

Govt to go for food-aided programmes

UNB, Dhaka

To arrest the rising price of rice, the Food Planning and Monitoring Committee yesterday decided to expedite food distribution through food aided programmes like Food for Work, Test Relief and VGF.

The Committee took the decision after reviewing the food situation at a meeting, chaired by Food Minister Tariqul Islam at the Food Ministry.

The meeting was informed that the government was capable of facing any emergency with its present stock of over 11 lakh metric tons of foodgrains.

It also recommended that the LC margin for private sector import of rice be reduced from 100 per cent to 25 per cent.

Agriculture Minister Matiur Rahman Nizami, Disaster Management and Relief Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf and State Minister for Relief Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury attended the meeting.

Food Secretary Abdul Latif Mondol, Agricultural Secretary Ayub Kadri, IRD Secretary Dr Shoeb Ahmed, Statistics Secretary Anil Chandra Singha, Acting Secretary of Disaster Management and Relief Ministry BMM Mozharul Haque and other officials concerned were present.

Clarification

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in a clarification yesterday referred to The Daily Star news item headlined "They're mere tailors, often go for personal gains" and said he did not mean to cast any aspersion on garments exporters and was just trying to make the point that the apparel sector has little value addition compared to the leather sector. He said the country needs to have higher value-added industries for sustainable development. He also said he recognises the contribution of the sector that fetches US\$3 billion for the country and reminded that as a finance minister he has always given strong support to this sector. The Daily Star report quoted him out of context.

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US demand for foreign skilled workers rises

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 29		5-43 pm
Jan 30	6-41 am	

Prayer Timings

Jan 29		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-40	6-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-46	5-50
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Bitter pills on plate

Cabinet to decide on 30 reform measures

INAM AHMED

The cabinet will meet soon to take a hard look at a list of 30 reform measures the finance ministry has drawn up to streamline the economy, and place them before the donors at the Bangladesh Development Forum meet in March.

Some measures are quite radical, some are harsh but all long overdue, while some others will tax the commoners by increasing utility tariffs.

Among the spiky issues stands out a proposal to amend the Privatisation Commission Act to pave the way for closing down loss-making state-owned enterprises and selling off profitable ones - steps not allowable under the pres-

ent form of the law.

In the first phase of the privatisation programme, the government will close down the loss-making jute mills, including the Adamjee Jute Mills, if the cabinet nods in approval.

In a bid to cut back on the excess manpower, the ministry wants to abolish any government post falling empty, if these had no bearing on the state affairs. Similarly, when someone would go on leave preparatory to retirement, no official would be drawn in to fill in the post.

In another radical proposition, the cabinet will have to decide whether to change the current hierarchy in the bureaucracy. The proposal is that, where applicable, the posts of additional secretary and

joint secretary would be abolished and only the deputy secretary will represent the office after the secretary. This essentially means shedding two posts.

In another wide divergence from the current practice, suggestions have been made to promote officials on the basis of merit and appoint private sector people to high government positions. Those activities supporting the government programmes will also be contracted out.

Plans are also there to privatise the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board and reduce its manpower.

The 30-item list also includes expansion of direct and indirect tax

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Draft ready PM may address nation in a couple of days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is expected to address the nation within the next couple of days about the "successes and achievements" of her government's 100-day programmes.

Khaleda Zia in her address to the nation on October 19 last announced a series of programmes targeted for completion within a 100-day period that ended on January 27.

Sources said an earlier decision on December 30 for the Prime Minister to address the nation over the radio and television on January 27 marking completion of the 100-day programmes was delayed for

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Mob burns 3 'muggers' to death at Motijheel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three suspected muggers, who shot and snatched Tk 2.60 lakh from two employees of a private firm, were burned to death by a mob in the city's Motijheel commercial area yesterday morning.

The suspected muggers died after the mob poured petrol on them and set them on fire. One of the employees, hit by bullets in his hands and in the neck, was operated upon at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Motijheel police said a crowd caught the three men as they tried to flee on motorbikes after snatching cash from the two employees of BD Corporation, a firm engaged in exporting perishables. They had just come out of a bank and were on their way to the airport.

Police recovered a revolver along with 11 bullets from the alleged muggers.

The employees are Mafijul Alam Chowdhury Arju, 33, and Humayun Kabir whose age could not be known. Arju, an airport supervisor of BD Corporation, Humayun, airport manager of the firm, and Imran and

Bashar of its commercial section, went to the Islami Bank, local branch, to withdraw money. Arju withdrew Tk 2.50 lakh from the bank and had brought with him Tk 10,000 from the office, Bulbul, another employee of the firm, said.

The identity of the three muggers could not be known immediately, but Motijheel police said they found papers in their trouser pockets, containing two names Tapan and Iqbal.

Witnesses said the incident took place when Arju and Humayun were moving towards the airport for paying airfreight at about 11:15am yesterday.

The two came out of the bank and tried to take a taxicab but the driver refused to run the metre and instead, asked for a negotiated fare. The duo then hired an auto-rickshaw and as they were about to get in it, three people riding a silver-coloured Honda motorbike (Dhaka Metro A-03-6307) asked the two to hand over the bag containing money, according to an witness.

A tussle followed after the employees refused to

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

A child snuggles up against her father's body during yesterday's biting cold brought about by the sudden climatic change.

Sudden bite of winter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Intermittent showers accompanied by cold wind disrupted normal life in the Dhaka City and elsewhere in the country yesterday, heralding a mild cold wave that may sweep the northern and southwestern parts of the country.

The sudden change in weather was due to the moisture-bearing easterly winds from the Bay of Bengal mixing with the cold sub-continental westerly winds, meteorological department sources said.

Although the lowest temperature of nine degrees Celsius was recorded in Srimangal in the northeast, the temperature varied between 16 and 18 degrees Celsius elsewhere in the country. A minimum of 15.7 degrees Celsius was recorded in the Dhaka City. Wind, mist and cloudy sky shrouding the sun made the cold felt bitterly, bringing misery to the poor without warm clothes and shelter, a meteorologist said.

The met office in its forecast said that a mild cold wave may sweep over Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions, and the regions of Mymensingh, Tangail, Jessore, Kustia and

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Experts meet today to talk regional power exchange

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fourth semi-annual meeting of the USAID South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy (SARI/Energy) begins in the city today, bringing together energy experts from the USA, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The two-day meet will discuss, among other regional energy issues, a pre-feasibility study for power exchange between Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Regional Coordinator and Programme Manager of SARI/Energy Robert W Beckman at a press briefing in the city yesterday said the pre-feasibility study conducted by US company Nexant concluded that power exchange between these four countries was technically feasible and economically advantageous.

"Interregional power wheeling can save a lot of investment," Beckman noted. "Wheeling of 150

MW power can save 30 million dollar in investment and 500 MW can save 50 million dollars."

Beckman further noted that the governments of the participating countries have shown keen interest in the USAID-sponsored regional cooperation efforts under the banner of SARI launched in Kathmandu in December 1999. Ever since, two meetings were held, one in New Delhi and the other in Colombo.

Today's session will discuss papers on "A call for private sector support in forging regional energy integration and cooperation throughout South Asia: A suggested framework of action for regional business associations and apex bodies", "Energy policy, trade and investment: The role of energy associations" and "State of the South Asia regional energy coalition".

Participants would also discuss regional partnership, rural energy

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New mancha against 'Janatar Mancha?'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of employees and officials have demanded immediate termination of and legal actions against 35 incumbent and former secretaries who 'revolted' against the BNP government in 1996 and joined the so-called "Janatar Mancha".

The demand came from a platform called Bangladesh Sachibalaya Karmachari Oikya Forum at its extended meeting with its convener Jubair Ahmed, a joint secretary, in the chair on Sunday evening, said a press release.

The meeting said a section of top bureaucrats and employees, violating the then prime minister's appeal, placed a six-point demand and joined the "Janatar Mancha", sponsored by the Awami League, then in opposition, in March 1996 at Tophkhana Road.

It expressed deep anguish at the contractual appointment of incumbent Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat and demanded his removal. The meeting said

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Contracts galore

47 senior officials appointed in last three months

REZAUL KARIM

The BNP-led alliance government in the last three and a half months of its rule has given contractual appointments for different terms to 47 senior officials, which is so far the highest in such a small time as compared to such appointments made within an equivalent period in previous regimes.

The officials include 13 secretaries, two additional secretaries, two joint secretaries and 30 other officials in different government offices including political appointees.

All the secretaries and additional secretaries were given one-year contractual appointments and one joint secretary two-year and another one-year.

The secretaries who were given contractual appointments are, Cabinet Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan, member, Planning Commission Dr Shah Mohammad Farid, Information Secretary Marghub Murshed, Education Secretary Shahidul Islam, Industries Secretary Al Amin Chowdhury, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Uddin Siddique, Rural Development and Cooperatives Secretary Dhiraj Kumar Nath, Primary and Mass Education Secretary Prof Tahmina Hossain, Water Resources Secretary Faisal Ahmed Chowdhury, Local Government Division Secretary AYBI Siddique, Secretary In-Charge of Fisheries and Livestock Dr Jahurul Karim, Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat and Secretary of the Election Commission Secretariat Saiful Islam.

The two additional Secretary level officials are Chairman of Rural Electrification Board Ziaul Islam Chowdhury and Director General of Disaster management and Relief Department Muhammad Ashraf.

The two joint secretaries include joint secretary of Cabinet Division Delwar Hossain with a two-year contract and Director General at the Prime

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2 Brigadier Generals elevated

DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

Two Brigadier Generals were promoted to the rank of Major General yesterday, according to sources.

For the last two months, both of them -- Rezzakul Haider and Manzur Alam-- were officiating in positions held by Major Generals.

With their promotion, the number of Major Generals in Bangladesh Army now stands at 24 including two posted as ambassadors.

Rezzakul Haider is Director General of Bangladesh Rifles while Manzur Alam is Director General of Ansar and VDP.

An infantry corps officer, Haider played an important role in UN peace-keeping operations and held the prestigious position of Chief Military Observer in East Timor.

Manzur Alam, a Signals Corps officer, earlier held the posts of Chairman of Khulna Development Authority and Instructor at the Staff College.

On January 21, the government decided to relieve three major generals of military service.

Most hospitals run out of morphine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most of the government hospitals have run out of morphine, an intravenous painkiller used during and after operations.

The government has not supplied morphine vials for the last two months, sources in different city hospitals said. At least 30,000 vials are required in hospitals across the country.

The painkiller has no substitute, but in its absence doctors prescribe pethidine, a less powerful painkiller.

According to Drug Administration and Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) sources, the drug being a sedative is under its strict control.

The production of the drug is not banned, but its raw materials were not available for a short time.

The Drug Administration, however, said the companies would start manufacturing the drug, since its raw materials are now available.

Only two companies -- Gonosasthya Pharmaceuticals and Jayson Pharmaceutical Company --

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AL sees no atmosphere to join JS session

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League has decided to stick to its earlier stance to abstain from attending parliament session till a 'congenial atmosphere' is created.

The decision was taken at a meeting of AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) with party chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina in the chair yesterday.

"We are not against joining parliament session, but it depends on the government's attitude in and outside the House." The party is not going to parliament "right now, top AL leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star last night.

With the ALPP decision yesterday, the second session of the eighth Jatiya Sangsad begins on Thursday without the main opposition party in the House. AL had boycotted its maiden session from October 28 last, alleging vote rigging in the October 1 national elections.

The meeting discussed the



Sheikh Hasina

existing political situation, government's attitude towards the opposition and the issue of joining House proceedings.

Hasina asked her party lawmakers to closely monitor activities of the government in and outside the House and also to get prepared to attend its session any time.

"Once a congenial atmosphere is created, we will attend parliament session," the former prime minister was quoted as saying at the meeting.

She also called upon the party legislators to resist 'fascist' behaviour of the government and organise people in their respective constituencies for 'ousting' it.

The meeting was attended by 47 party MPs out of the 58, who expressed interest in playing their due role in parliament but also drew attention to government-backed 'repression and atrocities' on opposition activists and supporters in their respective constituencies, meeting sources said.

They alleged that the BNP-Jamaat coalition government asked the district administrations concerned not to involve AL MPs in development activities in the respective areas. The ruling alliance are still unleashing attacks on AL activists and even those who cast vote for AL in the last elections, the MPs said.

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NCTB detects huge shortfall Fresh order to print 7 lakh textbooks

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

With only two days left to the deadline to distribute textbooks among students, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) yesterday issued fresh work orders for printing of about seven lakh additional copies of the revised versions, sources in the printing industry said.

The move to print additional copies at the last moment would further delay distribution of textbooks, causing further suffering to students.

The printing order was given last night after the NCTB found a huge shortfall of books of classes VI to IX, which have been revised after the BNP-led four party coalition came in power.

This proves that the NCTB did not have any demand projection for the current academic year, sources said.

Despite repeated attempts, the chairman of the NCTB could not be reached as he was in various meetings.

The government revised as many as 18 textbooks of different classes both of primary and secondary levels, sources said. These books are riddle with twisted facts and poor printing. Even with all the defects and errors, the NCTB is yet to complete distribution of textbooks almost a month after the new academic year. The education ministry had set December last the deadline for distribution.

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