaders Rajahul Hug Rajah, Brig (Rtd) Anisur Rahman and Azizul Azam to withdraw their candidatures in favour of the party nominee had failed. Under the circumstances, Rajshahi-5 by-election becomes an intra-party contests in the wake of boycott of the polls by the main opposition parties.

On Thursday noon a group of miscreants attacked him in 'Rasulpur' area where he also resides. They stabbed him and severed both of his wrists. He was rushed to DMCH. No case was filed till the writing of this report.

The news item terming me as a 'squatter' is utterly baseless, false, misleading, derogatory and defamatory since I am a legal, bona fide purchaser for value of 5.75 katha of land," the rejoinder said.

A resident of Road-5, a nuclear scientist, protested the news item that appeared on April 5, 2000. He said he did not encroach on "an inch of public land." He said his lakeside plot has a public walkway outside his boundary fence.

Two other Shibir activists were admitted to Satkania hospital.

Police later arrested one Mijanur Rahman from the spot.

Police said the gunfight was a sequel to previous political rivalry between the two student bodies.

Shibir-BCL gunfight at Satkania: One killed

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 6: One person was killed and two others were injured in a gunfight between the activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir and Bangladesh Chhatra League at Satkania today, police said.

The victims were identified as activists of Shibir, police said.

Jahangir alias Sabuj, 20, received bullet wounds during the gunfight that erupted at 12:30 pm near Satkania College. He was rushed to Satkania hospital where he succumbed to bullet injuries.

Two other Shibir activists were admitted to Satkania hospital.

Police later arrested one Mijanur Rahman from the spot.

Police said the gunfight was a sequel to previous political rivalry between the two student bodies.

Death in road accident sparks violence in city: Vehicles damaged

By Staff Correspondent

Several vehicles were damaged following the death of a young man who was run over by a minibus in the city's Kataban area yesterday.

The dead was identified as Razak.

A speeding minibus coming from Motijheel crushed Razak when he was crossing the road at about 1 pm.

Local people, along with the students, chased the bus and pelted stones at it. They managed to stop the bus.

The locals set the bus on fire but the police doused the fire. The mob also attacked the police team who had gone there to bring the situation under control.

Local people also put up barricade on the street and a tense situation was prevailing in and around the area till evening.

Police tried to remove the barricade but the mob chased the police away.

Police also had to fire tear gas shells to disperse the mob. A student of Ideal school was injured during the clash.

Habib Bourguiba passes away

TUNIS, Apr 6: Former President Habib Bourguiba, a founder of modern-day Tunisia who set this North African nation on its pro-Western course in three decades as its benign dictator, died today. He was 96, reports AP.

Bourguiba, who bore the titles "president for life" and "supreme combatant" before being deposed in a 1987 bloodless palace coup, died in his hometown of Monastir, a port city 160 kms (110 miles) south of Tunis.

He was buried in a state funeral.

Government officials are trying to encourage farmers to use liquid pesticides when their crops are attacked by pests.

However, farmers in Bogra said they can't use liquid pesticide since they don't have a spraying machine.

The government allocates only one spraying machine for every union, and we never get it,"

alleged Mohammad Shahjahan, a farmer from the village of Telukpi Rani Nagar. A spraying machine can cost more than Tk 3,000, a luxury most poor farmers are unable to afford.

Shajahan Ali Khan, a pesticide dealer, said over 70 tonnes of granule pesticide was sold in the thana this year compared to just 200 litres of the liquid variety.

Meanwhile, the situation in Rasulbagh and adjacent Makhali areas remained tense yesterday also and uniformed and plainclothes police were deployed there.

Unidentified gunmen shot dead three young men at Rasulbagh under Gulshan thana in the hours of Wednesday. Police identified the victims as Chowdhury Zahir Uddin Babar and Russell of Rampur Rampura and Selim of Khilgaon.

Family sources said Russell's mother will file a 'complaint' accusing some persons of involvement in the killing of her son. Earlier, Gulshan police filed a case in connection with the triple murder.

Police picked up three youths on Wednesday for interrogation in this regard. But it could not be known yesterday whether they were shown arrested or released.

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