

## Save soil the green way

PORIMOL PALMA

Agro entrepreneur Abdul Basith Selim provides a glaring example of how agriculture could be hugely profitable without the use of chemical fertilisers or pesticides, and ensuring quality management of natural resources that save the ecology at the same time.

Selim innovated a mechanism to save soil quality from iron or arsenic from the underground water used for irrigation in the paddy fields.

He produces indigenous varieties of fine and aromatic rice, using high quality compost made of cow dung and oilcake.

Selim, managing director of Basith Krishi Prokalpa Ltd, shared his success yesterday with The Daily Star at the two-day rice fair at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka. It was jointly organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and International Rice Research (IRRI) marking the latter's 50th anniversary.

At the fair, he is exhibiting 54 varieties of local fine and aromatic rice produced by him and contract growers in Sylhet.

Selim was an importer of agro-products from India. On one fine morning in 1990, he found a truck full of fine rice transported to a market in Sylhet from Dinajpur. Curiously, he asked the trader the cost of the rice.

"I was astonished to find that a full truck of rice was worth Tk 4.5 lakh, whereas the same quantity of general variety rice costs only Tk 2.4 lakh," he said. That inspired him to produce fine and aromatic rice in Sylhet, where large agricultural lands

remain fallow, as many people of that area depend on overseas jobs for their livelihoods, he added.

He bought seeds -- Chinigura and Kalijira from Dinajpur -- and tried those out on several types of lands.

"Fine rice was best grown on high lands," he said, adding that he knew the benefits of using cow dung and oilcake.

"I prepare the land well. Before planting seedlings, I apply cow dung and oilcake and plough the

should not be applied to the field directly.

In the middle of his field, he makes a small water reservoir to store the pumped water before irrigation. He also keeps some cow dung and hyacinth, so that any iron or arsenic present deposits at the bottom in about three days. Then, he opens the pipes installed at the edge of the reservoir, allowing the water to irrigate the fields.

In addition, to control pests, he hangs a light in the reservoir at night that draws insects in to die, he said.

Thus, as there is no need for chemical fertilisers or insecticides, production cost of fine rice is around Tk 25,000 a hectare.

Selim grows over 5 tonnes of rice per hectare, the price of which is Tk 1 lakh. From a hectare, a farmer can make net profit worth Tk 75,000.

To make oilcake, he grows mustard seeds during the dry season, which also helps maintain freshness of the soil, said Selim, adding that the demand for fine aromatic rice is increasing both at home and abroad.

Since 1994, he started campaigning the method and now has over 40 contract farmers to grow fine rice. He grows around 70 lakh tonnes of fine rice a year during Aman season on some 200 acres of land.

"I sell rice to exporters and superstores."

Finding it more profitable, many farmers are growing fine rice following his method, which is environment-friendly.

"We must take care of the environment. Otherwise it will not save us."



Abdul Basith Selim

PHOTO: COURTESY



Members of the Hindu community take out a colourful chariot procession in the city yesterday on the occasion of the Rathajatra festival.

PHOTO: STAR

## 150MW power plant gets Ecnec nod

Five projects worth Tk 1,419 crore approved

BSS, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnec) at meeting yesterday approved five projects involving about Tk 1,419 crore, including Tk 380 crore project assistance. Ecnec Chairperson and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presided over the meeting.

The approved projects are dredging of Chanda-Barasia river, establish-

ment of national institute of neuroscience (2nd amended), construction of Baushi-Gopalpur-Bhuyapur road, construction of flyover at Kadomtali in Chittagong, and construction of Sirajganj 150MW Gas Turbine (Peaking) Power Plant (amended).

Planning Minister Air Vice-Marshal (retd) AK Khandaker, Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, Labour and Manpower and

Expatriates Welfare Minister Engineer Mosharrar Hossain, Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen, Commerce Minister Lt Col (retd) Faruq Khan, Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, Information and Cultural Affairs Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr AFM Ruhul Haque, Prime Minister's Advisers HT Imam, Dr Moshir Rahman, Dr Modasser Ali,

and Dr Toufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury and State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Brig (retd) Enamul Haq attended the meeting.

Cabinet secretary, principal secretary to the Prime Minister, planning secretary, members of the Planning Commission, and secretaries of the concerned ministries and senior officials were also present, said an official release.

## Ailing Azam goes to Singapore today

BSS, Dhaka

Pop guru and valiant freedom fighter Azam Khan will leave for Singapore today for better medical treatment.

He is suffering from cancer in mouth and the doctors suggested he take treatment at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday provided financial assistance for Azam Khan for his treatment.

Hasina handed over a cheque for Tk 2 lakh to Ema Khan, daughter of the pop Samrat at the prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the city.

While giving the cheque, prime minister told Ema that if needed, her government will provide more help for the treatment of Azam Khan, who fought for the country in 1971

and later created a new trend of pop music in the country.

Ema told BSS that Azam Khan will talk to journalists from 11:00am to 11:30am at Hazrat Shah Jalal International Airport before flying to Singapore at 1:30pm today.

Dr Sajal Ashfaq confirmed cancer of Azam Khan after conducting biopsy on June 21. Then he got admitted to Square Hospital.

Various organisations, agencies and individuals have come forward in aid of ailing Azam Khan.

Interested people have been requested to contact at 01711-472367 to inquire about Azam Khan and give financial assistance.

Ema said her father urged the countrymen to pray for his recovery.



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina consoles Ema Khan, daughter of pop guru and valiant freedom fighter Azam Khan, at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the city yesterday after handing over a cheque for Tk 2 lakh to her for treatment of her father.

## ATTACK ON KASHEM IEB demands punishment to culprits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Engineers Institution, Bangladesh (IEB) yesterday demanded the government to arrest and punish the culprits responsible for the attack on PWD Engineer Abul Kashem during June 27 hartal.

It also demanded the government to launch a probe and expressed resentment for not arresting any culprit.

"An investigation should launch to find out why such an attack on the life of a non-political government engineer was carried out," said IEB General Secretary Mesbaur Rahman Tutul at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club.

He also urged the government to send Kashem to abroad for better treatment.

Kashem was undergoing treatment at a city hospital with a severe head injury after pickets vandalised his car near Shahbagh during the hartal.

IEB general secretary called upon political parties to come out of hartal culture. He also said they want a change in the country's political culture and language of protest.

"BNP resolving the hartal demanding called of the present utility crisis and we the engineers work for supplying utility. Then how they can attack us," said Dr. SM Nazrul Islam, president of IEB.

The IEB leaders urged the political parties to use information communication technology in conveying their message to people and demands to the government instead of hartal.

## ACID CONTROL (AMEND) BILL PASSED

### 7-year jail for filing false case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliament yesterday passed a bill amending the Acid Control Act 2002 to introduce a provision for imprisonment of maximum seven years or minimum two years for filing false case.

The existing provision says an individual will be punished with imprisonment for five years for filing false case.

The House also passed the Jute Ordinance 1962 (amendment) bill.

Meanwhile, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haq Inu in parliament demanded that the government begin judicial probe into all extra-judicial killings, including crossfire and custodial deaths and punish the culprits.

Speaking on a call attention notice, Inu also a component of AL-led ruling alliance, said some activities of Rapid Rab and Police made people worried and damaged the government's image.

He said Rab and police cannot give any evidence against their involvement in extra-judicial killings.

Inu said the AL-led grand alliance in its electoral pledge promised to bring an end to extra-judicial killings.

He drew attention of the home minister to root out extra-judicial killings.

Meanwhile, AL lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta on a point of order demanded that the education minister issue a statement in parliament on leakage of question paper on recruitment of teachers.

He praised the law enforcement agencies' role to arrest the culprits involved with the question paper leakage.

## One crushed under wheels of train

A CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

A youth was crushed under the wheels of a train at Mulibari rail crossing here yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Shahidul Islam, 20.

Shahidul was crushed under the wheels of the Dhaka-bound

Silk City Express coming from Rajshahi at about 10:00am while he was crossing the rail line. He died on the spot, witnesses said.

On information, railway police recovered the body and sent it to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed.

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