

Chickens, eggs

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consumption, if chicken and eggs are cooked at higher than 70 degrees Celsius temperature.

High temperature kills the deadly H5N1 virus and make the meat safe for human consumption, they added.

"It is absolutely safe to eat if you cook it above 70 degrees Celsius," Brig Gen Dr Md Abudus Shahid Khan, director of DMCH, said adding, "In fact, we are preparing it at over 100 degrees Celsius to ensure safety of the patients."

Prof Mohammad Tahir, vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, also echoed his view. "Besides, we do not have any established case of transmission of the virus to human beings so far. It's okay if we boil it properly," he added.

However, lack of awareness has led many private clinics to take out the protein item from their menus. The fears grew as the disease hit the poultry industry of the country with thousands of poultry culled across the country in recent times.

Growing concerns among consumers have already halved the consumption, putting the whole industry in grave peril as thousands of people have already become jobless and farms closed.

Talking to The Daily Star, Dr Md Muniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owners' Association, admitted that some of the clinics and hospitals have stopped providing eggs and chicken to the patients.

He, however, hoped that the clinics would put the items back on the menu soon after some awareness campaigns.

"People's awareness level has increased. If it is washed and boiled properly, the risk of avian influenza disappears," he said adding "We are fully aware of it now and those clinics and hospitals that had suspended the supply earlier should start providing the diet soon."

Director of Bangladesh Shishu Hospital Md Salim Shakur, also a professor at Bangladesh Institute of Child Health, observed that the people are unnecessarily frightened.

Bangladesh

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Look to the talented but inconsistent batsmen to fire.

There were some signs of encouragement during the drawn three-day warmup game against the visitors, with opener Zunaed Siddiqui caressing a century on the second day and some strong performances from Shakib Al Hasan, Shahriar Nafees and Aftab Ahmed.

Tamim Iqbal's recovery from a thumb injury is unlikely to be considered safe enough and it would be Nafees who would partner Zunaed at the top of the Bangladesh innings.

Former national captain and the country's highest scorer in Test cricket Habibul Bashar would add a major feather in his cap as he is all set to become the first player to play his 50th Test match for Bangladesh.

In the visitors' camp, skipper Graeme Smith will equal the South African captaincy record held by the late Hansie Cronje when he leads his team in the Mirpur Test for the 53rd time.

Smith was 22 when he took over from Shaun Pollock and became South Africa's youngest captain, leading his team against Bangladesh in Chittagong in March 2003.

TEAMS
Bangladesh: Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Tamim Iqbal, Zunaed Siddiqui, Habibul Bashar, Shakib Al Hasan, Aftab Ahmed, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mashrafe Mortaza, Abdur Razzak, Mohammad Rafique, Shahadat Hossain.

South Africa: Graeme Smith (captain), Ashwell Prince, Hashim Amla, Johan Botha, Mark Boucher, AB De Villiers, JP Duminy, Neil McKenzie, Robin Peterson, Jacques Kallis, Morne Morkel, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Dale Steyn.

Umpires: Steve Bucknor (WI) and Aleem Dar (Pak).

Bangladesh

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The scrap materials were seized and the arrested expatriates referred to Qunfuda's passports department, which is to refer them to the Labour Office, the Saudi daily said.

According to various news reports, the number arrests of Bangladeshi nationals by Saudi police has gone up, and various restrictions have been imposed on them regarding visa renewals and permits for part time jobs alongside regular jobs.

There have also been reports in the local media that the Saudi government has stopped issuing visas to Bangladeshi workers. The Saudi Arabian embassy in Dhaka has however refuted such reports.

Meanwhile the Foreign and Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury is to visit Saudi Arabia shortly to discuss labour issues with his counterpart.

Ethnic kids

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"Indigenous children should teach in their first phase of primary education in their own language and gradually should be turned into Bangla medium. This will help to reduce dropout rate among the indigenous children," said renowned educationist Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury.

The ICEF report styled "Many Languages, Once Voice" based on research shows 95 percent parents from indigenous communities prefer their children's education in Bangla medium so that they can cope with outside situation and lead a better life.

Besides, 65 percent parents opined education for their children in their own languages side by side with Bangla.

The government has taken several measures under Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II) to check dropout at primary level across the country.

However, CHT areas have yet to come under the PEDP-II activities.

National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) Chairman Prof Dr M Masir Uddin said they have no plan to publish indigenous textbooks now.

"We'll make curriculum and publish primary textbooks according to the direction of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE)," he told The Daily Star.

Some non-government organisations in CHT are now working to write textbooks in indigenous language but at a very limited scale.

"We have made three types indigenous textbooks -- Marma, Chakma and Tripura -- for primary level. But we are working only in limited areas in three CHT districts. The government should take initiatives to publish indigenous textbooks which will help reduce the dropout rate at primary level," said James Gomes, Chittagong regional director of Caritas, one of the NGOs, which published indigenous textbooks.

Angshahla Marma, headmaster of Daksepura Village Education Centre in Balipara, Thanchi, said students don't leave school anymore after introducing indigenous textbooks.

He suggested educated indigenous people be recruited as teachers as Bangla-speaking teachers cannot clearly understand the feelings of indigenous children.

Bangladesh Adibashi (indigenous people) Forum has long been demanding introduction of education in indigenous languages, especially at primary level. But no governments have ever paid any heed.

"Primary education for indigenous children should be in our mother language. We have been demanding it for long. Without it you can't expect to reduce dropout rate in CHT," said Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of the Forum.

Loan default
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four-party alliance has turned bad. This is also the reason why the bulk of the loans defaulted last year was with the state-owned banks."

Of the government-run banks, increase in defaulted loans was Tk 977 crore in Sonali Bank, Tk 220 crore in Janata Bank, Tk 397 crore in Agrani Bank and Tk 694 crore in Rupali Bank.

Officials of Janata Bank said at least six business houses have become defaulter because of anti-corruption drives. Similar were the views of Sonali Bank officials.

Rupali Bank officials said their overall activities including loan recovery were very slow because of lingering privatisation process.

Up to December 31, 2007, 40 percent of their outstanding loans were defaulted, compared to 23 percent in the previous year.

According to the central bank, the increase in defaulted loans was Tk 556 crore in the private commercial banks and Tk 111 crore in the foreign commercial banks.

However, the amount of loans shirked in the specialised banks decreased by Tk 428 crore.

Out of Tk 1,71,044 crore in outstanding bank loans, the volume of classified loans was Tk 22,624 crore or 13.23 percent on December 31, 2007, compared to Tk 20,098 crore or 13.15 percent on December 31, 2006, the sources said.

Classified loans in state-owned banks stood at Tk 13,791 crore or 29.27 percent of outstanding loans on December 31, 2007, which had been Tk 11,503 crore or 22.94 percent on December 31, 2006.

Defaulted loans in private commercial banks added up to Tk 4,921 crore or 5.01 percent of outstanding loans in December 2007, which had been Tk 4,365 crore or 5.45 percent in December 2006.

Classified loans in specialised banks stood at Tk 3,716 crore or 28.58 percent of outstanding loans in December '07, compared to Tk 4,144 crore or 33.68 percent in December 2006.

The size of defaulted loans in foreign commercial banks was Tk 194 crore or 1.43 percent of outstanding loans in December last year against Tk 83 crore or 0.81 percent in December 2006.

Ekushey observed

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The day has since been observed as the Language Martyrs Day. Unesco declared it International Mother Language Day in November 1999.

People outside the capital and Bangladesh missions abroad also paid homage to the martyrs placing flowers after midnight at Shaheed Minars.

The Central Shaheed Minar and its surrounding areas received a facelift on the occasion. Streets and their central reservations were decorated with festoons inscribed with Bangla letters and the national flag.

Poetry recitation started long before people started paying homage to the martyrs and continued till 2.00am. After a four-hour break, it continued for five more hours.

The chief adviser led the council of advisers and his special assistants to place wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar.

The speaker and deputy speaker of parliament, Dhaka city mayor, foreign diplomats, representatives of international organisations in Dhaka, Dhaka University vice-chancellor and teachers, leaders and workers of various political parties and socio-cultural organisations as well as thousands of people placed wreaths later.

The lone entrance to the Shaheed Minar was then opened for general people around 12.30am.

State-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar, and private TV channels aired special programmes. BTV telecast the wreath laying ceremony live from the Shaheed Minar. Newspapers published supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

After paying their tribute at the Shaheed Minar, many thronged the ongoing month-long Ekushey Book Fair at Bangla Academy.

It was a public holiday and the national flag alongside black flags flew at half-mast on government, autonomous and private buildings.

Bangladesh Embassy in Kathmandu in association with Dabur Nepal, a private organisation, organised a week-long painting exhibition at the embassy marking the day.

Bangladesh High Commission in Male organised a poetry reading programme and a discussion at Chancery Building yesterday.

Meanwhile, expatriate Bangladeshis in the US paid homage to language martyrs across the country, reports NewsWorld.

Employment growth

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But underemployment rate has increased from 16.6 percent in 2000 to 24.5 percent in 2006.

"These show that not enough employment was generated during the period," says Dr Rushidan Islam Rahman, research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). "This phenomenon has to be seen in the light of demographic factor and to some extent employment factors."

In the demographic context, the 1980s saw baby-boomers with high population growth rate. These newborns entered the labour market in early 2000 and so the employment rate also spiked, she explained.

But more complex is the employment factor. While the absolute population increased since 2000 despite a drop in population growth rate, employment rate dropped. Rushidan tries to find the answer in the sectoral employment statistics of the LFS.

Most of the employment has taken place in 'trade' and 'transport and communication' sectors and not so much in manufacturing. While the service sector that lacks large investment thrived, the manufacturing especially the small and medium enterprises performed badly, leading to less employment.

"We can explain that female employment in manufacturing dropped because of stagnating readymade garment sector," said Rushidan. "But what that would be the case for male employment in construction sector which actually boomed during the period is a riddle."

"With the advancement of the economy, it is expected that paid employment will grow faster than self-employment," she continues. "But data on type of employment shows there has been little growth of paid employment."

The total paid employment (regular salaried jobs plus daily/casual wage employment) also declined from 16 million in 1999-2000 to 15 million in 2002-2003 to 15.2 million in 2005-2006. This has resulted in slow growth of real wage -- 3.5 percent in 2003-2004, 2 percent in 2004-2005 and 0.0 percent in 2005-2006, according to the Bangladesh Economic Review, 2007.

"Labour force from poorer households is usually engaged in casual wage employment. Therefore, the above figures do not reveal an impressive experience of pro-poor labour market process," observes the BIDS research director.

There are other explanations for decline in casual and regular paid employment. Investment did not take place as much in wage labour-based enterprises and family enterprises grew more than the SMEs as evident in the large self-employed female population mostly in household agriculture like poultry, livestock and crop processing, she continued.

With a countrywide average economic dependency ratio of 71, urban areas witnessed a ratio of 79.7 and the rural areas 68.4 in 2005-2006. Six years ago, this was the reverse with 83.2 for rural population and 78.3 for urban areas. One explanation for this may be that more people in the urban areas are pushing for higher education and so more are dependent on the income-earning family members. The reverse may be true for the rural population.

Under the current economic situation, Rushidan feels that with high food prices, real crops production will be higher in the coming crop seasons if the government can ensure adequate and timely input supplies. This will increase the demand for paid casual labour.

She also pins hope on investment supportive growth in power sector, communications and an environment which will convince entrepreneurs to accept lower profit rates in the short term.

EC proposal

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or doing any other thing to influence poll results.

In the existing parliamentary election laws, the defence services -- army, navy and air force -- are exempted from trial for the offence of influencing election results.

The laws now provide that the returning officer (RO), assistant returning officer (ARO), presiding officer, assistant presiding officer, polling officer or any other officer, or clerk, performing election duty, or any member of police force can be tried for such offence.

The EC in its revised proposals for electoral reforms included the definition of 'law enforcement agency' in the relevant provision, replacing the existing words 'any member of police force'.

"The words police force have been replaced by 'law enforcement agency' in its proposal," the EC said.

According to the existing and proposed laws for conducting parliamentary polls, the 'law enforcement agency' means any Police Force, Ansar Force, Battalion Ansar, Bangladesh Rifles, Coast Guard, and the Defence Services of Bangladesh.

The EC in its earlier proposal, made public on April 5 last year, did not include the definition of law enforcement agency, and kept the provision as it is in the present laws.

But its revised proposals, which were sent to the political parties on Tuesday for the second round of electoral reform talks with the EC. In defence of shifting from its earlier stance, the AL said they agreed on the existing laws as they believe it will be good for the country if the army is engaged in election duties with the authorities.

War criminals

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government's duty is to try them. He also urged the government to form a special tribunal to identify the war criminals and bring them to justice.

"It is a very good move. But initiatives to try the war criminals should be taken at the same time," said Sultana Kamal, former adviser to the caretaker government.

She said the EC's initiative would not be effective if the war criminals are not tried.

Welcoming the EC's initiative, ZA Khan, one of the advisers to the BNP chairperson, said the war criminals should be brought to book.

He said if the alleged persons are found guilty, they must be barred from taking part in the elections.

Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon said the EC's initiative can be regarded as a step forward towards barring the war criminals from contesting elections.

"Now it's the government's responsibility to identify the war criminals and bring them to justice," added Menon.

"The government might have a list of war criminals. If not, it can get the list from Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee," said the Workers' Party president adding that the government can start the process of trying the war criminals according to the list.

"The government can also form a commission to identify war criminals and then try them under the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act," Menon said.

President of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) Hasanul Haq Inu thanked the EC for taking the initiative and said one of the important organs of the state had made a move to bar the war criminals from contesting polls. Now, the other organs like the executive and the judiciary should take initiative to try them.

EC earlier proposed inclusion of similar provisions in the existing electoral laws for city corporations and municipalities to prevent the war criminals from contesting elections to local government bodies.

Biographies

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Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO jointly organised the seminar and open discussion where participants narrated contribution of language martyrs to Bengali as a mother tongue.

Prof Serajul Islam, president of Asiatic Society, said around 26 crore people speak Bangla around the globe today making it the sixth most spoken language in the world.

Economist Dr Atiur Rahman said Bangla language is the people's language and is not an oppressed language. He said the government should now focus on ethnic languages of the country as many ethnic languages are gradually dying out.

Prof SMA Faiz, vice chancellor of Dhaka University, told the gathering that the concept of visiting professorship should be introduced in the universities of the country immediately so that foreign language experts can come to Bangladesh and carry out valuable researches on Bangla language.

Dhaka University History Department Professor Dr Ahmed Kamal and language martyr Jabbar's wife Amena Khatun and son Nurul Islam Badal also addressed the seminar.

Education Additional Secretary AKM Abdul Awal Mazumder conducted the discussion.

India to supply

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decision on it would be taken by April 30.

STC on its website said the supplier should deliver Indian parboiled rice that conforms to quality norms of the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act. It should be packed in 50 kg PP woven bags, which can withstand moisture during shipment.

The company specified that the rice should be delivered at Chittagong port within three weeks from the date of confirmation of supply order.

"These transactions should be treated as local sale, hence no export incentives are applicable to these," STC said.

The STC tender comes after the government permitted export of 50,000 tonnes of non-basmati rice to Bangladesh by West Bengal Essential Commodities Supply Corporation Ltd.

Despite the restriction on export of non-basmati rice, the government is giving exemptions from time to time for export of specific quantities of rice to different countries on humanitarian grounds.

Last year, the government had imposed a ban on non-basmati rice export to build a buffer stock and improve domestic supplies.

Following complaints from exporters, the ban was partially lifted by fixing the minimum export price of \$ 500 per tonne to augment domestic supplies of common varieties.

Zardari, Sharif

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November 2007, adding: "We are not looking at pro-Musharraf [parties]."

Zardari's first meeting yesterday was with the leader of a small ethnic Pashtun secular grouping, the Awami National Party (ANP), which defeated headline Islamic parties in the country's insurgency-hit northwest.

"We have decided to work together for the interest of Pakistan, democracy and supremacy of democratic institutions, and rule of law in the country," Zardari said after the meeting.

The ANP became the third biggest opposition party after the polls.

ANP leader Asfandiyar Wali Khan said he and Zardari had agreed "in principle to go together for supremacy of democracy" but said there were some issues which still needed to be resolved.

Nawaz Sharif's party yesterday said he will seek a parliament seat in a by-election so that he can lead his party's bloc in the new parliament, AP reports from Islamabad.

Sharif did not run for a seat in Monday's election. But several seats will become available because some candidates ran in multiple constituencies and won more than one seat.

The law requires those candidates to give up those extra seats, which must be filled in special elections.

Raja Zafarul Haq, chairman of Sharif's party, made the announcement after a meeting of senior party leaders and members who won seats in Monday's vote.

The party agreed on the name of Mian Nawaz Sharif as parliamentary leader and he will contest a by-election, Haq said.

Sharif was disqualified by election officials from running in this week's balloting due to a conviction on terrorism and hijacking charges stemming from the 1999 coup in which he was overthrown by Musharraf.

Sharif earlier addressed hundreds of protesters and lawyers outside deposed chief justice Iftekhar Muhammad Chaudhry's Islamabad home, where the judge remains under house arrest.

EC earlier proposed inclusion of similar provisions in the existing electoral laws for city corporations and municipalities to prevent the war criminals from contesting elections to local government bodies.

14 killed

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Thirteen bus passengers died in the bus. Only a few passengers could jump out of the bus through the windows, witnesses said.

Police recovered the bodies and sent the injured to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital.

Deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of Cox's Bazar visited the spot.

Superintendent of Police of Cox's Bazar Banaj Kumar Majumdar said the 13 victims were electrocuted.

Meanwhile, shock gripped the officials and management of the garment factory as the news of their employees' death reached the factory. Managing Director Ishtiaque Ahmed and General Manager Bapan Das Gupta could not find words to express their grief.

"We are trying to find out the identity of the dead and injured and we will send the bodies to their homes. The management will do everything needed for the victims' families," Bapan told journalists.

Fire in city

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hours to douse the fire. The firemen could not ascertain the cause of the fire immediately.

Witnesses said the fire originated at about 8:30pm.

They said the fire gutted over 100 shanties of a slum beside Pragati Sarani in Merul. The fire also burnt down seven bamboo shops, 38 fish trading shops, 32 chambers of the fish traders, several grocery shops and a multipurpose business establishment.

Fish traders said at least Tk 20,00,000 was kept at their chambers.

Syed Abul Kashem, president of the firm, said he had kept Tk 2,00,000 in cash inside his shop and the fire destroyed everything.

Nepal blockade

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"We just want certain ideological commitments, so that we can have good participation and representation in the polls," said Rajendra Mahato, another UDMF leader, referring to compensation for anyone injured or killed in protests, the release of anyone arrested and an end to "excessive force on protesters."

The UDMF also wants a guarantee the government is ready to discuss its political demands.

The forthcoming elections are for an assembly that will rewrite Nepal's constitution, the climax of a peace deal between mainstream parties and former Maoist rebels that ended a decade of civil war.

Parties from the south missed Wednesday's deadline to register candidates, but election officials said the government had instructed them to extend the deadline until February 24 -- another sign of a possible compromise.

Nepal's elderly Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala insisted the polls would be going ahead as planned.

"It is your duty to adhere to the law and not to abide by the orders of Pervez Musharraf who is illegal and unconstitutional," he told the demonstrators as hundreds of paramilitary troops and police stood guard.

His comments came after anti-Musharraf lawyers clashed with police.

Police fired tear gas at lawyers calling for the restoration of Chaudhry, the deposed chief justice, in the southern city of Karachi. Thousands more demonstrated elsewhere.

If Chaudhry gets his job back he could overturn Musharraf's controversial victory in a presidential election in October and oust him as president.

In the eastern city of Lahore about 2,000 lawyers chanted "Go, Musharraf, go" and "Restore independence of judiciary" during a protest.

Musharraf has rejected calls to quit in the wake of his allies' electoral defeat. He has been backed for most of his time in office by the United States as a key ally against Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network.

The embattled leader, who stepped down as army chief late last year, extended an offer of cooperation to his rivals on Wednesday, calling for a "harmonious coalition" after the polls.

Democrats

abroad give

Obama 11th

straight win

AFP, Washington

White House hopeful Barack Obama has won his party's primary for Democrats living outside the United States, the Democrats Abroad organisation said yesterday.

Obama won 65.6 percent of the vote taken between February 5-12 in 164 countries and territories around the world, including Antarctica, compared to 32.7 percent for his rival Hillary Clinton.

The global primary gives Obama his 11th victory over Clinton, although only seven delegates were at stake.

Obama has won 2.5 international delegates so far with two going to the former first lady, Democrats Abroad said. The remaining 2.5 votes will be determined at the Democrats Abroad Global Convention in Vancouver, Canada, on April 12-13.

"With the US image so badly damaged by the present Administration, American Democrats living overseas were eager to have their voices heard," said Christine Schon Marques, International Chair of Democrats Abroad in Geneva.