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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 fertiliser 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 Motia 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 fertiliser 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 fertiliser 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 fertiliser, 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 Jadhav, Robin Singh and Anil Kumble -- are due in the afternoon.

Pakistan captain Moin Khan, Abdul Razzak and two 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 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.

Kim Campbell, former Canadian prime minister and chairwoman 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.

"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."

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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 insurgent 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 tests.

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

## IJO's fate hangs in balance

Successor agreement appears a far cry as EU members stay away from conference

By Mustak Hossain

Existence of the International Jute Organisation (IJO) as an international body has become uncertain as the 15 European Union (EU) members of the 25-member organisation stayed away from its conference that began here yesterday, sources said.

The IJO may exist as a separate body under the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), an official of the EU mission here told The Daily Star yesterday seeking anonymity.

The two-day IJO meeting here is a follow up of its Geneva meeting last month, that was aimed at reaching a consensus on renewal of the 1989 International Agreement on Jute and Jute Products to give a lease of life to the international body.

The 1989 agreement expires on April 11, and if it is not re-

newed at the Dhaka meeting, the IJO would automatically get liquidated.

The EU members stayed away from the Geneva meeting saying that IJO failed to promote trade on jute and jute goods. The Dhaka meeting may be extended by one day, sources said.

The EU members had also observed that there was no justification to keep alive such an organisation that deals with only one commodity. EU countries' contribution meet 30 per cent of IJO's total expenditure.

"The EU members stayed away from the IJO meeting as they believe that such meetings are not effective to discuss the future status of IJO," the official of the EU mission said.

An EU official however came here from Brussels yesterday to attend the April 9-10 meeting of

the International Jute Council (IJC), the policy-making body of IJO. The IJC meeting will be a follow up of the IJO meeting.

He hinted that the European Union (EU) official is likely to place some proposals regarding policy matters to reach a new agreement on IJO "to it more flexible and to incorporate some concerns of EU members".

Out of 25 members of the IJO, the EU with 15 member dominates its policy. IJO officials said.

The Geneva meeting however adopted a resolution, which stopped short of referring to a "successor agreement" but said that proposals on a "successor instrument" were welcome.

The IJO meeting began at the International Conference Centre (ICC) with its President Li Enheng in the chair.

## 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 minibuss in the city's Kataban area yesterday.

The dead was identified as Razzak. A speeding minibuss coming from Motijheel crushed Razzak 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 afire but police immediately went there and 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 a 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.

## Mastaans sever wrists of businessman

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Apr 6: Miscreants severed the wrists of a businessman in Rasulpur of 'Pagla' area under Fatulla thana on Thursday around 1:30 pm.

Locals said, Khorsheed Alam (40) was the business partner of Golden Re-roller Mills at 'Pagla'. He was also known as a social worker. The local mastaans were angry with him as he protested their illegal activities. 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.

## BCL activists clash over formation of DU hall unit

By DU Correspondent

Two Bangladesh Chhatra League activists were injured at the University of Dhaka's Jagannath Hall Wednesday night during clashes over formation of the hall unit committee.

Sanjoy, a third-year student of Sanskrit and Palli, and Probr, who appeared for the honours final exams in the Department of Philosophy, were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Protrah is listed in serious condition.

According to the sources, unidentified men armed with weapons attacked Protrah at around 9:30 p.m. in front of the hall's teachers' bungalow.

## Greener may not mean healthier

Granule pesticide a threat to environment, experts say

Rafiq Hasan back from Bogra

Farmers are using granule pesticide cut with urea fertiliser on their fields to control pests, despite the danger the chemicals pose to the environment.

"It makes the plants greener and protects them from pests," said Saywar Hossain, a farmer in Royganj thana, Sirajganj.

Abdul Khaled, Abdul Jabbar Sarkar, Hazrat Ali Pramanik and Matur Rhaman, farmers from nearby villages, said they have been getting good results with granule pesticide for a long time.

However, pesticide experts and government officials said granule pesticide was a waste of money and a danger to the environment, since it kills all the insects in a field.

"There are many insects that help plants, but granule pesticide prevents their growth," said an official with a multinational company that is a major pesticide manufacturer. "It also kills fish and other aquatic animals. Long-term use of granule pesticide will create an ecological imbalance in the country."

Shafiqul Islam, a farmer from Ismat Salonga in Sirajganj, said he used 1 kilogram of granule pesticide per bigha on his 16 bighas of land this year.

"Granule pesticide is very powerful and it protects plants from all kinds of pests," said Islam. "Its effects remain until harvest. What else should I do, we have to grow crops for our livelihood."

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.

Shahjahan 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.

Shahidul Islam, another pesticide dealer in Royganj, Sirajganj, said granule pesticides account for more than 80 per cent of his sales. Popular brands include Furadan, Basudin, Sunfuran, Farafuran, Marshal Bisfuran Brifer and Vitafuran.

More than 11,000 tonnes of granule pesticide is used across the country annually. About 95 per cent it applied before pests attack a crop.

The government is trying to discourage indiscriminate pesticide use. It has implemented a \$6.6 million US integrated pest management project to curb pesticide use in the country.

"We always try to discourage farmers from using all types of pesticide," said an official. "But they can only use liquid after observing the harmful effects of insecticide in the field."

## No headway in triple murder case

By Staff Correspondent

Police failed to make any headway yesterday in its probe into the triple murder at Rasulbagh in the city on Wednesday.

The case was now handed over to Detective Branch for investigation.

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 Russel of Rampur Rampura and Selim of Khilgaon.

Family sources said Russel'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.

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

আমেলা ও ঝুঁকিতভাবে

তগদ অর্থ

দেশে প্রবেশ করতে চান?

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## 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 Charchat 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 Shahed 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), Raihanul Huq Raihan (Independent), general secretary of Awami League Charchat

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.

thana unit, Brig (Rtd) Anisur Rahman (Independent) who was AL candidate in 1996 elections, Azizul Azam, (Independent) Chairman of Gargari Union and local Awami League leader, Abdul Gafur Shah (Independent), who was Jatiya Party (Ershad-Manzur) candidate in the by-election of December 8 of 1999, Advocate Shushanta Sarker (Independent) district unit CPB leader, Mohammad Sadek (Independent) local leader of Krishak Mukti Party, Ziaur Rahman (Independent), Dr. Nuruzaman Sarker (Independent) and Tosaddek Hossain (Independent).

Symbols will be allocated tomorrow for the candidates. Sources said that all attempts of Awami League for convincing AL leaders Raihanul Huq Raihan, 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.

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## Rejoinders

From Page 1

rectly stating that she was in illegal occupation of 2.8 katha land whereupon she filed a Writ Petition. The Hon'ble Court, after the hearing, stayed operation of the Eviction Order and restrained the government from disturbing her peaceful possession.

"The news item terming me as a 'squatter' is utterly baseless, false, misleading, derogatory and defamatory since I am a legal, bonafide 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.