

Unpalatable truth

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wheat samples.

They are also seeing whether any high officials are involved in the scam. One of the workers of the LSD told the committee head that the wheat was purchased till night of August 1.

Joint Secretary of the food ministry Yakub Ali is heading the committee comprising Director of the food directorate Abdur Rouf, Chief Chemist of the food ministry Mahmuduzzaman, and Deputy Chief of food cell department of the food ministry Pranab Chakrabarty.

The Additional District Magistrate of Bogra Abdur Mannan, who also heads a local investigation team formed by the deputy commissioner on August 3, accompanied the ministerial probe body.

District Controller of Food (DCF) Nurul Absar told the probe body head that the suspended officer in charge of the Sadar warehouse, Quamrul Hasan, has a sound official record. The DCF also claimed that Hasan was not involved in the scam. Local journalists however placed loads of complaints and evidences before the committee regarding the wheat scam.

Yakub Ali refused to talk to the press, saying that the investigation was still going on and suggested the newsmen wait till submission of the probe report on August 14.

"We just completed one of our scheduled examinations and three more chemical tests are yet to be done...So we have to wait some more days to comment on the matter," Yakub Ali said.

About the insects in the wheat samples collected from two warehouses, Abdur Rouf, the director of the food department, told journalists that presence of insects could not be avoided in any of the warehouses in the country 'due to weather'.

"There are presence of some foreign bodies, crooked 'dana', spoiled 'dana' and ill-nourished 'dana' in the wheat samples most of which appear to have been imported," said a source close to the probe body. The source also added that the wheat was procured after the expiry of the scheduled date for procurement.

Earlier, at the Bogra Circuit House, Yakub Ali told The Daily Star, "We have been given a specified guideline to work and we will try to check all the allegations made in newspapers".

The wheat purchased in No. 11 warehouse on August 1 and August 2 was shown procured on July 28 and July 26 respectively by the officials concerned, sources said. Nayan, a worker in the Sadar

warehouse for 10 years, told The Daily Star that both low quality and fresh wheat was loaded in the warehouses. He also said the wheat was loaded till night of August 1.

Another labourer, on condition of anonymity, informed that there were several queues of wheat-loaded trucks inside the warehouse till August 3. "We earned a huge amount of money for unloading a number of trucks till Saturday night."

Some local journalists pointed out to the probe body that the abandoned warehouse which the district administration sealed on August 4 for presence of wheat sacks bearing date-expiry seal of Punjab Agro Industries Corporation was used for repacking the Indian wheat. If the officials concerned had the opportunity to purchase all the wheat stored in the warehouse, then nobody could find out the sacks bearing the Indian seals, they observed.

The probe body also found new empty sacks, wheat repacked in Bangladeshi 85-kg sacks and wheat in Indian 50-kg sacks.

A trader who does business with local food department, seeking an anonymity, alleged that Helaluzzaman Talukdar Lalu, MP, District BNP Secretary Rezaul Karim Badsha and wheat trader and district BNP's Industrial Affairs Secretary Mahfuz Siddique Liton were indirectly involved in the scam.

District BNP's Organising Secretary Maidul Islam; Abdullah, an inactive leader of local BNP; district Awami League's Treasurer Abul Kalam Azad, influential businessmen Parimal Kumar Singh of Chelopara, Umar of Colony area, maternal uncle of the MP Khalilur Rahman, and Mamtaz Uddin, a supplier to the food warehouses, are alleged to have directly supplied the imported wheat to the warehouses.

According to traders, the scam was planned and executed from Champa Mahal, residence of the local MP Helaluzzaman Talukdar Lalu. Local people said the residence is called the 'Second Hawa Bhaban'.

First Joint Secretary of BNP Tareque Rahman reportedly came to Bogra Friday night, a day before the arrival of the high-level probe team here and resided at the Champa Mahal.

Meanwhile, Helaluzzaman Talukdar Lalu, MP, Rezaul Karim Badsha, and Maidul Islam have refuted the charges brought against them. Others were not available or could not be contacted immediately.

Idle DCC mocks mayor

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that the DCC spent millions of taka over the last five years to buy and spray adjuvanticide and larvicide. But surprisingly, almost the same insecticides -- Cicoflying and Abate -- were used every year against the thumb rule that the same chemical should not be used for more than 24 months to avoid mosquitoes growing resistance to insecticides.

In fiscal 1997-98, the DCC used 30,000 litres of Cicoflying adjuvanticide worth Tk 1,75,00,000. In fiscal 1998-99, it used 130,000 litres of Cicoflying adjuvanticide worth Tk 4,61,00,000. In 1999-2000, 1,45,000 litres of Cicoflying insecticide and 2000 litres of Ioon2.5 EC worth Tk 14,95,000 were used.

In fiscal 2000-2001, 118,180 litres of Cicoflying were purchased in three seasons. The DCC also used 50,000 litres of Ioon 2.5EC worth Tk 1,49,50,000. The following year it used 150,000 litres of Cicoflying adjuvanticide insecticide worth Tk 5,32,00,000.

Besides, the city corporation

also purchased larvicide worth Tk 12.22 crore since fiscal 1997-98 to kill eggs of mosquitoes. It also purchased a huge number of fogger machines, hand-held sprayers, vehicle-mounted spray machines and ultra-low volume spray machines.

The total area of the DCC has to cover with both types of insecticides is 360 square kilometers or 36,000 hectares of land. In addition, the corporation has 2,460-km drains and 2,100 square hectares of ditches where it regularly sprays larvicide to kill mosquito eggs and larvae.

Meantime, a World Health Organisation (WHO) expert said, "What we are witnessing is a re-emergence of this epidemic disease."

Jose Esparza, coordinator of viral vaccines at the WHO, said, "At WHO, we are concerned that we have to react to this epidemic now, because it is expanding and there are now 100 countries in the world that have the ecological conditions for outbreaks."

Cable crisis

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Shangshita (TSS) would supply the copper cable and installation materials respectively to the BTB. Local labourers of the international contractor would only dig the roadside trench and lay the cable and other materials supplied by these SOEs.

The decision is also feared to defer the cable laying works which may ultimately put the entire project at stake. "Neither the BCS nor the TSS keeps any delivery commitment," complained a highly placed source at the BTB.

He blamed the unruly trade union and corrupt management for the poor performance of these two losing telecom SOEs. The BTB source was also critical of the sub-standard quality of the BCS and TSS products.

The telecom secretary is blamed for siphoning off the BTB fund to give a fresh lease of life to the dying SOEs. He is the ex-officio chairman of both the BCS and the TSS. The secretary reportedly asked the BTB chairman to sidestep the competitive bidding process and award the contract to supply cable and other materials to the BCS and the TSS.

It has reportedly prompted the BTB to hold a board meeting and endorse the secretary's bail-out package for the two financially insolvent SOEs. The BTB chairman has refused to comment spe-

cifically on this issue, only saying, "We did everything to protect the government's interest."

But the chairman could not confirm if the government was saving any money by helping the BCS and the TSS. The telecom secretary could not be contacted, as he is on an overseas trip.

Muggers

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area at around 7 pm. As a tactic, members of the gang take position at different points on a lane and mug people. Then they move on to another lane and do the same thing. This way they move to all the four lanes in the area to do the mischief.

The gang possesses three revolvers and other weapons and snatch everything from their victims, even if one has only 10 taka with him. If they do not get anything from one, they stab him.

The gang leader, Shahib, was released on bail in a murder case recently. Khoka and Monir are two his main accomplices.

When contacted yesterday, Mirpur police said they have received complaints against the gang and a case has been filed regarding the stabbing of Aminul. One person was arrested yesterday morning in this connection.

Marwari probe

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finance secretary and the central bank detailed information on the credits taken by different industrial units owned by Gindhar and the names of directors of the companies.

But the banks informed that "Om Prakash Agarwal does not have any loans against his name", sources said. However, according to the sources, Agarwal took loans for two of his enterprises -- East West Commodities and HB Apparels and the loan receivers were two employees of those enterprises. Mysteriously, both them were killed later.

The sources said, some of the banks are trying to suppress information regarding the loans taken by Agarwal in their bid to avoid any action against them.

Meantime, the Bangladesh Bank yesterday morning issued letters to the managements of the five PCBs, seeking information on the latest status of the credits of Agarwal and Modi and also asked them to provide details about their transactions with the banks, sources said.

Earlier, the BB governor on Thursday gave instruction to probe the whole issue.

Just two hours after issuance of the letters, central bank officials probing the matter went to the PCBs and did primary investigation. The officials sought the banks' cooperation for an 'intensive investigation' into the issue.

Central bank sources said, a number of investigation teams would simultaneously investigate in the five banks to find out the root cause of the scam and also identify the 'links and responsibilities' of the bank officials as regards the scam.

Om Prakash Agarwal was basically an importer of dye, chemical and yarn used in textile and garment industries. He started his business in Narayanaganj in 1977. Later, he established two RMG units -- East West Commodities and HB Apparels.

Allegations are there that Agarwal was involved in over-invoicing and also withdrew cash incentive from banks showing fake LCs. Sources said, Agarwal was also involved with Singapore-based cliques engaged in hundi business.

Bappi's killers

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Eight-year old Bappi, a student of class III of the Armenitola Govt. High School, was abducted by his cousin Mohammad Shipon from his Becharam Deuri residence on Monday.

Shipon and four of his accomplices -- Ripon, Snaject, Shankar and Sharif -- later strangled him at night and threw the body into the Shitalakhya river.

Kotwali police arrested Shipon, Ripon and Sanjeet on the same night. They gave confessional statements to the CMM's Court on Thursday. Police arrested Shankar from Rugganj on Thursday night. But the other accused, Sharif, is still absconding.

Kotwali police said teams are raiding various places of Gazipur and Keraniganj districts to nab Sharif. "We have information that Sharif is hiding there," said the duty officer of Kotwali Police Station.

Meanwhile, Shankar gave his confessional statement said when he was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court yesterday afternoon.

He said he pinned down Bappi's legs as others strangled the kid. "I also took off the shirt and trousers of Bappi before throwing him into the river," he told the court.

Cell phones

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enforce protective measures against radiation of radio, television and mobile phone, restrict setting up of housing near high-voltage line and formulate policy for use and marketing of different machinery.

The minister said there was no reservation on the part of the government to implement the proposals but "it would be more effective if awareness could be created among people instead of enacting any laws."

He, however, urged the experts to prepare the draft of the proposed law saying "it is impossible to turn oneself away from modern technology but we have to be alert against the harmful effects of scientific breakthroughs."

Nuruzzaman, in the keynote paper said non-radioactive radiation could act like a "silent assailant" and might spread various deadly diseases including cancer in human body. "So, we have to think about our protection," he said.

Jubo Dal men

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and trucks and punctured their tyres.

They blocked the town's main roads at Chashara and Talaram College points and also the Dhaka-Narayanaganj link road. They damaged at least eight passenger buses which came out on roads in the early morning.

At about 6 am, when police attempted to clear the roads, clashes erupted at several areas in the town. The activists fought gun battles with police in Missionpara area, police sources said.

Seven buses carrying 400 policemen for the prime minister's program in Rugganj also got trapped in the barricade. The 400 policemen joined the Narayanaganj police and managed to remove the barricade put up on the road to Rugganj.

At around 8am, news reached the activists that David has been released. They left the roads.

The OC of Fatullah thana, KM Abdullah, said there are several GDs against David. Police arrested him for interrogation about the GDs and his 'mysterious presence' in Fatullah area at late night Friday night, he said.



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina receives a bouquet from her party leaders on her arrival from a tour to the USA and the UK yesterday.

Presidential polls

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mentary democracy, fell vacant on June 21 after the resignation of President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury. Since then, Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Jamiruddin Sircar has been doing the functions of the titular head of the state as the acting president.

CEC MA Syed met acting Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui at the latter's office yesterday before announcing the schedule.

A candidate who receives support of the BNP-led coalition, which commands a two-thirds majority in the 'House will get elected. Main opposition Awami League has decided to abstain from voting.

Deputy Leader of the AL's Parliamentary Party Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star after the announcement of the election schedule that his party will skip the polls if the ruling coalition picks its own man to run for the office. Should the BNP-led alliance choose a neutral, widely respected person for presidency, the AL will participate on the election, he added. "However, since the BNP has shown a loyal party man like Badruddoza Chowdhury the door, we have every reason to believe that the next man will be more loyal to the party."

However, if the AL and other

opposition parties do not choose a candidate -- which means there will not be more than one candidate -- then no voting will take place and the president will be elected on September 8.

The BNP has not decided about who to pick for the presidency. But party insiders said the acting president in all probability will be chosen to run for the office. However, they said some party hardliners want anyone other than Jamiruddin Sircar as president.

Now, if Sircar gets elected, a new speaker will need to be elected, too. B Chowdhury was elected president unopposed on November 12 last year. He assumed office on November 14, succeeding Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad.

But he had to resign barely seven months after taking over in the face of an 'impeachment' threat by the ruling BNP that elected him for a five-year term.

Loss of confidence of the majority party in parliament was cited as the official reason for the BNP move against the then president. But Prime Minister Khaleda Zia later made an oblique reference to the former president as she spoke about "conspiracy" against her government.

Silver revolution: PM

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pisciculture has immense importance in socioeconomic development, earning foreign exchange, conservation of fauna and, above all, implementation of the poverty-alleviation programme.

Announcing some legal and policy measures for giving a boost to the sector, she asked for strict application of the fisheries laws.

The legal measures include restriction on catching of fish fry during the breeding season and total a ban on use of current net as well as all other equipment harmful to the growth of fishery resources.

"We have to enhance our fishery resources and preserve that for the sake of the country and the people," the prime minister said launching the two-week-long nationwide campaign.

Presided over by Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadek Hossain Khoka, the function was also addressed by Textiles Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, State Minister for Industries Prof Rezaul Karim, local members of parliament, including Abul Kalam, Atau Rahman Khan and Giasuddin and local BNP leader Shamsuzzaman.

Fisheries Secretary Dr Zahurul Karim and Director General of the Fisheries Department M Nasir Uddin Ahmed also spoke. A large number of fishermen came from far and near in boats and launches to join the function amid a festive mood. The two sides of the road leading to the venue were decorated with colorful festoons and banners inscribed with slogans encouraging fish farming.

Ministers, MPs, diplomats, local leaders and people concerned in the pisciculture sector attended the function marking the launch of the massive campaign which officials believe can bring about a significant improvement in the dwindling resources of fisheries in the country.

Khaleda Zia stressed the need for adopting science and technology-based pisciculture to increase fish production and its exports.

The prime minister in her address regretted that "we have failed to utilise the huge potential of thousands of ponds, lakes, canals and other water bodies, and even the huge Bay of Bengal, in our possession".

Sweet-water fishes have become rare due to silting of rivers, filling up of canals and other water-bodies, environment pollution and fishing of fish fry.

Khaleda Zia called upon all concerned to take up massive programmes for farming fish alongside paddy cultivation in

lowlands and post-crop fish cultivation besides cultivating fish in fishery farms.

The prime minister also called for ensuring fair price to the fishermen and proper marketing of the catches and processed products.

Pointing at the boundless marine resources in the Bay of Bengal, she said regulated and well-managed extraction of seafood could bring huge amount of foreign currencies through enhanced exports.

The prime minister alleged that development had been neglected in the last five years. "Resources were wasted and misused," she said.

"We cannot stand as onlookers in the race of development," she said stressing innovation of technology befitting the time and need of the country and the proper use of it.

"We do politics of development, not politics with development. We all have to be development-minded. We have to work unitedly for development. We ourselves have to resolve our problems. We cannot remain dependent on others forever," Khaleda Zia said.

She reminded that the hard-earned independence would become meaningless if the nation cannot achieve self-reliance.

She noted that the country has got resource constraints, technological limitations and dearth of skilled and trained manpower. "We are active in removing those, but the biggest constraint is time," she said.

The prime minister recalled the contribution of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman to waging a social movement for increasing fish production and removing prolonged problems of the fishermen.

Speaking on the occasion, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadeq Hossain Khoka said a law would be tabled in the next session of parliament for strictly imposing a ban on current net and fishing during the breeding season.

Khaleda Zia on the occasion distributed prizes among 32 persons and organisations for their feat in fish cultivation. The prizes included 14 gold, nine silver and nine bronze medals.

At the launch of the "Fisheries Fortnight 2002", the Post Office published a special stamp commemorating the event. The prime minister formally released the stamps.

Speeches over, the PM released various species of fish fry in the adjoining river Shitalakhya.

Urea price

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democratically elected government and have to take many things into consideration," Saifur told newsmen after the meeting.

In its bid to reduce its loss, the BCIC has long been pressing to raise fertiliser prices. Even, the last government turned down two such proposals by the BCIC. The donors are also putting pressure on the government to increase fertiliser price.

Recently, the BCIC proposed to fix urea price at Tk 7,140 per metric ton (MT) against the existing rate of Tk 6,140. The corporation also proposed to increase price of granular urea to Tk 6,600 from the existing Tk 5,700.

The BCIC factories sell both types of fertiliser at Tk 4,800 per MT at the mill gate against the production cost of Tk 6,140 for urea and Tk 5,700 for granular urea.

Six factories under the BCIC produce around 19 lakh MT of fertiliser against an annual demand of around 25 lakh MT and the gap is met with imported fertiliser. In fiscal 2001-02, the country imported about 5.21 lakh MT of fertiliser.

The loss of the BCIC, which also has paper and cement plants, has been increasing for the last few years and stood at Tk 276.01 crore last fiscal year. The loss was Tk 155.01 crore in FY01 and Tk 153.04 in FY00.

7 killed

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vate clinics.

Survivors said the bus, jam-packed with passengers from Dhaka, was heading towards Chittagong. After crossing the Meghna Bridge, the driver in his callous attempt to overtake a microbus hit it hard and a baby taxi coming from the opposite direction and tumbled into the water.

The driver of the baby taxi died on the spot and the small vehicle was crumpled. The microbus was also badly damaged and its passengers were injured.

Dengue

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monitoring dengue situation.

The Bangladesh Shishu Hospital received five dengue patients yesterday, DMCH 12, Milford Hospital 11, BIRDEM eight, the Government Employees Hospital two, and different private hospitals and clinics received 17 patients.

Meanwhile, the Bishwa Shahitya Kendra has started an awareness campaign in the city to keep houses and neighbourhoods clean.

Several groups of volunteers visited different areas and cleaned stagnant water, garbage, and empty cans, which are the breeding places for the Aedes mosquitoes responsible for the dengue infection.

However, there was no sign of any cleanliness drive by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). And the lack of drive has led to large-scale dengue infection this year.

The dengue fever has also spread to some other cities including Chittagong and Rajshahi. Four patients are admitted to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) with the fever while the number of dengue patients at the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital is three.

Price to pay

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ently ended here.

On Friday afternoon, Ratna was standing in front of her tin-shed house.

"I saw Rubel hanging around the place," said Enamul, father of the girl. "But I did not suspect anything and left home with my rickshaw."

Police said after the father left home, Rubel lured Ratna to the under-construction building and slit her throat. He kept the body on the first floor so that it could not be noticed easily, they thought.

"I saw my daughter for the last time Friday afternoon. But she was missing since the evening and we looked for her throughout the night," police quoted Ratna's father as saying. "As we searched for our daughter, we saw Rubel coming from the direction of the building. He crossed us quickly and went in the direction of his house."

The victim's father filed a murder case accusing four persons - Rubel, his brother Shaheen and sister Rubina and mother Jaharana.

All the four were arrested yesterday and they would be produced before court today.

AL to defy flag law

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decided in the next few days," a cabinet member close to the prime minister said.

The minister said they are still looking into suggestions as to what should be done once the opposition party flouts the official ban. "But we should not let the planned opposition action go unchallenged," the minister said, seeking anonymity.

Two other ministers, also preferring not to be named, told The Daily Star yesterday that the issue was politically sensitive.

"If they (AL men) do it (defy the ban) we'll ignore," said one minister who suggested the government better not to go for a confrontation. "What would they gain out of lowering the national flag on the so-called national mourning day, which has already been scrapped?"

The other minister said they would simply go by the relevant law. However, he hinted that the government might at best initiate a legal action against the AL.

Explaining the flag rules, a senior official at the law ministry said the government could file a criminal lawsuit against the opposition party for violating the flag ban. But, he added, there is ambiguity about the provisions of punishment in the 1972 presidential order on flying flag if one does not abide by it.

The previous AL government amended the flag rules in 1996 and

added August 15 in the list of days when the national flag would be lowered. It also declared August 15 as the National Mourning Day, which was also a public holiday.

But the BNP-led coalition government cancelled the public holiday on December 23 last. On July 22, the cabinet cancelled all official programmes of August 15 and dropped the day from the list of days when the national flag would be kept at half-mast.

But the July 22 cabinet decision on the August 15 issue was announced officially 15 days later.

Explaining reasons for the delay, a source in Cabinet Division said the announcement was made only after the decision of the cabinet was approved by the prime minister.

This is for the first time that the government has made a public announcement in a bid to stop the AL from lowering the national flag to mark Bangabandhu's death anniversary.

Even before there was an official declaration in 1996, the AL used to do so while observing the occasion.

Six criminals held after gunfight with police in Jhenidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Police arrested six members of an armed gang after a gunfight at village Brahmapur in Sailakupa upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

Sailakupa thana police, acting on a tip-off, cordoned off the house of Kobad Ali at the village at about 3 am.

Sensing presence of the police, the members of the gang opened fire.

Police returned fire, leading six of the gang, including its leader Uzal, injured. Police arrested the six while others managed to flee.

The arrested armed miscreants, identified as Uzal, gang leader, Kobad Ali, Abed Ali, Sobed Ali, Menhaz and Mahub Islam, were admitted to Sailakupa Health Centre.

Police also recovered a shutter gun, a sawed-off rifle and six bullets from their (miscreants) possession.

Police said the gang was engaged in killing, robbery and extortion at bordering villages of Jhenidah and Kushtia districts for long.

A tense situation is prevailing in the area.

Two separate cases were registered with Sailakupa thana in this connection.

Transport

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number of rickshaws. However, most roads of the upazilas were a deserted look in the absence of buses, trucks, taxis, tempos, minibuses and microbuses.

Hundreds of thousands of commuters suffered a great deal in the absence of mechanised transports especially buses, taxis and tempos. Rickshaws charged exorbitant fares taking advantage of the transport strike.

No