

Most fertilisers contaminated, substandard

Speakers tell CAB view exchange meet

UNB, Dhaka

The government should immediately launch a massive drive against the fertiliser manufacturers, importers and their agents to save the country's agriculture as most of the fertilisers that are being used by the farmers are found to be contaminated and substandard.

The observation came at a view exchange meeting with journalists, organised by Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) at the CAB conference centre yesterday.

A research paper presented in the meeting said that after examining 17 samples of fertilisers used in the country, the Association found

16 of those as contaminated and substandard.

The fertilisers found contaminated and substandard are - Zinc, Boron, Micro-nutrient, TSP, Mixed fertiliser (NPKS) and Gypsum fertilisers.

"Mainly the mixed fertilisers are highly contaminated with arsenic, cadmium and lead. That's why our lands are losing fertility day by day. Such fertilisers are also very harmful for human health and the environment," Prof SM Imamul Haq of the Soil, Water and Environment Department of Dhaka University told the meeting.

Prof Haq, also Director of Bangladesh Australia Centre for Environment Research, said the caretaker government should take

immediate measures to save the country's agriculture by ensuring the use of government-specified quality.

"Like the drives against food adulteration, the government can form special teams to work on quality of fertilisers and identify those involved in contamination of fertilisers."

Of the total 138 fertiliser companies registered in the country, some 52 factories are functional and most of these produce substandard fertilisers, he said.

"There are appropriate laws in our country. But the laws need to be implemented properly for ensuring the quality of fertilisers," he said.

He added that the food cycle of the country was being polluted

because of the use of contaminated fertilisers, but no effective measures were taken in this regard.

CAB Treasurer Khalilur Rahman Sajal presented another research paper where the officials of Agriculture Extension Department have been accused of not performing their duties properly.

"Fertilisers' production, import, preservation, distribution and marketing, the whole process has become hostage to a group of illegal profit-seekers. For this, indifference of the officials of Agriculture Department is responsible," he said.

CAB President Borhan Ahmed and General Secretary Kazi Faruk also addressed the meeting.

Student bodies urge Yunus not to join DU convocation

DU CORRESPONDENT

Student organisations and a section of general students yesterday protested the decision of Dhaka University (DU) to confer honorary Doctor of Laws degree on Nobel laureate Prof Dr Muhammad Yunus at the convocation ceremony.

Terming Prof Yunus a controversial person, they urged him not to join the 43rd convocation of the university scheduled for tomorrow.

Earlier, everyone had welcomed the DU authorities' decision to confer the honorary degree on the Nobel laureate and invite him as the convocation speaker when the convocation was scheduled for December 24 last year.

The convocation was rescheduled for February 28, but the student organisations went against the DU's decision as Prof Yunus floated a political party by this time. They said Prof Yunus has made himself controversial by floating a political party.

The student bodies yesterday also accused Vice-Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz of hiding the truth from teachers and students that Prof Yunus, in a reply letter to the invitation from the DU authorities, gave his consent to receiving the honorary degree but did not say whether he would be the convocation speaker.

They demanded resignation of the VC, saying that he has deceived the teacher and students by not disclosing the content of the Prof Yunus's letter.

Chhatra Sangram Parishad, an alliance of 14-party-backed student organisation, said the VC has lost the moral right to cling to his post.

In a joint statement, the Sangram Parishad leaders also urged Prof Yunus not to join the convocation.

Progotishil Chhatra Jote, a combine of left-leaning student organisations, and general students under the banner of 'DU Students' vowed to prevent Prof Yunus from attending the convocation.

Meanwhile, the police picked up four activists of Bangladesh Chhatra Mukti, the student front of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, from the campus yesterday morning when they were distributing leaflets against Prof Yunus.

Shamsul Islam gets Bangla Academy Award

Poet Shamsul Islam won the Bangladesh Academy Award for his contribution to poetry, says a press release.

He will receive the award today. His books include 'Joluka He Nil Jamuner', Kusumer Ritu, Cigarette & Other Stories, Bakbakum, Istimisti and Kingbondati.

Shamsul Islam, who is now the feature and literary editor in the daily Deshbandha, was also awarded Poet Ahshan Habib Award, Padma Padak and Sadat Ali Akhand Award.

Padashkhep-64 executives

Nargis Mannan and AKM Rezaur Rahman have been unanimously elected as president and general secretary of the executive committee for the years 2007 and 2008 of Padashkhep-64, an organisation of the post-graduate degree holders of 1964 from the University of Dhaka, says a press release.

The committee was formed at the general meeting of the organisation recently.

Other office bearers are Akramul Quader, vice-president, Zahurul Haq, joint secretary, Nilufar Sultana, treasurer and members Dr M Shahadat Ali, Rafiul Karim, Nazima Rabbani, Lukman Hakim, Ibrahim Bhuiyan and Rafi Imam.

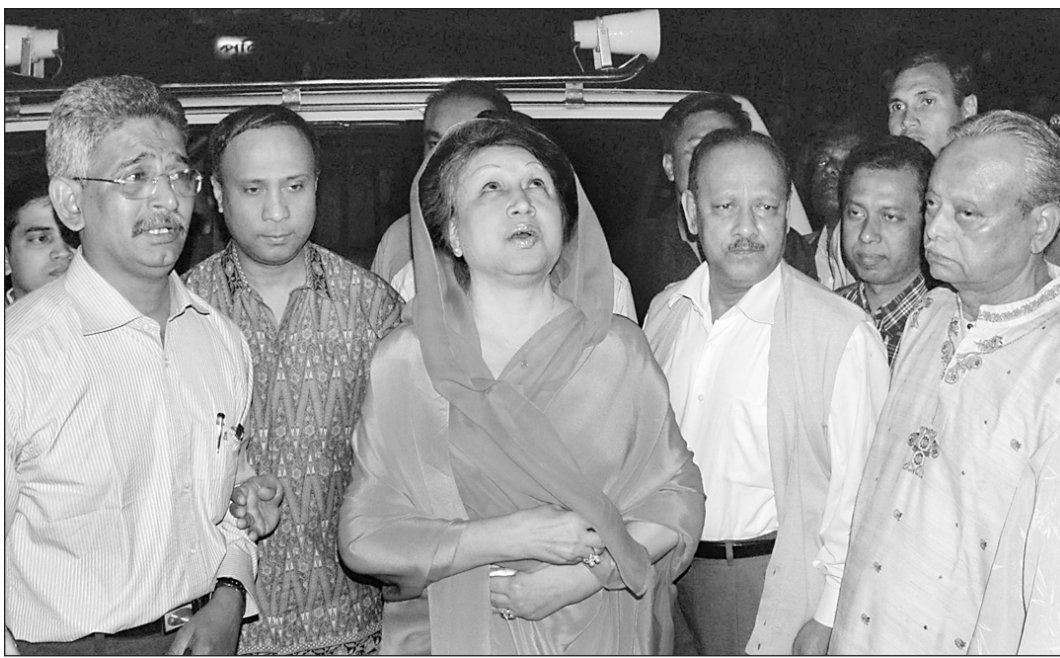


PHOTO: STAR

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia visits Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) Bhaban at Karwan Bazar in the city yesterday following a devastating fire that gutted dozens of offices in the building, including Rtv and ntv.

KILLING OF WOMAN IN LAXMIPUR

Six to die, 3 get life

UNB, Laxmipur

A court in Laxmipur yesterday sentenced six people to death and three others to life imprisonment for killing a woman.

The condemned convicts are Abdul Khaleq, Md Montajuddin Ahmed, Abdul Motin, Delwar Hossain, Halima Begum and Amir Hossain. Khaleq was tried in absentia.

The three lifers are Monwara Begum, Rasheda Begum and Abdul Jalil.

The court also fined the lifers Tk 10,000, in default, to suffer one year more rigorous imprisonment.

According to the prosecution, Foyjer Nesa was killed at her in-law's house at Indrapur village in sadar upazila on June 12, 1994 "following brawls over the money sent by her husband Amir Hossain from abroad".

After examining the records and 22 witnesses, Additional Sessions Judge AFM Johurul Alam delivered the verdict.

Mosquito menace on the rise in city

UNB, Dhaka

Mosquito menace has increased in the city during the last few days despite the special drive launched by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) against the hazards.

DCC officials yesterday said the residents of different areas have complained of mosquito menace saying they have not seen any anti-mosquito drive.

But Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said, "Special drive against mosquito is going on ... I myself will conduct the drive in Sonargaon and Magbazar areas today."

He said, "The massive drive will continue in different parts of the city until the middle of March."

The drive includes fogging of streets and lanes, specially the congested and swampy areas and

cleaning water hyacinth and other objects from the ponds and ditches.

Explaining the problems in combating mosquitoes, he said areas surrounding the DCC, including swampy and low lying lands of Cantonment, Peelkhana, Manda, Basabo, are the ideal grounds for breeding mosquitoes. They swarm to the city during this season of the year.

The DCC combating teams do not go beyond the city area, he added.

Khoka said the local administration of those areas and the Public Health Department should also undertake vigorous campaign against mosquito.

"DCC discussed the matter with the authorities several times in the past without any result," he added.

AL high-ups wary

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Jalil told the meeting that at least three points of the MoU -- including declaring the Kadianis non-Muslim and issuing Fatwas -- had been misinterpreted in the newspapers, meeting sources said.

He had rather tried to bring Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis into 'secular politics' through signing the deal, Jalil said.

The AL presidium members, who declined to accept Jalil's version, said there is no alternative but to admit that the signing of the deal was a direct attack on AL's secular foundation.

At that stage party chief Sheikh Hasina intervened to say that they had to sign the deal in a crisis period to strengthen the AL-led grand alliance so that they could foil the planned 'one-sided' election on January 22, said the sources.

Hasina told the meeting to continue such 'intra-party debates' with open mind so that the high-ups could get a real picture of the overall situation.

The AL president initiated holding regular meetings at her Dhanmondi office with a view to modernising the

party by carrying out reforms that would strengthen internal democracy, party sources said, adding that it will also help to take collective decisions and establish accountability at all levels.

"We will involve leaders of the party at different stages of the party's planning," AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah told The Daily Star after the meeting on Sunday night.

The AL leaders decided to hold a meeting of the party's Central Working Committee on March 3.

The meeting to be continued for several days will review overall situation including the reform issues, AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader said.

"We will make public the changes that are going to be brought in our manifesto, constitution and committees to meet the demand of time," he added.

The AL leader, however, declined to comment about the debate on the MoU deal with Khelafat Majlis.

TIB welcomes ACC chairman, commissioners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday welcomed newly appointed Chairman Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury and Commissioners M Habibur Rahman and Abul Hasan Manzur Mannan of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The decision of the government to recast the ACC in its efforts to curb corruption is timely, reflects the people's demand and will play an important role in protecting the national interest, the TIB said in a press release.

Describing the appointments as the most important initial step to make the ACC active for curbing corruption, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said TIB hopes that the new chairman and commissioners will be able to play an effective role to fulfil the expectations of the people.

He also called on the government to ensure total independence of the ACC through plugging the legal loopholes in order to make it fully active.

TIB hoped that the government will also take initiatives to bring reforms to Public Service Commission in order to ensure transparency in the administration, said the press release.

TIB will also try its best to provide all kinds of supports to implement any reform initiatives taken by the government and the ACC, it added.

One killed in Khagrachhari road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

One person was killed and seven others were injured in a road accident at Gamaridala under Sadar upazila in Khagrachhari yesterday.

Police and hospital sources said the accident occurred at 3.15pm when a Mohalchhari-bound speeding jeep, popularly known as alias Chander Gar, turned upside down and fell into a roadside ditch as its driver lost control over the steering.

Driver Mohammad Rafiq, 35, son of Mohammad Aslam Mia of Shabbadma Para village under Sadar upazila, died on the spot.

Abdul Barek, 39, Md Farid Mollah, 50, Mohammad Morshed Ali, 35, M Abdus Salam, 90, Abul Khair, 30, Mohammad Shekander Ali, 55, and Obasa Chakma, 34, were rushed to Khagrachhari Adhunik Sadar Hospital in critical condition, sources said.

BSEC BHABAN FIRE

Profound shock at loss of lives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of different political parties and organisations have expressed profound shock and sorrow at the loss of lives and damage of property in yesterday's fire at Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) Bhaban in the city that left at least two people dead and scores of others injured.

Praying for the salvation of the departed souls, they expressed deep sympathy to the members of the bereaved families.

They also urged the authorities concerned to make immediate arrangement for quick and proper treatment of the injured.

They also demanded proper investigation into the cause of the fire and take necessary measures in high-rise buildings to avoid such mishap in future.

In a message, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia expressed deep shock at the loss of lives and damage of property in the fire.

She prayed for the salvation of the departed souls and conveyed deep sympathy to the members of the bereaved families.

Khaleda urged the authorities concerned to make arrangement for better treatment of those injured in the incident and prayed for their early recovery.

She thanked the members of Fire Service, Army, Air Force, Rab and Police for conducting the rescue operation.

She also thanked people for their courageous role in rescuing those who were trapped inside the building.

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina also expressed deep shock at the death of two people and sympathy for those who were injured in the fire.

In her message she prayed for peace and salvation of the departed souls and expressed deep sympathy to the bereaved families.

She also demanded investigation into the cause of the fire that broke out at around 10:35am.

She also thanked Fire Brigade, Army, Air Force, Rab, Police and Red Crescent for their efforts to put out the flames and conduct the rescue operation.

In a statement, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan expressed deep shock and sorrow at the loss of lives and damage of property at BSEC Bhaban fire.

Meanwhile, Adviser to caretaker government Geeti Ara Safiya Chowdhury visited the BSEC Bhaban in the afternoon.

She discussed with the officials concerned about the progress of the rescue operation.

She told the journalists that the Ministry of Industries has already formed a four-member enquiry committee to investigate into the incident and the committee will submit its report within the next 24 hours.

Later, the adviser visited Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, Combined Military Hospital and Shamorita Hospital where the injured were admitted.

Maj Gen (Retd) Dr ASM Motiur Rahman, adviser to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Religious Affairs, also visited Dhaka Medical College and Hospital and inquired about the treatment of the injured people.

The organisations that expressed sorrow and concern at the fire incident included Workers' Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka Reporters Unity, Karmojibi Nari, Christian Lekhok Forum, Jatiya Janata Party and Ibne Sina Trust.

Book on right to information launched

DU CORRESPONDENT

Onkur Prakashani published 'Totthoyer Odhikar' (Right to Information), a book containing some 60 essays on right to information, at Amar Ekushey Book Fair yesterday.

The book is edited by Robaet Ferdous, assistant professor of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University (DU) and Indian journalist Bhadesh Das.

Prof Sadeka Halim of DU and poet Abdus Samad unveiled the cover of the book.

Death anniversary



Biman, says a press release.

On the occasion, a doa mahfil will be held at Sonargaon Road mosque in the city after Asr prayers today.

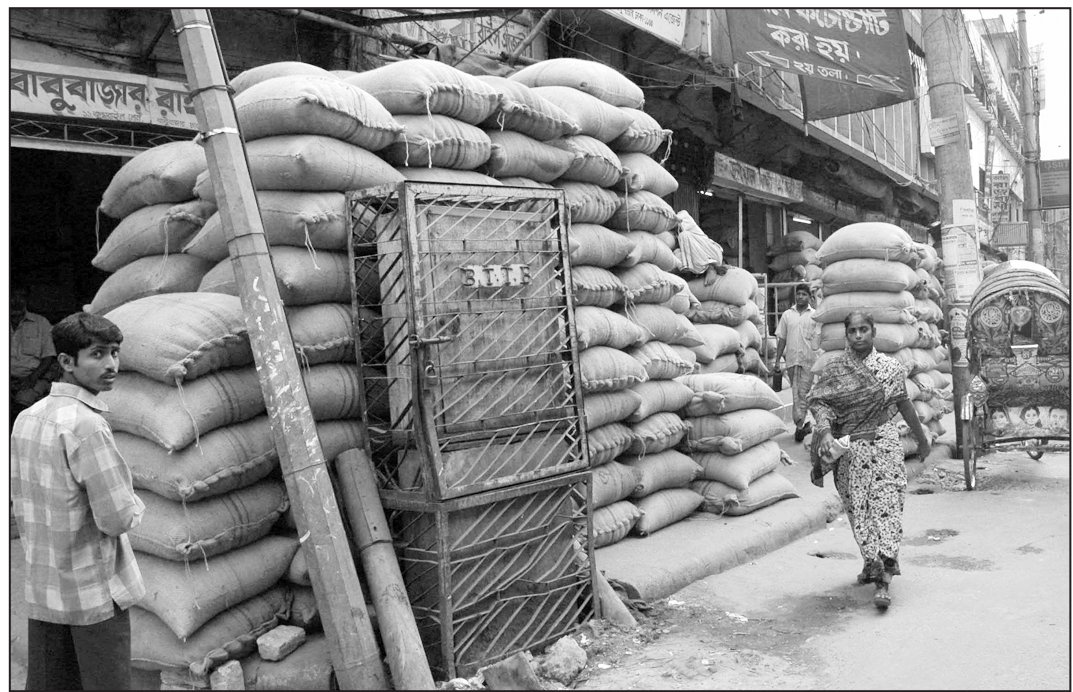


PHOTO: STAR

Rice traders have occupied footpaths of Babubazar area in the city. The picture was taken yesterday.

Police action on NSU students 15 injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police swooped on students of North South University (NSU) during an eviction drive against illegal structures at Banani in the city yesterday afternoon, leaving at least 15 students injured.

Sources said a team of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) led by Magistrate ASM Emdadul Dastagir tried to evict the people from the ground floor of Bangladesh Thai Aluminium Tower (BTA Tower), which houses a number of club offices and classrooms of the private university, at around 5:30pm.

The students first requested the eviction team to wait for some time as the classes and club activities were going on. Director of BBA Programme of the university Mostaque Ahmed Zebal was also present during the negotiation, but the magistrate did not pay heed to them, the sources added.

As more students gathered in the area, the police, fearing resistance, clubbed a number of students to bring the situation under control.

The situation worsened when fellow students organised a sit-in to protest the attack.

Talking to The Daily Star over telephone, Mostaque Ahmed said, "I asked the magistrate to give the students and club members about half an hour's time to vacate the floor. But he refused to pay heed. The police also turned violent and beat up a number of students."

Release of Uttaran chief demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 400 teachers, students, social-workers, civil society members and NGO activists of Jessore, Satkhira and Khulna have appealed to the chief adviser (CA) to caretaker government for immediate release of the executive director of Uttaran, a Satkhira-based NGO.

In a memorandum to the CA, they said Shahidul Islam devoted his life to uphold human rights and good governance and establishing landless people's rights on khas land apart from organising people to address water-logging crisis in the south-western part of the country.

"He and his organisation have been playing a pioneering role in various developmental activities including tree plantation, sanitation, protecting bio-diversity, ensuring right to pure drinking water and education programmes in the region," reads the memorandum submitted to CA on February 22.

Shahidul was arrested by Joint forces from Tala upazila on January 27 and handed over to police. Later he was sent to jail with one-month detention.

WEATHER TODAY

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Having chances of rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Jessore, Kushtia and Comilla, Met office said in a forecast.

Highest temperature 31.8 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Cox's Bazar and lowest 14.8 degree Celsius at Dinajpur.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:00pm today and rises at 6:22am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature In Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	28.1	19.2	56	53
Chittagong	31.5	17.8	63	54
Rajshahi	28.0	15.6	70	55
Khulna	28.0	17.5	74	58
Barisal	29.0	16.9	67	74
Sylhet	29.3	18.2	87	54
Cox's Bazar	31.8	19.2	72	70