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Major part of donations being spent for rebuilding: CA

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said a major part of donations given to the Chief Adviser's Relief and Welfare Fund is being spent on rebuilding houses in the cyclone-battered areas.

He said this while receiving donations for the cyclone victims from a number of individuals and organisations at his office. The CA thanked them all for their contributions.

Referring to his visits to the cyclone-hit areas, the head of the caretaker government said houses in some places have either completely or partially damaged.

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Only 4pc go for higher education after college

Shortage of universities main reason

SURANJITH DEABNATH

After passing HSC, a little more than four percent students pursue higher education in the country as the public and private universities combined do not have adequate seats to accommodate them.

According to a report of the University Grants Commission (UGC), the percentages are 11.9 in India, 29.3 in Malaysia and 37.3 in Thailand.

With the number of HSC-qualified students increasing every year, academics have suggested increasing the number of universities and seats at the existing universities besides ensuring quality education.

UGC Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam told The Daily Star, "No doubt time has come to take steps for increasing seats at the existing universities. But we will also have to maintain quality education, otherwise the very purpose of higher education will be defeated."

Prof Nazrul suggested introducing double shifts or evening shift at the public universities and reputable private universities to meet the present crisis.

The 20-year (2006-2026) strategic plan of UGC for higher education in Bangladesh suggests that at least 28 new universities will have to be established to absorb 15 percent HSC-passed students for higher education.

Tough admission fight in the public universities now denies around two lakh students, including even those who achieved GPA 5 in both SSC and HSC, admission in subjects of their first choice because of the shortage of seats.

Around 2.5 lakh students are SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

6 more bodies found 16 days after cyclone

UNB, Barguna

Six more decomposed bodies were recovered from different areas of cyclone-hit Sadar upazila yesterday.

With the recovery, the official death toll from November 15 cyclone Sidr raised to 1,277 in the district.

Locals said the fire fighters recovered the bodies from paddy fields at Nishanbaria, Gazi Mahmud and Nali villages in the afternoon.

Four of them were identified as Kulum Bibi, 95, wife of Mohammad Munshi, and Kanika Rani, 5, daughter of Bhabachandra Hawlader of Nishanbaria village, Marzina, 8, daughter of Moslem, of Gazi Mahmud village, and Noorjahan, 60, wife of Lal Mia Sikder of Nali village. Identity of the rest could not be known.

Aman loss Tk 2,000cr at final count

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About eight lakh metric tons of Aman crops worth around Tk 2,000 crore have been damaged in Cyclone Sidr that ripped through the southwestern districts last month, shows the agriculture ministry's final damage assessment.

The report unveiled at a press conference yesterday reads, "The overall shortfall in Aman production for the current fiscal stands at 14 lakh metric tons as crops to the tune of another six lakh metric tons have already been damaged in floods."

Agriculture Adviser CS Karim, Secretary Abdul Aziz and senior

officials of the ministry spoke at the press conference.

The adviser said, "We will make good the shortfall through rice import from global market and food assistance from donors." He however ruled out the possibility of any food crisis in the country despite the losses.

He said banks and NGOs would be the government's partner in post-cyclone rehabilitation programmes.

The government will design the programmes in consultation with different stakeholders.

Besides, it would distribute seeds of high-yield Boro varieties among the farmers for increased production in the next season, he

added. Abdullah-Al-Shahin, senior information officer of the ministry, presented the updates on food production and supply situations.

He said the government will have to import 31 lakh metric tons of rice from global market to address supply shortage in domestic market. That will be 29 percent higher than the import last fiscal year, according to final accounts of the agriculture ministry.

"Twelve lakh metric tons of rice has already been imported and the rest [19 lakh] will be imported soon by the government and private traders," he said adding the government agencies would bring in

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India allows import of 5 lakh MT rice

Pranab offers rebuilding of 10 Sidr-hit villages

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India yesterday lifted its ban on rice exports to the tune of five lakh tonnes to help Bangladesh deal with its food shortages and also proposed to pay for the full rebuilding of 10 villages badly affected by Sidr.

Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee made the announcement during his daylong visit to Bangladesh yesterday, which follows discussions with Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury on the sidelines of the Commonwealth leaders summit in Uganda recently.

During a press conference at a city hotel before his departure, Mukherjee told reporters that the ban has been partially lifted to help Bangladesh meet the demand for rice, which the government estimated to be around a million tonnes.

India earlier banned rice exports to protect its domestic market from shortage, but decided to export five lakh tonnes to Bangladesh in view of Sidr ruining

the south-west coastline's Aman crop.

Last week, the government asked donors to purchase five lakh tonnes of food relief from overseas, so that the fragile domestic food market remains undisturbed.

Mukherjee said India's public operators would procure the rice in India, which can then be purchased by Bangladeshi public or private buyers.

India had already waived the rice export ban for 50,000 tonnes immediately after the cyclone and had also provided 20,000 tonnes as direct relief.

Asked whether India would subsidise the rice, Mukherjee dismissed the possibility saying India's rice export price is already competitive considering global prices of rice.

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury told reporters the government is touched by the gesture and India's proposal to "adopt" 10 coastal villages fits into the government's medium- to long-term rehabilitation programme.

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Sadik Miah, right, a construction worker for 30 years, waits along with others at Naya Bazar in the capital yesterday to be picked for work. He said work is getting harder to come by and he has to return home empty handed 18-20 days a month.

REFORM TALKS

EC will not contest HC stay on inviting Saifur-led BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will not appeal against the High Court order that stayed EC's November 22 move to invite one faction of BNP to talks.

The EC wants quick disposal of the matter now, an election commissioner said yesterday.

"We are not thinking of filing an appeal, rather we plan to appoint a lawyer to pursue a quick disposal of the matter. We have already consulted with the attorney general's

office in this regard." Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain told reporters at his office.

The election commissioner said that the Supreme Court will remain be closed for 15 days from December 13 and they want this issue to be resolved before December 13 if possible.

The HC on November 18 stayed for four weeks the EC's move to invite the Saifur led faction of BNP to its electoral reform talks scheduled for November 22. Following

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