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**MPs-elect of BNP, allies take oath today**  
Speaker meets Khaleda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The lawmakers-elect of the BNP and its allies Jamaat-e-Islami and Bangladesh Jatiya Party will be sworn in this afternoon by Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar.

Party sources said after oath taking, the BNP's parliamentary party will hold a meeting to elect the leader and deputy leader of the opposition in parliament.

The BNP might also pick its nominee for the post of deputy speaker of parliament as the ruling party has announced to elect the deputy speaker from the opposition.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar called on BNP Chairperson

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## Fertiliser prices halved

Markdown to give Boro major boost; govt subsidy for non-urea fertilisers will now stand at Tk 2,700cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday slashed the prices of non-urea fertilisers to almost half per kilogram to help farmers during the country's biggest crop season, Boro.

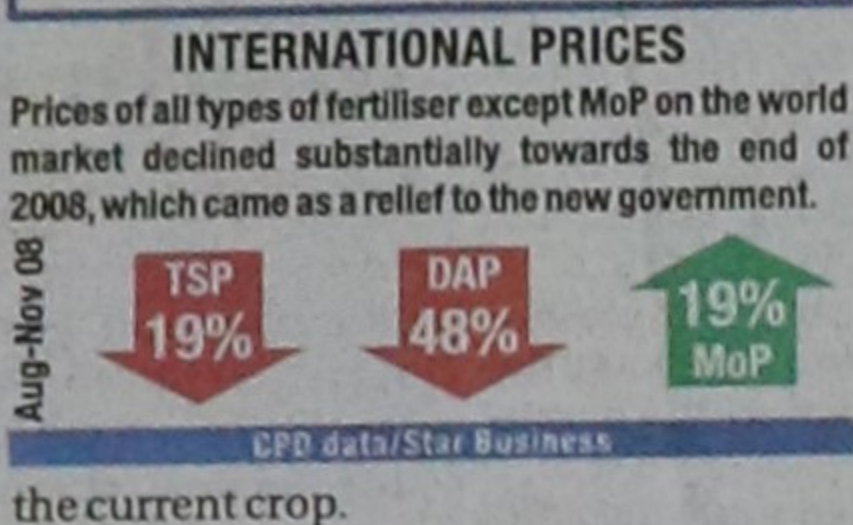
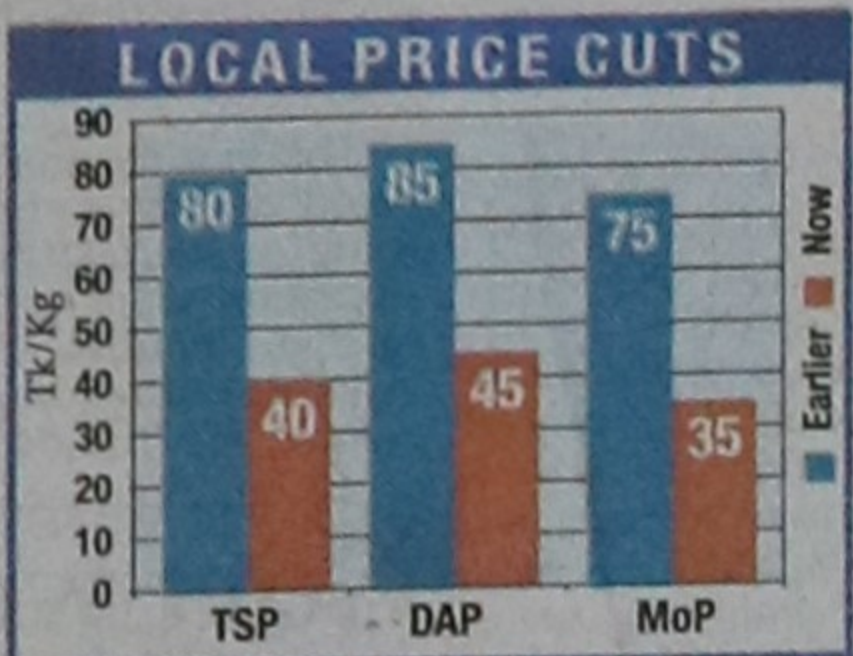
From now, farmers will be able to buy 1kg TSP (triple super phosphate) at Tk 40, MoP (muriate of potash) at Tk 35 and DAP (di-ammonium phosphate) at Tk 45 from dealers and their agents at the union parishad level.

Previously TSP cost Tk 75-80 a kg, MoP Tk 65-75 and DAP Tk 80-85.

Farmers, however, will have to buy urea at the previous price of Tk 12 a kg.

The move is meant to bring down the prices of essentials by cutting farmers' production cost, which had soared in the recent past because of a rise in the diesel and fertiliser prices.

The government cut the prices of non-urea fertilisers after reducing the price of diesel, a key factor for irrigation during



Agriculture experts say the reduction in the prices of non-urea fertilisers and diesel would help farmers reduce produc-

tion cost by Tk 1 to Tk 2.5 a kg.

"It was one of our commitments in the election manifesto to ensure easy supply of fertiliser to farmers. We are happy to have fulfilled the promise and enable millions of farmers to get fertiliser at a

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## Rice to be cheaper by up to Tk 2.5/kg

PINAKI ROY

The reduction in fertiliser price will decrease the present production cost of rice by Tk 2.5 a kilogram but the government has to take prompt actions for the farmers to reap the benefit of its move.

The government has sharply reduced the price of non-urea fertilisers but the rice price depends on many factors including its production, distribution of

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## Govt to sue Siemens over Koko graft

MD HASAN

The government has decided to take legal actions against Siemens Bangladesh Ltd, following the international scandal of bribery and money laundering involving Germany based industrial giant Siemens, and Arafat Rahman Koko, younger son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

The actions might include blacklisting of Siemens Bangladesh Ltd, barring it from doing business in the country.

But it is still not clear whether similar actions are also warranted against Nokia Siemens Networks (NSN), the new global joint telecoms division of Siemens and Finland based mobile phone manufacturing giant Nokia.

In July 2008, NSN was awarded a contract for expanding the network of government owned mobile phone service operator TeleTalk.

Out of about Tk 274 crore expansion deal, NSN got a contract worth Tk 184 crore, while the remaining Tk 90 crore deal went to China

based Huawei.

Earlier, Siemens Bangladesh got a contract of '10 lakh mobile project' of Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTB), which eventually morphed into TeleTalk.

Siemens Bangladesh Ltd already admitted that between May 2001 and August 2006 it made payments of at least \$5,319,839 in bribes to various Bangladeshi officials and Koko through purported business consultants in exchange for favourable treatment during the bidding process for the contract of 10 lakh mobile project of BTB.

The scandal first started to be unearthed during the formation of NSN in June 2006, as some discrepancies were found in Siemens' balance sheet, said an NSN high official.

As the scandal is getting bigger by the day, The Daily Star contacted the new telecom minister seeking comments on the issue.

"We are looking into all possible legal actions against Siemens Bangladesh and others who were involved in the scandal," said

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## Israel intensifies Gaza offensive

al-Qaeda calls for jihad; UN chief for immediate ceasefire

AGENCIES

Fighting has intensified in the Gaza Strip between Israeli troops and Palestinians yesterday as al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden called for a holy war against Israel in revenge for its deadly offensive.

In his first recorded statement in eight months, the al-Qaeda chief appealed for jihad to stop Israel's "aggression against Gaza", a US-based monitoring service said on Wednesday.

In the 22-minute audio recording entitled "A Call for Jihad to Stop Aggression Against Gaza," Bin Laden called for a holy war to restore "Jerusalem and Palestine," Intel Centre said.

The al-Qaeda leader slammed Arab and Islamic governments for their response to the Israeli onslaught in which nearly 1,000 Palestinians have been killed, at least 292 of them children.

Israel said it launched 60 air strikes overnight. Residents spoke of heavy machine-gun fire as Israeli troops fought Hamas gunmen near Gaza City.

The conflict has reportedly killed nearly 1,000 Gazans and 13 Israelis.

Diplomatic moves to end the crisis continue, with UN head Ban Ki-moon reiterating his call for an immediate ceasefire after talks in Egypt with President Mubarak continue.

Egypt has been leading efforts to broker a ceasefire deal, that could include a new force of peacekeepers to prevent smuggling on its border with Gaza.

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## Halt attacks on Gaza

Bangladesh asks Israel

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has strongly condemned the unrelenting indiscriminate Israeli attacks on Gaza that left nearly a thousand people dead.

"We are appalled by the scale of devastation and the deaths of innocent Palestinians, including women and children, in the attacks. Bangladesh is deeply concerned at the unabated

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## BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Govt to seek 2 more judges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said the government will soon press for appointing two new judges to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court to expedite the trial of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assassination case.

Appointment of the judges will be done as per recommendations of the Supreme Judicial Commission, he told newsmen at his Secretariat office.

The minister said the government after the appointment will ask the attorney general to pray to the chief justice to form a bench of the apex court to hear the appeals in the case.

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## Permanent Pay Commission to be formed

Says Muhith

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is mulling over formation of a permanent pay commission for the public servants to adjust their income to inflation.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith disclosed it to reporters yesterday after a meeting with a five-member delegation led by Pay Commission Chairman M Mustafizur Rahman at the minister's office.

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## UPAZILA POLL CANDIDACY

## AL grassroots in disarray

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Awami League chief's directives to grassroots leaders of the party to pick a single candidate for the post of chairman in the upcoming election to upazila parishads appears to have fallen flat with rival contestants from the party still in the polls race in many upazilas.

Supporters of many candidates, who were not picked by grassroots level party committees, are clashing with supporters of party-backed candidates in many areas, let alone extending support to them.

In the first week of this month, AL President Sheikh Hasina sent directives to the president and general secretary of the

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# What's New From Nokia...

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