

Redouble efforts to up food production

Chief adviser urges farmers

UNB, Mithapukur

Assuring necessary government support, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed urged farmers to redouble their efforts to increase production of food by turning single-crop farmland into two-crop land.

"We don't have any alternative to food production as acreage of land is squeezing due to urbanisation, industrialisation and infrastructure development," he told a meeting of representatives of cross-sections of the people at the upazila auditorium.

Fakhruddin, now in Rangpur holding a meeting of the Council of Advisers, said instructions were given to departments concerned to timely supply agricultural inputs like fertiliser, diesel and irrigation to farmers in order to boost boro paddy production this year.

He said the Rural Electrification Board has been provided with money to buy electric transformers to help irrigation for the boro farming. Besides, shops and markets have been ordered to close at 8:00pm to save power for irrigation.

He said the government has set the target of procuring 28 lakh tons

of fertiliser this year, 3 lakh tons more than previous year's, to support increased agricultural production.

The fertilisers will be distributed from 12,000 to 14,000 points so that farmers could get it timely.

"Turn your one-crop land into two-crop land and two-crop into three-crop land. Government will provide all-out support to you in increasing production," he said.

He noted that the incumbent government has prioritised the agriculture sector with increased allocation in ADP. Besides, Tk 350 crore has been earmarked for agriculture research to increase the production of food grains.

Explaining the reason for holding the Council of Advisers' meeting in Rangpur, he said, "We want to take government to the doorstep of common people. Rangpur has been selected as it is far away from the capital Dhaka."

He said the council meeting asked the advisors to identify the problems in the northern region and take effective measures to resolve those. From now on, the advisors will visit different districts and meet people to know their problems and find solutions.

About the coming general election, he said, "We are moving towards the elections to be held towards the end of this year."

He said the Election Commission is preparing a voter list with spontaneous support of the people.

Fakhruddin mentioned that the Council of Advisers has approved an ordinance making the Election Commission independent. "Our aim is not only to hold an election in a free and fair manner this year but all elections in the future."

Presided over by Rangpur DC Khandaker Atiar Rahman, the meeting was also addressed by Moslem Uddin Pramanik for farmers, Shahana Begum for teachers, Abdul Halim for journalists, Shah Mohammad Hafizur Rahman for UP chairmen and Rangpur Municipal chairman Abdur Rouf Manik.

The local representatives raised various demands, including establishment of industrial units and cold storage in the laggard region.

The chief adviser said the government will extend all cooperation if the private sector took initiative for setting up industries.

Condition of Saifuddin Manik deteriorates

BSS, Dhaka

Condition of ailing Gono Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik has deteriorated further.

He is now undergoing treatment in the intensive care unit (ICU) of Comfort Hospital in the city.

Dr Satyajit Dutta at the ICU said Manik is suffering from cancer, which has now spread to different parts of his body. His blood pressure is falling quickly. He was taken to the ICU yesterday as his condition deteriorated.

Manik got admitted to Comfort Hospital on January 24.

METER TEMPERING 14 lime factories pilfer gas worth Tk 3.5cr a year in Narayanganj

UNB, Narayanganj

Tempering of meter and unauthorised gas connection were detected in 14 lime factories at Siddirganj yesterday.

Set up in the late 70s the lime factories have pilfered gas worth Tk 3.5 crore every year, Titas Gas Company officials said.

Factory owners went into hiding when a joint task force of army personnel and Titas Gas officials raided the area at 11:00am. None was arrested. Snapping the lines the task force told the factory workers that their owners should contact the Titas Gas office in Dhaka today with relevant documents.

Babul, owner of Faisal Limes, said the raid to their factories was intended to harass them as they have not tempered the gas meter, which is not possible for them.

'Come to aid of mothers, children in hospitals'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Patient Welfare Association at Maternal and Child Health Training Institute (MCHTI) last year provided assistance to more than 11,000 mothers and children, said the speakers at a seminar yesterday.

They said the association provided medicines to poor patients and financial help to expecting mothers so that they could give birth to healthy babies.

The seminar titled 'Role of the Patient Welfare Association in helping helpless mothers and children' was held at MCHTI auditorium in the city.

Mahmuda Khatun, general secretary of the association, said it also provides counselling on birth registration, breastfeeding, childcare and how to eradicate malnutrition.

She said the association, which is currently active in 87 hospitals, has been getting fund from the government since 1994 to carry out its social and humanitarian activities.

Beside the government, different individuals and organisations including Rotary Club, Inner Wheel Club and Public Welfare Estate Association are also extending their support to strengthen the activities of the Patient Welfare Association, she added.

As part of its activities, a Children's Play Corner was inaugurated at MCHTI yesterday where some 10 children at a time will be able to play for their recreation.

Speaking as chief guest at the seminar, Social Welfare Secretary MA Hai Hawladar said maternal mortality rate as well as the number of underweight newborns are still very high.

"It is not possible for the government alone to provide total support to huge number of patients in the hospitals, and the individual people and organisations should come forward in this regard," he added.

Director General of social service department Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, MCHTI Superintendent Dr Mohammad Sirajul Islam, Dr Abdur Rahman, Begum Anjum Ara of Inner Wheel Club, Selina Khan, Prof Monwara of Rotary Club of Dhaka North West also spoke.

Expat donates Tk 5 lakh to cancer hospital

Syed Kamal Uddin Haider, a distinguished pharmacist living in UK, yesterday handed over a cheque for Tk 5 lakh to Dhaka Ahsania Mission President Kazi Rafiqul Alam at the Mission Bhaban for cancer hospital fund, says a press release.

With this fund a bed will be set up after the name of his sister late Syeda Nargis Ara.

While accepting the donation Rafiqul Alam said, with the support of the government and generous people the hospital is being built.

For timely completion and commissioning Tk 200 crore is needed. If Bangladeshis expatriates living in various countries come forward, we would certainly be able to build the most modern cancer hospital in time, Alam said.



Slum dwellers sift through burnt remains of their shanties after a devastating fire destroyed 200 shanties at Gandaria in the city early yesterday.

BBC BANGLADESH SANGLAP

Initiate unconditional dialogue soon

Participants urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should initiate a dialogue with the political parties immediately but impose no conditions to make it successful with a view to resolving the prevailing crises, panellists at BBC Bangladesh Sanglap said yesterday.

"We are in deep crisis. To get rid of it, unconditional dialogue must be held without further delay," said Awami League presidium member Suranjit Sengupta.

National unity should also be forged through dialogue, he added.

The other panellists are Manzurul Ahsan Khan, president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), and Prof Tajmeri SA Islam, vice-president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta).

BBC Bangla Service in conjunction with the BBC World Service

Trust organised the programme at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city. Kamal Ahmed of BBC Bangla Service moderated it.

Manzurul Ahsan Khan said the agenda of the dialogue should contain election related issues -- how to hold a free and fair election.

He suggested that the government should also lift the ban on political activities.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said that if the government imposes any conditions, the dialogue would not be successful.

About the issue of the trial of war criminals, Suranjit Sengupta said the government could appoint prosecutors and form a special tribunal in a very short time to start the trial.

Manzurul Ahsan Khan demanded immediate arrest of the war criminals in order to protect the country's sovereignty and maintain law and order.

If the present government could identify the war criminals and punish them, it would be one of the best jobs of the present government, said Prof Tajmeri.

The panellists also said the government should arrest all corrupt bureaucrats to ensure transparency in the administration.

Suranjit suggested that the government should set up an administration reform commission to curb corruption.

Prof Ahmad said the number of incidents of petty corruption has gone up in the last one year.

73 new titles arrive at Ekushey Book Fair

DU CORRESPONDENT

A total of 73 new books arrived at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair on the Bangla Academy premises in the city yesterday, the second day of the fair commemorating the supreme sacrifice of Bangladeshis in the 1952 Language Movement.

Among the new arrivals are 19 novels, 12 books of poem, seven non-fiction books, four biographical books and four books on the liberation war, according to Bangla Academy Information Centre.

Owners of the publishing houses and the Bangla Academy authorities said the sale of books is satisfactory.

A number of visitors said they are looking forward to more new arrivals.

Talking to reporters, Bangla Academy Director General Syed Muhammad Shahed said the English to Bangla Dictionary published by the academy was its best-selling book yesterday.

About the allegation that some stalls are violating the rules of the fair, he said the authorities have

noticed that some publishing houses are selling books of other business houses. "We have already warned them. If they fail to abide by the rules by tomorrow (Sunday), we will take stern action against them."

All stalls are selling books at a discount of 25 percent while Bangla Academy is offering a 30 percent discount on its books.

A series of seminar styled 'Bangladesh's achievement in art and literature in three decades' began at the fair venue yesterday.

Meanwhile, the two-day National Poetry Festival ended on the Dhaka University campus yesterday. The festival began on Friday with the slogan "The message of poetry is the victory of democracy".

Around 400 poets from home and abroad participated in the festival organised by the National Poetry Council.

Poet Mohadev Shaha and Jahanara Parvin, a young poet, were honoured with National Poetry Council Shamsur Rahman Award at the festival.

200 shanties gutted in Gandaria slum fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A devastating fire burned down around 200 shanties at Gandaria Rail Gate slum in the city early yesterday.

The flames originated from an earthen oven at about 1:00am and soon engulfed the slum, Shyampur police said adding that no casualties were reported in the incident, but inhabitants lost most of their belongings.

Firefighters from Postogola, Sadarghat and headquarters rushed to the spot on information and doused the blaze with the help of local people at about 2:15am.

HSBC official arrested on charge of killing wife

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested an official of a private bank on charge of killing his wife at Gulshan in the city last night.

The arrestee identified as Faimuzzaman Chowdhury, an official of Hongkong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) Limited, was arrested after his father-in-law filed a case with Gulshan Police Station accusing him (Faimuzzaman) of murdering his daughter Tasmir Hossain Munni 25.

Munni's father Amir Hossain in the case said Faimuzzaman killed his daughter Munni and then hanged her from a ceiling fan inside their bedroom.

Gulshan police recovered the body from Faimuzzaman's residence at Gulshan yesterday afternoon.

World Cancer Day tomorrow

BSS, Dhaka

The World Cancer Day will be observed in Bangladesh as elsewhere around the globe tomorrow with a call for timely and proper medicine for the children attacked by the killer disease.

Different organisations will hold various programmes on the day with particular emphasis upon mass awareness for hygiene of the affected children and media's catalytic role in awakening the people against cancer.

Bangladesh Childhood Cancer Society (BCCS) will organise a rally in the morning and a discussion on the issue, a BCCS press release said yesterday.

President to open Scouts Council tomorrow

BSS, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed is scheduled to inaugurate the 36th general meeting of the national council of Bangladesh Scouts at the national scouts training centre at Mouchak in Gazipur tomorrow, a press release of the scouts said yesterday.

President and Chief Scout Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed gave separate messages on the occasion.

In his message Iajuddin said, "scouting is basically a social movement which provides inspiration to the children, juveniles and youths to become good citizens."

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in his message said, "the ideal of scouting could help the students to become ideal citizens, developing their patriotism and character by imbuing them to serve the distressed humanity." To stand beside the helpless people during natural disasters is one of the major duties of the scouts. The scouts will always carry out this duty with a sense of service, he added.

Death anniversary

Today is the 10th death anniversary of M Akhtar Ali, a former secretary, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil will be held after Asr prayers at his residence (House-14/A, Road-95, Gulshan-2) in the city today.

Relatives and admirers have been requested to attend the mahfil and pray for the peace of the departed soul.

New venue of Rotary Dhaka meetings

All regular weekly meetings of the Rotary Club of Dhaka Cosmopolitan will be held at Abasar Bhaban (5th floor), Sugandha Community Center Building, 7-13 Shatmasjid Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka on every Sunday instead of usual meeting venue of Cirdap cafeteria until further notification, says a press release.

Election won't be acceptable keeping Hasina in jail: Akhavan

UNB, London

Canadian lawyer Payam Akhavan said here yesterday elections in Bangladesh keeping Awami League President Sheikh Hasina behind the bar will not be acceptable to the people.

Akhavan, the Canadian counsel for Hasina, who arrived here from Dhaka made the remarks at a press conference at Dilshad Restaurant in East London.

Sheikh Rehana, her son and UK Awami League leaders were present at the press conference.

Akhavan said mandate of the caretaker government is to hold free, fair and acceptable election. "To ensure fair and acceptable election, Hasina should be released," saying the graft case against her filed by Azam J Chowdhury has no basis.

"I believe Sheikh Hasina is innocent," he told the press conference. He said he will raise the matter for international awareness seeking release of Hasina.

Rehana, also indicted in the graft case, said she is not absconding. "I will go to Bangladesh as soon as possible. I am waiting for the time."

8 suspected car lifters held in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Detective Branch of Police in separate drives seized a microbus and a private car in the last two days and arrested eight suspected car lifters from different points in the city.

Members of Rab-4 seized the microbus from Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital yesterday and arrested Ashiqur Rahman Riaz and Saiful Islam.

A DB team recovered a private car at South Kuril in the city and arrested six people from different areas in the city.

The arrestees are Towhidur Rahman, Biplob Ali Mollah, Shamsul Alam, Mohammad Mafiz, Suruj Mian and Abul Kalam.

DB officials said the gang members used to commit robbery and hijack vehicles identifying them DB officials.

DHAKA TODAY

Discussion
Ministry of Environment and Forest, and IUCN jointly organise a discussion to mark the World Wetlands Day 2008. Venue: Cirdap Auditorium. Time: 4:00pm.

Discussion
Jatiya Neta Bhasha Sainik Shamsul Huq Smriti Sangsad organises a discussion to mark the 90th birth anniversary of language movement veteran Shamsul Huq. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 3:00am.

AL discussion
Bangladesh Awami League (AL) organises a discussion demanding trail of killing of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria. Venue: AL central office. Time: 3:00pm.

Tribute
Dhaka Theatre and Bangladesh Gram Theatre jointly organise a discussion to pay tribute to dramatist Selim Al Din. Venue: Bangladesh Mohila Samity auditorium. Time: 6:30pm.



Maulana Abdul Awal Khan Chowdhury addresses the National 'Salana Jalsa' at Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamat at its Bakshi Bazar office in the city yesterday.

WEATHER TODAY

No change in temperature likely

UNB, Dhaka

Dry weather will prevail over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Mild to moderate cold wave is sweeping over Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Jessore, Barisal, Kushtia, Bhola, Comilla and Tangail and it may continue, Met Office said.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country during early morning, it said, predicting nearly unchanged night temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 26.0 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Cox's Bazar and lowest 06.4 degree Celsius at Srirongal.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:46pm today and rises at 6:38am 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	22.3	11.5	76	44
Chittagong	22.0	13.6	52	52
Rajshahi	21.3	08.6	100	71
Khulna	22.4	10.6	76	60
Barisal	22.6	09.4	82	64
Sylhet	22.8	09.8	79	50
Cox's Bazar	26.0	14.9	54	43