

Proposal to buy addl one lakh tonnes of rice approved

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday approved a proposal for purchasing additional one lakh metric tons of rice under the 2004 Boro procurement drive to build an optimum food stock in government silos.

A regular meeting of the cabinet with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair gave the approval.

It also approved the draft of an agreement to be signed with Singapore on bilateral capital investment development and protection.

The cabinet also gave its nod to

signing an agreement with Morocco on science and technology.

It also received a report on Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting held in Dhaka May 8-10.

The cabinet endorsed a number of draft acts including Private Teachers Registration and Certification Agency Act 2004, Animal Disease Act 2004, Bangladesh Animal and Animal Products Quarantine Act 2004 and Bank Company (Amendment) Act 2004.

Cabinet ministers and state ministers concerned attended the meeting.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) leaders present a bouquet to Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at Sudha Sadan yesterday when they met her with a request not to call hartal at least for next one year.

'Meet demands of non-govt teachers'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE) yesterday urged the government to meet their eight-point demand including 10 percent salary enhancement in the proposed budget for 2004-05 fiscal year.

Their other demands include 50 percent dearness allowance, festival allowance, promotion of teachers, pension facilities and adequate house rent.

"There is not a single word about non-government teachers in the proposed budget, though the education sector got the highest allocation" said NFTE Convenor Qazi Faruq Ahmed at a press conference at its office in the city.

"We never experienced such oppression that the government is now continuing on us," he said, adding that the government is totally indifferent to non-government teachers' demands.

demands.

"The non-government teachers, who were vocal to establish their rights, are now the victims of false cases," Faruq alleged.

He said the NFTE will hold a grand rally at the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh on June 26 to press home their demands.

If the government tries to create any barrier in holding the rally, they would go for tougher agitation, Faruq warned.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF RICE

840m people suffer from chronic hunger globally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 840 million people in the world suffer from chronic hunger, over 50 percent of whom depend on rice cultivation for their livelihood, said former director general of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) N I Bhuiyan at a seminar yesterday on the eve of International Year of Rice 2004.

"The vision of International Year of Rice is to improve food security, alleviate poverty and preserve the environment for the billions of people for whom rice is life," said Bhuiyan in a keynote paper at the seminar organised by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) at its auditorium in the city.

He said rice cultivation occupies about 77 percent of the total cropped area of Bangladesh, and rice alone constitutes about 92 percent of the total food grains produced annually in the country.

Bhuiyan projected that the net demand for total food grains for 136 million people in the country in 2005 will be 22 to 24 million metric tons. Of them, net demand for rice alone will be 20 to 22 million.

While speaking as farmers' representative from Barisal, Rafiqul Islam said the farmers are facing serious economic hardship in affording high-cost seeds, fertiliser and irrigation.

"We demand quality seeds in time at an affordable price to pursue our ancestral occupation and survive our existence," he added.

"We provide five to six percent quality seeds every year and intend to

increase the amount up to 10 percent soon," said Chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) Md Ismail.

BRRI Research Director AR Gomosta suggested land reform and cultivation of suitable crop species in the fallow land to address the growing demand for rice and other cereals by the increased population.

Member director of BARC MA Razzaque said area and environment friendly crop varieties and small-scale mechanisation of cultivation is needed in our country.

Dr Sadiq Bhuiyan of Rice Foundation said at least 60 scientists left the BRRI during the 90s and this was a serious setback to the country's agricultural research.

He said one dollar spent in rice research brought 16 dollar return in the past, but still investment in this area is one of the lowest in Bangladesh.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar admitted inadequate investment in agriculture, gradual reduction of cultivable land and want of quality seeds, but said the country would harvest 26 million metric tons of rice this year. He said the government is taking priority measures to ensure 10 percent of quality seeds soon.

Although Bangladesh occupies 4th position both in terms of area of rice cultivation and total production among the 16 Asian rice-producing countries, it holds 8th position in terms of per hectare rice yield which is 2.31 metric tons, he added.

Agriculture Secretary Abdul Halim chaired the seminar.