

## Tk 310cr farm subsidy plan scuttled

REAZ AHMAD

The finance ministry has rejected a Tk 310 crore proposal for subsidy for diesel-run pumps, dashing some 10 million farmers' hope for a reduced irrigation cost, official sources told The Daily Star yesterday.

The agriculture ministry conceived the proposal to provide the subsidy to the farmers for irrigation by diesel-run pumps on August 11 last year. The proposal got the nod

from the Cabinet Committee on Agriculture and the parliamentary standing committee on the agriculture ministry also recommended for its approval.

But the finance ministry recently turned down the subsidy proposal on the ground that diesel-run pumps have diverse usages.

"It's true that diesel-run engines have multipurpose uses but that shouldn't bar us from providing the much-needed subsidy to the farm-

ers," Agriculture Minister MK Anwar told The Daily Star on the refusal.

"We clearly mentioned in the proposal that diesel-run pumps, against which the subsidies would be provided, would run 12 hours a day and operate 65 days in a season and gave the monetary estimate accordingly. These pumps would consume 0.95 litre diesel an hour on average."

Anwar does not see any legitimate reason for the subsidy rejection

specially when the prime minister herself gave special thrust on agricultural growth. "We put forward the proposal citing meticulously how the subsidy money would be spent."

The rejection came at a time when Bangladeshi paddy growers are losing price edge to their Asian counterparts mainly because of high irrigation costs.

Irrigation cost accounts for as

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## JP returns to Sangsad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lawmakers of the Jatiya Party (Ershad) returned to the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday in the wake of the government's announcement in parliament of fulfillment of their demands and hectic backstage parley.

Amid desk-thumping by treasury benches, seven legislators led by Raushan Ershad, parliamentary party chief of the JP, entered the House minutes after Local Government Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan made a conciliatory statement to erase the grievances of the JP that commands 14 lawmakers.

The end of parliament boycott by the JP was a facelift to the opposition benches, virtually vacant since June 25 last year because of a long-drawn boycott by main opposition Awami League, which has taken to the streets demanding snap polls.

"There is no restriction on HM Ershad's visit abroad. He was not allowed to fly from Zia International Airport on misinformation. We will make the authorities alert so that such an incident does not recur in future," Bhuiyan told the House.

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## Move to put hartal culture to rest

Business leaders decide to meet Khaleda, Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the business community have decided to meet the prime minister and the leader of the opposition in parliament seeking a lasting solution to 'hartal culture' that they noted causes immense harm to the national economy.

They will put forward suggestions to the two top leaders to end the current political crisis, President

of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Abdul Awal Minto said at a meeting of business leaders in the capital yesterday.

Hartal culture is harming the economy tremendously and both the government and the opposition should realise this, Minto said, adding the worsening law and order is another major impediment to trade and investment.

"Since both our top leaders believe in democracy, we think they will come forward to eliminate the basic causes of hartal," he told a meeting of the Council of Chamber Presidents (CCP) held at the FBCCI conference room.

The apex business body leader said hartal hampers not only business and production but also harms every individual.

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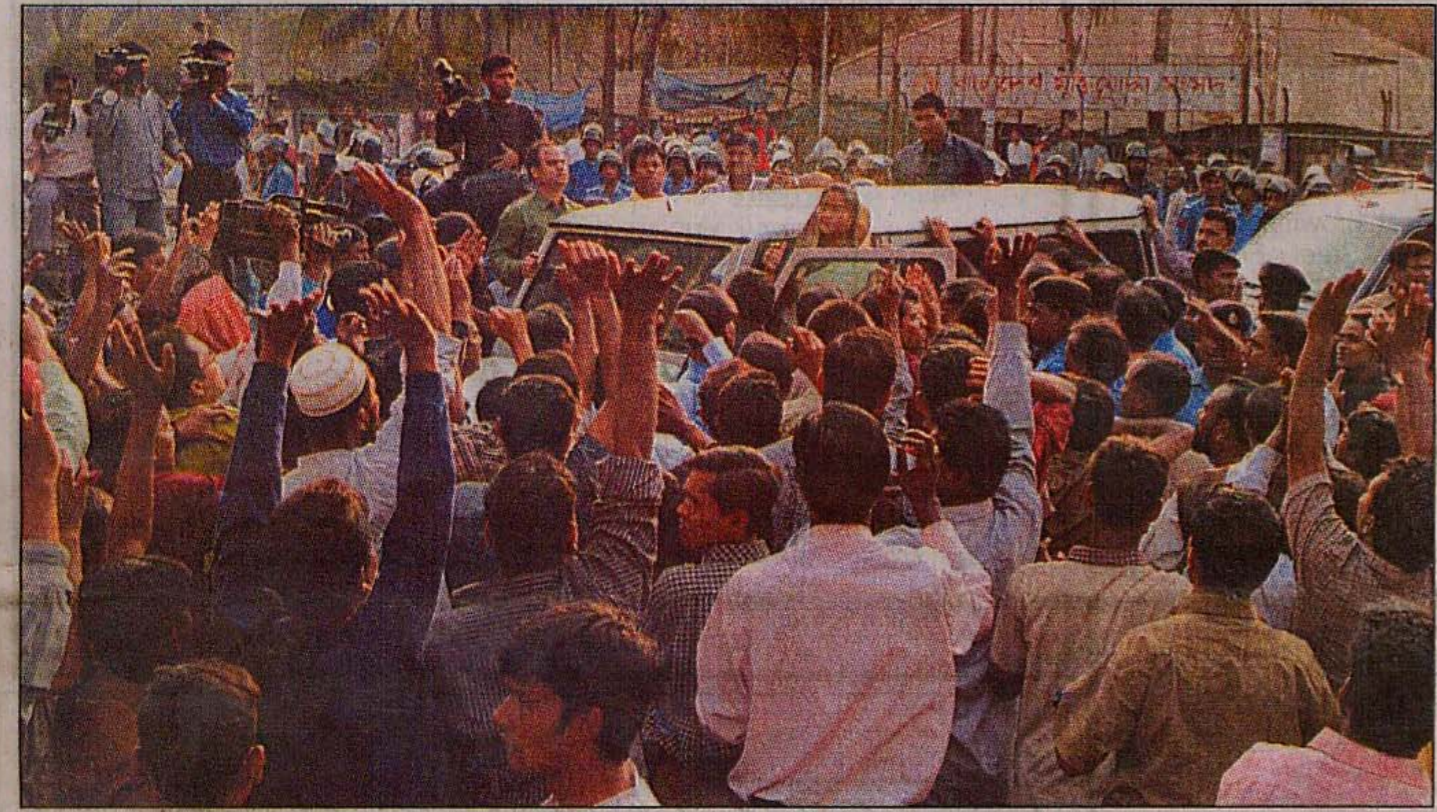


PHOTO: STAR

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina leaves her car surrounded by police and her party workers on the way to Bangabandhu Avenue, yesterday's venue for an International Mother Language Day discussion that turned into a protest rally because of police resistance.

## AL rejects anti-graft body

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League leader lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta yesterday rejected the Anti-corruption Commission Bill 2004, passed by the Parliament Wednesday, saying the bill would neither ensure independence of the commission nor curb

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## MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY Cops seal AL office, spoil programme

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday blocked roads to the venue for an International Mother Language Day discussion, organised by the main opposition Awami League (AL) in Dhaka, which boiled over into a protest rally.

Law enforcers sealed all entries to the AL headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue with barbed-wire fences and mounted guard since morning against participants of the programme, scheduled to begin at 3:00pm.

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## Iran train death toll rises to 320

REUTERS, Nishapur, Iran

Iranian mothers yesterday sifted through charred bodies, shredded by the explosion of a runaway train that killed at least 320 people, trying to find enough of their loved ones for a fitting burial.

Fifty-one wagons laden with petrol and fertilizer that had come adrift from their locomotive

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## Announcement

Due to unavoidable circumstances the Star Weekend Magazine will come out on February 21 instead of today. We regret the inconvenience.

## Announcement

The next installment in our series The Strength Within comes out Saturday. The story this week is how a number of women in Manikganj have escaped their woes through effective use of microcredit.

## Failure to reduce rate would be "cynical indifference": Hasina

Microcredit summit ends with vow to serve ultra poor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The four-day Asia Pacific summit on microcredit ended yesterday with a commitment to increase efforts to provide microloans to the ultra poor and fulfil the millennium goal of halving the world's poor by 2015.

It suggested creation of a South Asia regional microcredit institution.

Leader of the Opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina speaking as chief guest at the closing ceremony said the government has blocked microcredit and other programmes of several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the allegations that they were politically incorrect during the last general elections.

She urged the government and

donors to treat all NGOs evenhandedly and transparently.

She observed that the future of microcredit programmes will depend on the role of the government and donors.

"It is the joint responsibility of the government and donors to protect the integrity of the programmes. If they fail, the NGOs

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## Coalition dismisses snap polls demand

Renews dialogue offer to Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP and its ruling coalition partners yesterday dismissed the opposition demand for the government to quit office and announce mid-term elections as 'illogical, undemocratic and unconstitutional.'

The four-party alliance government to resign much ahead of its tenure in office is undemocratic and it would weaken the democracy in Bangladesh that is only flourishing.

They also believe people may not want a democratic government to stand down halfway into its five-year term in office.

They slammed the main opposition Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina for her refusal to sit with the government for talks to end the ongoing political standoff. They said all her moves are aimed to ruin democracy, create instability and

put brakes on the current development efforts.

There is no such situation that calls for early elections or resignation of the government. People do not want elections before the Khaleda Zia administration serves out its five-year term," BNP Standing Committee member and Health Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said.

He said the four-party alliance rode to office on the back of an overwhelming two-thirds majority in parliament and nothing has happened to suggest that the support has eroded. He asked the AL to come back to parliament and resolve all outstanding issues.

"She is shifting from one demand to another and also making illogical and unconstitutional demands one after another. We are not accountable to her and so the question of holding mid-term polls does not arise," Mosharraf added.

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## Privatisation of oil cos uncertain

Workers vow to resist govt move

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Prospects for privatisation of state-owned petroleum distribution companies looks bleak as the Oil, Gas, Road and River Transportation Workers' Council seems firm to resist any government move to offload the public enterprises.

"We will resist any move to privatise the distribution firms for the sake of the country and its people," Haji Yakub Ali, co-ordinator of the council, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Supply of petroleum products from depots to filling stations came to a halt on Saturday due a country-wide daylong strike by some 10,000 lorry and tanker operators.

The strike has apparently forced the government to soften its stance and State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM. Mosharraf Hossain said the privatisation plan was still under consideration. "The decision to privatise the distribution

firms is not final yet. We have a lot of things to discuss," the minister told strikers later on Saturday.

Yakub said the government move is due to its subservience to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that prescribed the privatisation process.

He said sensitive sectors like oil and gas involving huge risks should not be offloaded to the private sector, which, according to Yakub, does not have adequate expertise.

He alleged that the government wants to sell off the oil companies in connivance with a vested quarter having a stake in the sector.

On the other hand, the government says privatisation is needed to stop theft and boost profits by selling imported petroleum products in local markets.

The government last month announced plans to privatise all three distribution companies --

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**Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board (DTCB)**  
Setu Bhaban, Amtali, Banani, Dhaka

**NOTICE**

In order to improve traffic management and reduce traffic jam of Dhaka Metropolitan City, Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board (DTCB) has decided to ban plying of all categories of non-motorised transports on **Russel Square-Kalabagan-New Market-Azimpur Eden College Road** between 6.00 AM and 10.00 PM from 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2004

To facilitate movement of rickshaw passengers, arrangements for plying of additional new improved buses have been made on this road. Separate seats will be kept reserved in the buses for the women.

Non-motorised transports will be allowed to cross east-west of **Russel Square-Kalabagan-New Market-Azimpur Eden College Road** at the following two crossings:

- 1) Dhanmondi Road # 6
- 2) Dhaka University-Nilkhet-New Market-BDR Gate # 3 and
- 3) A separate Rickshaw Lane from New Market Katchabazar and Chandrima Super Market to Dhanmondi Road # 1 (parallel to main road) is under construction. After construction of this lane, the people of Dhanmondi-Zigatola-Rayerbazar etc. will be able to make journey to New Market via Dhanmondi Road # 1.

Wholehearted cooperations from the people are solicited for successful implementation of the project for improvement of traffic management of Dhaka Metropolitan City.

## Nepal continue to marvel

### Crucial Bangladesh-India match today

SPORTS REPORTER

Giant-killers Nepal are within sight of a place in the Super League stages after defeating no-hopers Uganda in their final group B match of the ICC Under-19 Cricket World Cup at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

The youngsters of coach Roy Dias, chasing a modest Ugandan total of 194, reached the target with 11 balls to spare and five wickets in hand.

The architect of their back-to-back win was once again captain

Shakti Gauchan with 80 not out.

The second win put South Africa, the runners-up of the previous edition, under pressure.

The Proteas who were shocked by their Himalayan counterparts on Wednesday will require a victory over England today if they stand an outside chance of progressing at Nepal's expense.

In Group A, Zimbabwe comfortably defeated Canada by eight wickets at Bogra's Shaheed Chandu Stadium to leave defending champions Australia staring at

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