

Farm sector

FROM PAGE 1
dance with the drumbeats to celebrate the beginning of Boro harvest.

Fakhruddin Ahmed in his speech expressed satisfaction that the farmers have achieved a bumper Boro production this season and the grand rally was organised to honour the farmers.

He called around two crore farmers 'national heroes' who have contributed to the building of a food security blanket. He also congratulated agriculture scientists and agriculture officials at the grassroots level.

He called upon the farmers to continue the pace of their success with bumper production of Aush, Aman and other crops also.

He said the country's farmers have produced at least 1.75 crore tonnes of rice this year by cultivating about 45 lakh hectares of land, which is much better than what the authorities had anticipated.

The government is purchasing rice from farmers at Tk 28 per kg this year while the rate was Tk 18 last year, he said, adding that the farmers will get Tk 17,500 crore by selling Boro rice to the government this year.

He suggested that the farmers use gutti urea, a homemade urea fertiliser, instead of imported urea to reduce the import cost and pressure on the government that is giving a subsidy of at least Tk 1,300 a bag.

The government has also given direct fuel subsidy to ensure farmers' financial security, he added.

Fakhruddin admitted that the people of the country, especially the middleclass, are facing difficulties for the soaring prices of essentials. The price of rice on the global market increased two or three folds and its impact was eventually felt on the domestic market. "Only the farmers of the country can ensure food security for the entire nation by producing crops like rice, wheat and maize if they are given proper input security," the chief advisers said.

He added that rice prices are getting down compared to previous months with the start of Boro harvesting across the country.

Fakhruddin expressed deep concern at the decreasing water table of the district despite having several rivers. To mitigate the farmers' sufferings and ease irrigation, he urged the ministry concerned to take necessary steps to restore water flow of the Punarbhaba river.

Two successful farmers from the district—Md Motiur Rahman of Biral upazila and Md Abdul Hossain of sadar upazila—also spoke at the grand rally. The chief adviser congratulated Motiur for achieving 80 maunds of rice in an acre of land.

Agriculture Adviser CS Karim, who also attended the rally, said this year the government has disbursed Tk 3,900 crore to 67 lakh farmers as fuel subsidy.

Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Managing Director Md Shamsul Alam, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Resident Representative Hua Du and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Country Representative Adriano Spijkers also attended the rally. Md Nabiul Haque Mollah, deputy commissioner of Dinajpur, presided over the meeting.

After the rally, the chief adviser

visited several litchi orchards and enquired the farmers about the business. The farmers urged him to set up a litchi processing centre in the district.

Fakhruddin also inspected the state-run Boro procurement drive at the Pulhat LSD godown in sadar upazila.

After spending some time at the Dinajpur Circuit House, the chief adviser left Dinajpur at 1:20pm for Dhaka by an air force helicopter.

15 hurt

FROM PAGE 1

On May 12, the youths caught Shah Alam and handed him over to the local UP chairman. On Wednesday night, Chakaria police sat in a meeting to resolve the matter.

Locals alleged that SI Hafiz beat up the two youths at one stage of altercation at the meeting. As Sirajul Islam stood in protest, the SI also beat him, they said.

Sirajul was first taken to Chakaria Hospital. He succumbed to injuries while being shifted to Chittagong.

Sirajul's son Mohammad Kalu later filed a murder case with Chakaria judicial court against the officer-in-charge of Chakaria Police Station Ruhul Amin Siddique, SI Hafiz and manpower agent Shah Alam.

When contacted, Cox's Bazar Additional Police Superintendent Imam Hossain said the allegation of death of the farmer in police beating is false as there was no mark of injuries in his body as per the autopsy report.

Accounts

FROM PAGE 16

delivers a verdict," he said adding, "In our investigation we found that crores of taka was transferred through their accounts with the help of the IT system for heroin smuggling purposes."

Sources said the DNC took the steps to facilitate the ongoing investigations into several heroin smuggling cases filed against the suspects with Benapole, Sharsa and Kotwali police stations.

According to sources, the DNC requested the banks to freeze bank accounts of the following Jahangir Alam, Abdul Rahim, Anisur Rahman, Tozafful Hossain Tufan, Samir Roy, Shahidul Islam, Nazma Begum, Ashraf Alam, Tarok Nath and Nada from Sadipur, Tariqul Islam and his brother Raquibul Islam.

All the 12 were arrested by the DNC on charge of heroin smuggling. During interrogation, they admitted that they are members of an international heroin smuggling ring and they smuggled in and out heroin worth several crores of taka everyday across the border, sources said.

They also admitted that they transferred the money for heroin smuggling purposes through the IT system, intelligence sources said.

Sources said the drug smugglers had been conducting their business using different businesses as cover-ups.

The DNC in different drives this year recovered 6.5 kilograms of heroin, 3 kg of potassium and made several arrests.

Myanmar cyclone death toll soars above 43,000

AP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta warned yesterday that legal action would be taken against people who trade or hoard international aid as the cyclone's death toll soared above 43,000.

It was the first acknowledgment by the military government, albeit indirectly, of problems with relief operations in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis.

The warning came amid reports that foreign aid was being sold openly in markets, and that the military was pilfering and diverting aid for its own use.

The ruling junta has been blasted by aid agencies for refusing to allow most foreign experts into the hard-hit Irrawaddy delta and not responding adequately to what they say is a spiralling crisis.

Relief workers reported that some storm survivors were being given spoiled or poor-quality food rather than nutrition-rich biscuits sent by international donors, adding to fears that the ruling military junta in the Southeast Asian country could be misappropriating assistance.

New York-based Human Rights Watch said in a statement Wednesday that it had confirmed an Associated Press report that the military had seized high-energy biscuits that came from abroad, and distributed low-quality, locally produced biscuits to survivors.

Thursday's state radio announcement obliquely denied the military was misappropriating aid.

"The government has systematically accepted donations and has distributed the relief goods immediately and directly to the victims," it said. "Effective legal action will be taken against those who hoard, sell or buy, use or misuse the international or local donations or relief goods or cash to the cyclone victims."

Elisabeth Byrs, spokeswoman for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said aid workers who visited all the major markets in Yangon found no evidence of hoarding or sale of relief goods.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies spokesman Matthew Cochrane said the organization also had not received any such reports.

The government said Thursday that the official death toll from the May 2-3 cyclone had climbed by almost 5,000 to 43,318. The number of missing has remained at 27,838 for at least two days.

Dhaka asks

FROM PAGE 16

and sought Bangladesh's support in requesting the Myanmar government to allow unhindered entry of aid workers to Yangon. He also sought support for independence of Kosovo, two aircraft for Darfur and US candidature for IOM leadership.

He said Muslim countries would take collective decision in this regard at the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference (ICFM) to be held in Uganda in July.

About Darfur, Iftekhar said Bangladesh has offered two battalions under the UN peacekeeping mission and will see whether it will be possible to provide two aircraft under the UN operation.

Asked about free access of Bangladeshi apparels to the US market, he said the government is making continuous effort to get special and differential treatment to Bangladeshi products on the US and EU markets. "Since our performance is good, we should be rewarded."

To this end, he added, he had written individually to each US Congressman.

Asked if any political matter was discussed during the meeting, Iftekhar said it was a confidential discussion, but noted that Bangladesh's destiny lies in the hands of the Bangladeshis.

BNP factions

FROM PAGE 1

addressing leaders of Manikganj Bar Association and BNP at his Nam flat in the city yesterday.

He continued, "I don't know exactly what they [pro-reform leaders] are saying about the unity, but our stance is clear, which is, all except those expelled can work for BNP from their own position."

About the upcoming dialogue with the government, he said BNP is still in the four-party alliance and whether to join the talks if invited would be decided at party forum and in consultation with the allies.

Party sources said the proposal for a joint announcement over unity came from a top leader of the Saifur group yesterday. But as of filing this report at 9:00pm, Delwar did not agree to it.

Pro-reform stalwart Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan might make an important announcement regarding the unity before his arrest or surrender to court, added the sources.

Bhuiyan, who was charged with graft in the Gatco case Tuesday, faces an arrest warrant issued by a Dhaka court yesterday.

Meanwhile, a group of former lawmakers siding with Saifur-led faction yesterday met their acting secretary general Major (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed at his Banani residence and discussed the reconciliation efforts.

Some leaders of pro-Khaleda faction too are trying to convince Delwar to hold a joint meeting at the party's Nayapalata office and make a formal declaration, said sources close to the unity move.

Scant supply

FROM PAGE 16

increased to Tk 18 a strip from MRP of Tk 12.

A drug retailer at Uttara said, "The manufacturer's price for inhaler Salmolin by ACME Pharmaceuticals used to be Tk 120, but now we have to pay Tk 140 for it. That's why we have to sell it at a higher price."

Similarly, Beximco Pharmaceutical's inhaler Azmasol, with an MRP of Tk 140, is now priced at Tk 165 for the retailers, he added.

The drug market has been experiencing a crisis of inhalers since November last year as its local manufacturers including Glaxo, Beximco and Square have not been maintaining adequate supply of the drug, said retailers.

To meet the demand, the retailers are buying the drugs at higher rates from open market at Mitford in the capital and that led to the rise in the retail prices of the particular drugs, they explained.

"The supply of tablet Amdocil Plus, used for blood pressure, has been cut-off for the last one and a half months. We get it from Mitford at higher price and sell it for Tk 60 instead of its MRP Tk 45," said a retailer adding that many drug manufacturers including Beximco Pharmaceuticals during the past few months have not been supplying their products as per the market demand.

Nazmul Hassan, chief executive officer of Beximco Pharmaceuticals, brushed aside the allegation saying that although the company faced a crisis last year, the company does not have any shortage in production or supply this year.

"It is the wholesalers who stock up medicines and sell those to retailers for extra profit. From our experience last year, we came to know from the retailers that they were able to buy our medicines from the wholesalers during a certain period when we ceased our supply of drugs to the wholesalers," said the Beximco CEO.

The wholesalers buy up particular drugs even from retailers, stockpile those and later sell those at higher prices, he alleged.

When the attention of the Drug Administration (DA), the government body that is entrusted with monitoring price, quality and affordability of drugs for the general public, was drawn to the drug price situation, The Daily Star was told that the DA has formed a three-member team and the team will visit drug markets in the city.

CA opens

FROM PAGE 16

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FROM PAGE 16

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twice every week.

"Selling drugs over the MRP is a punishable crime. Drug licence of a drug trader could be cancelled for such an offence and cases could be filed against the trader with drug court," said a high official of the DA requesting not to be named.

"In fact, shortage of medicine is very little. The problem lies in coordination among doctors, pharmaceutical companies and the drug control authorities," said manager of a drugstore named United Pharmacy at Shabbagh.

"If there is a shortage of a particular brand of medicine made by a particular company, the patients could easily look for the same medicine made by a different company, but they don't do that because the particular medicine made by the particular company was prescribed by their doctors."

If it was mandatory to prescribe and sell drugs under their generic names, people would not go through such problems, he said adding that people have been suffering due to the imprudent policies of the government.

Prof Muniruddin Ahmed of Department of Pharmacology at University of Dhaka, said, "If the supply of medicine is sufficient, there is no scope of price hike by the retailers or wholesalers. But if the retailers or wholesalers attempt to raise the price by forming a cartel, the Drug Administration should move in and take stern action against them."

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US to increase

FROM PAGE 16

\$ 21 million in support of democracy and governance programmes, more than double the 2008 enacted level."

This additional funding, he added, will help promote comprehensive anti-corruption reforms, strengthen the government institutions, particularly at the local level, and support democratic political party development.

In response to a question from the chair, Boucher informed the House that US wants to see lifting of emergency before the election so that people can freely participate in the upcoming election.

Congressman Pence (R-IN), ranking member of the committee, earlier requested the US officials to rectify the inconsistencies in the US policy for foreign assistance.

Congressman Pence particularly referred to the instance of Bangladesh where US government provides an annual assistance of about \$80 million while taking away more than \$500 million as tariff from Bangladesh's export.

He noted that this is an example of disconnect between US foreign assistance and foreign policy objectives and urged the administration to rectify this.

Mark S Ward informed the Congress that the US government is also planning to increase funding for further good governance reform initiatives that "build upon positive steps taken by Bangladesh's 2007 caretaker government."

Referring to recent cyclone in a neighbouring country, he highly appreciated the disaster preparedness and post-disaster recovery of Bangladesh.

Congressman Gary Ackerman (D-NY), who chaired the hearing session, noted Bangladesh's transition and acknowledged caretaker government's initiative like government's recent decision to allow indoor politics.

However, he expressed hope that further steps will be taken to facilitate a democratic and legitimate election in Bangladesh.

RU VC

FROM PAGE 16

The removed VC was widely criticised for his role following the arrests of eight RU teachers on charges of breaking the emergency rules in August last year. Even Dhaka University teachers demanded his removal for his role at the time.

He also incurred the wrath of his students for his failure to maintain law and order in halls of residence, especially in female dormitories. A university teacher, Dr S Taher Ahmed, was killed at his campus residence during Prof Altaf's time in office.

After the state of emergency was declared in early last year, RU teachers and students handed in memorandums to the chief adviser, demanding Prof Altaf's removal.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) conducted several investigations against top officials of some public universities and found huge financial and administrative irregularities in Rajshahi University, especially in recruiting teachers.

Prof Altaf, who became the RU vice chancellor on June 5 in 2005, was removed following UGC recommendations, sources said.

Politicians

FROM PAGE 16

Dhaka University Prof Asif Nazrul said political parties are now suspicious about the implementation of the reforms because of some "stringent decisions of the judiciary", while the Election Commission (EC) is also suffering from a crisis of confidence.

The EC in some ordinances has been given unlimited power to cancel elections in constituencies if candidates provided incorrect information to the EC. It has also been given the power to cancel a political party's registration for minor slips.

He said instead of giving the EC such authority, a commission can be formed to decide on cancelling elections in constituencies.

AL leader Abdur Razzak alleged that the role of the EC has helped frustrate politicians. Holding upzila elections before the national polls and re-demarcating constituencies at this critical period cannot be welcomed, he said.

Shujan President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said he does not think that political parties are "compelled" to accept reforms, rather these reforms were proposed by the parties themselves but were ignored for long.

The political parties did not have the scope to go to their supporters and seek opinions due to the nationwide ban on indoor politics. But since the ban has been lifted they should start reforming their parties.

Asked if he sees any change in the mindset of political leadership now, Muzaffer said many big leaders have been arrested and tried.

"This is surely hit the politicians," Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder presented the keynote paper at the roundtable while former advisers to caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan and ASM Shahjahan also spoke.

Columnist Syed Abul Maksud moderated the event.

Terror threat

FROM PAGE 16

Washington spent 15.6 billion dollars on training for the Afghan national army and police, "yet the army is still incapable of operating on its own and the police are so bad that most Afghans are more afraid of them than they are of the Taliban" militant group.

In Pakistan, over the same period, the Bush administration provided 1.5 billion dollars in "foreign military financing" and 5.56 billion dollars in "coalition support funds."

The military financing was to buy radars, and anti-submarine planes to track what Ackerman called "the non-existent al-Qaeda air force and navy."

The coalition funds "disappeared into the Pakistani Treasury for unspecified services allegedly rendered," he claimed.

"Yet Pakistani officials complain, and have done so to me directly, that they lack the capabilities and training to conduct effective counter-insurgency operations," Ackerman said.

Richard Boucher, the State Department official in charge of South Asian affairs, maintained at the hearing that Washington had "made progress on a broad range of fronts" in South Asia through US and other foreign aid.

He said particular achievements included economic growth, strengthened local and national institutions, and successes in countering insurgents.

"But that's not enough and important challenges remain, most prominently in the fields of counter-terrorism, improving governments' capacity to provide basic services, and strengthening democratic practices and institutions."

Boucher said the US administration's fiscal year 2009 "base" budget request for South Asian states -- Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives -- was more than two billion dollars.

Much of the request remains concentrated in Afghanistan and Pakistan, "which are key to regional stability," he said.

The State Department has also increased coordination and consultation with counterparts at the

US Agency for International Development and other key providers of foreign assistance in the region, he said.

He called for greater international donor coordination as foreign assistance resources grew scarce in meeting rising needs in South Asia.

"The United States is one of the largest donors in South Asia, if not the largest. But, we can't do it all," he said.

Since 2001, he said, the international community had made multi-year financial pledges through to 2013 of assistance to Afghanistan totalling over 43 billion dollars.

Moudud charged

FROM PAGE 1

disproportionate to his known sources of income.

In his statement, Moudud showed immovable properties worth over Tk 1.97 crore, five vehicles worth Tk 64.25 lakh, fixed deposit receipt (FDR) worth over Tk 9.77 crore in 22 accounts, over Tk 52.55 lakh deposited in 12 bank accounts and other movable properties worth over Tk 32 lakh.

The ACC investigation found out that the BNP leader owns immovable properties worth over Tk 2.37 crore, five vehicles worth Tk 64.25 lakh, FDR worth over Tk 12.51 crore in 22 accounts, and other movable properties valued at over Tk 1.57 crore. Besides, he has over Tk 53.51 lakh deposited in bank accounts.

The joint forces during a raid on April 13 last year detained him and seized 32 cans of beer and 16 bottles of other alcoholic beverages at his home.

The following day, Gulshan police filed a case against him under the Narcotics Control Act in connection with smuggling in and possessing contraband liquor.

Moudud has been behind bars since then.

Police later pressed charges against Moudud in that case and the case was transferred to the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court for trial.

But, the High Court stayed the proceedings of the case for six months and the stay order was later extended to October 7, 2008.

Frantic race to save

FROM PAGE 16

reservoirs -- two of them major -- across five provinces.

Underlining the desperate efforts, China launched a mass public appeal for thousands of shovels, hammers and cranes, saying some rescuers were having to shift huge concrete slabs by hand to get to survivors.

"As long as there is only a glimmer of hope we will never give up," vowed China's vice health minister Gao Qiang.

Premier Wen Jiabao ordered another 30,000 troops and 90 helicopters to the area to bolster operations, while the military began its first major air drops of tens of thousands of food packets, clothes and blankets.