

ALARMING DECLINE IN FARMLAND

'High yielding, GM crops best answer'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculturists and economists yesterday suggested that Bangladesh makes the best use of recent scientific developments to boost productivity in mind the adverse ecological impacts of technology.

Expressing concern over the ever-increasing population and alarming decline rate of farmland, high yielding and genetically modified (GM) crops seemed to hold the best answer, they said.

Small-scale farmers are crucial to our agriculture but some multinational lending or donor agencies undertake commercial projects without considering environmental issues or interests of the farmers.

The remarks were made at a book-launching ceremony organised by Agricultural Reporters' Forum (ARF) in association with Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihood (CSRL) at the National Press Club.

Journalist Altab Hossain is the author of the book 'Agricultural Economics and Globalisation'.

CSRL Coordinator Ziaul Haque Mukta

said there are several thousand reports about farmers buying hybrid seeds of rice and potato, but not getting the promised yield.

"If that is the case, how can we rely on hybrid seeds or GM food?" he asked.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury of Equity BD said, "We don't want to commercialise agriculture as food should be a basic right, not a commercial commodity."

Chowdhury said a multinational lending agency for the sake of its project, destroyed a large number of local trees and planted foreign varieties which proved harmful to the ecology.

Responding to such remarks, Food Minister Dr Abdur Razzaque said, "We must be aware of our national interests, but that does not mean that we shall not take advantage of the global scientific advancements."

He said around most of the cotton and soybean oil produced in India is GM.

However, Bangladesh is yet to produce GM edible oil or cotton, because of unavailability of the required technology, said Razzaque, an agronomist by profession.

"We used to import hybrid rice seeds from China but now we are producing them here. Maybe in the next five to seven years, we won't need to import rice seeds anymore," Razzaque said.

Executive Director of Brac, Dr Mahabub Hossain said Bangladesh has still a lot of strengths that must be utilized to the fullest.

He referred to two varieties of submergence-tolerant rice which if planted along with other high yielding ones during Aman season, could raise yield significantly, he noted.

Speakers lauded Altab Hossain's efforts on writing the book, saying it will surely contribute in creating awareness among policymakers on the pros and cons of embracing technology and its influence on the country's agriculture.

Dr CS Karim, former agriculture adviser to caretaker government, Editor of Samakal Golam Sarwar, Head of Center for Policy Dialogue Research Dr Uttam Deb, Additional secretary of the agriculture ministry Anwar Faruque, President of ARF Ashraf Ali and Vice President of ARF Rezaul Karim Siddiqui also spoke.

Manjur pledges action against previous irregularities in CCC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Newly-elected Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) M Manjur Alam said action would be taken against previous irregularities in the CCC.

The mayor was briefing the newsmen after taking his office yesterday.

Water-logging his first priority to address the reiterating crisis, Manjur declared to form a separate committee at the first general meeting of his tenure dedicated to solve the problem effectively. The meeting is scheduled for July 26.

Replying to journalists' queries Manjur said he would adopt short, mid and long-term programmes for the development of the port city according to his electoral pledge.

He said none of the ongoing develop-

ment projects would be hampered.

Asked about the case filed by former Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury for concealing information in the affidavit while submitting the nomination papers, Manjur said he would face it through legal procedure.

The new mayor expressed optimism to work unopposedly with cooperation from all, irrespective of party affiliation, for smooth improvement of the port city.

Expressing his gratitude to all the voters who franchised in June 17 CCC polls, Manjur sought cooperation from the city dwellers to discharge his duty smoothly.

Acting Mayor Zahirul Alam Dobhash handed over the charge to Manjur at a ceremony held at the CCC conference room around 11:00am.

Newly elected 41 ward councillors, 14 female councillors from reserved seats and CCC senior officials including Chief Executive Officer Manjur-e-Elahi were present at the ceremony.

Prior to taking charge, Manjur offered feteiha at his parent's graveyard and at the shrine of Hazrat Shah Amanat.

After reaching the CCC premises around 10.00am, Manjur joined a Milad Mehfil held at the CCC conference room.

BNP-backed candidate of Chattagram Unnayan Andolan Manjur Alam won the CCC mayoral race on June 17 defeating ruling Awami League-supported Nagorik Committee candidate ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury.

Prime Minister Sheikh Haisna administered the oath to Manjur as the CCC mayor on Sunday.

Korea to help in agri engineering

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Korea will provide technical assistance and share knowledge in the field of agriculture especially on Agricultural Engineering and Biotechnology.

A five-member delegation from Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) said this when they called on vice chancellor and high officials of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU) yesterday, says a press release.

In the meeting, they discussed tripartite collaboration in the field of research programme, which will be jointly conducted by BSMRAU, BRR and KOICA.

The KOICA's delegation includes CHOI, Moon-Jung, director Rural Development team, KOICA; Prof Who AS Kang, department of Bio-system Engineering, Kangwon National University; and Hwang Kee Min, rural development specialist Korea Agricultural and Rural Development Institute.

On the other, Prof Dr Md Zinnatul Alam, dean of Animal Science and Prof Dr KH Saifuddin, dean of Faculty of Agriculture were among the team of the BSMRAU.

SC asks cops not to torture Jamaat trio

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday upheld a High Court (HC) order that asked the police not to torture Jamaat-Islami Chief Motiur Rahman Nizami, its Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid and Nayebe-Ameer Delwar Hossain Sayedee in any manner during remand in a sedition case.

Chamber Judge of the SC's Appellate Division Justice SK Sinha yesterday did not pass any order on the government's petition seeking stay on the HC order.

Barrister Abdur Razzaq, principal counsel for the Jamaat leaders, told The Daily Star that the chamber bench of the Appellate Division did not pass any order on the government's petition against the HC order, and it means that the HC decision has been upheld.

Following a writ petition, the HC on July 15 in an order asked police not to torture the three top Jamaat leaders after taking them on remand in the sedition case filed with Uttara Police Station in March this year.

The HC also ordered the police authorities to allow counsels of the remanded Jamaat leaders to meet them

for legal consultations, to take steps for their medical check-ups and supply pillows to them for sleeping.

The government recently filed a petition with the SC for staying the HC order.

A Dhaka court on June 30 placed the Jamaat trio on remand for interrogation in this case.

Additional Attorney General MK Rahman, however, said there is no bar for the police to taking the Jamaat leaders on remand in the sedition case following the chamber judge's order.

Time for depositing Hajj money extended

UNB, Dhaka

The government has extended the deadline for depositing money for performing holly Hajj under both government and private management by August 2, said a government handout yesterday.

The deadline for depositing Hajj money (moallem fee, air ticket, house rent and other costs) was extended for facilitating pilgrims.

Saarc UGC meet ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The sixth meeting of the heads of University Grants Commission (UGC) or equivalent bodies of the Saarc member countries ended on Monday endorsing the resolution of fast finalisation of mutual recognition of academic and professional degrees.

The meeting also adopted the resolution of developing common regional educational standards, says an official of UGC of Bangladesh.

These resolutions were taken at the sixteenth Saarc Summit held in Thimphu says a press release.

The meet recommended publishing a Saarc regional handbook on chartered universities or degree awarding institutions in the member states, the press release added.

It was also noted to introduce and develop quality assurance and accreditation mechanism by the member states.

The member states were requested to make proper utilisation of SAARC Chair Scholarships.

It was also decided in the meet that the seventh meeting of the heads of University Grants Commission (UGC) or equivalent bodies of the Saarc member countries would be held in Bhutan next year.

WEATHER

Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely to occur at many places over Barisal and Chittagong divisions and at a few places over

Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dhaka, Khulna and Sylhet divisions in next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy to heavy falls are also likely at places, Met Office said.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:47pm today and rises at 5:23am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 34.3 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and lowest 25.0 degrees Celsius at Dinajpur, Rangamati and Sandwip.

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	31.5	28.4	75	74
Chittagong	31.6	26.5	76	76
Rajshahi	34.3	27.2	86	77
Khulna	32.5	28.2	77	80
Barisal	30.0	27.6	87	92
Sylhet	30.2	25.2	93	96
Cox's Bazar	33.0	25.8	74	82

Ecneec okays 3 projects worth Tk 226 crore

UNB, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved three development projects involving Tk 226 crore, including a project to develop the existing sewerage system in the city.

The Ecneec approved the projects at its 3rd meeting of the current fiscal year at the NECN conference room with Ecneec Chairperson and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

"The entire cost of the projects will be borne by the government exchequer," said Planning Minister AK Khandaker while briefing reporters after the meeting. Planning Division Secretary Habibullah Majumder was present on the occasion.

The planning minister said the ADP implementation progress for the 2009-10 fiscal was 91 percent compared to 86 percent in the 2008-09 fiscal.

The cost of the Interim Emergency Sewerage Construction Line and Rehabilitation Project-2nd Phase' under the Local

Government Division has been estimated at Tk 84 crore.

Under the project, some 21.30km of new sewerage lines would be installed, one pump station will be constructed and six more sewerage pumps will be set up for the development of existing sewerage system in the city. The existing sewerage network of the Dhaka Wasa is able to serve only 20 percent of the city properly.

Besides, 37.25km of sewerage pipelines would also be restored.

The project will be completed by 2012 with the main objective of resolving the problems in areas outside of the sewerage network.

The first phase of the project was completed successfully at a cost of Tk 15.5 crore in 2009.

Signboard-Morelganj-Rayenda-Sharonkhola-Bagi road into a regional highway under the Communications Ministry at a cost of Tk 90 crore and Pagla-Jagannathpur-Raniganj-Auskandi road construction Project, also under the communications ministry involving Tk 52 crore.



Dr Francis Gurry, Director General of World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), one of the 16 specialised agencies of the United Nations, pays a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday at the Prime Minister's Office in the city yesterday morning.

HC stays govt decision on chick price fixing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) has stayed for three months a government decision, which fixed the maximum price for a one-day-old broiler chick at Tk 30 and a layer chick at Tk 32 and asked the poultry breeders to mention the prices on sale packets.

An HC bench also issued a rule upon the government to explain within four weeks why its decision on the price fixing should not be declared illegal.

The bench of Justice Mamonnoo Rahman and Justice Syeda Afsar Jahan on Monday issued the order following a writ petition filed by Breeders' Association of Bangladesh (BAB) challenging legitimacy of the government decision.

"The chicks will be sold at the market price as the HC stays the government decision," a lawyer concerned told The Daily Star yesterday.

On July 11, the Department of Livestock (DLS) issued a directive asking poultry breeders to take effective steps for citing retail price of chicks as was fixed by the government.

BAB filed the petition with the HC on July 18 stating that DLS had no jurisdiction to take decision on fixing the price.

Dr M Zahir and Advocate M Shafiqur Rahman appeared for the petitioner.

Two shot in city over previous enmity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons received bullet injury as a sequel to previous enmity at city's Elephant Road yesterday morning.

The bullet-hit are Oliur Islam Dhali, 40 and Zillur Rahman, 38. Both are businessmen at Elephant Road area.

Zillur shot Oliur at a tea stall in front of Bata Signal at around 9:30am with his licensed pistol. When people came to help the victim, Zillur accidentally fired at his waist, which injured him, said Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of New Market Police Station.

Local people rushed them to Dhaka Medical Hospital.

A case was filed with New Market Police Station in this connection.

Obituary

METRO DESK

Al-Hajj Abul Hasan, son of Munshi Abdus Sobhan and adviser to the central committee of the Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, passed away due to kidney and blood pressure related complications at his Rayer Bazar residence in the city on July 15, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, six sons and four daughters to mourn his death.

Hasan, founder of the Rayer Bazar Banik Samity, was laid to rest at the Azimpur graveyard on July 16 after Namaz-e-Janaza at the Rayer Bazar mosque.

Open liaison office in Dhaka PM requests WIPO director general

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday requested the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) to open its liaison office in Dhaka for better coordination between Bangladesh and the organisation in various sectors.

She made the request when Dr Francis Gurry, Director General of WIPO, one of the 16 specialised agencies of the United Nations, paid a courtesy call on her at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the morning.

During the meeting the Prime Minister reiterated her call to the WIPO for another 15 years' waiver of Bangladesh and other LDC countries in pharmaceuticals sector from intellectual property (IP) rights regime, said Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad.

Stressing the need for establishing an integrated National IP office in Bangladesh to coordinate all IP related activities in the country, Hasina said her government during its last tenure had integrated patent and trademarks offices.

"Our government is now working on the establishment of an integrated National IP office merging the functions of the Patent and Trademarks Office and the functions of the Copyright Office," she said, seeking WIPO's support in this regard.

On waiver issue, she said pharmaceuticals industry of Bangladesh has achieved remarkable growth under the intellectual property waiver.

Bangladesh now exports its high quality and competitively priced pharmaceutical products to over 70 countries, including many LDCs, she said.

She said the growth of Bangladesh's pharmaceutical industry has thus benefited all the LDCs in guaranteeing primary healthcare needs of their peoples.

Hasina stressed that the world should now begin to allow extension of this waiver for the pharmaceutical industry in LDCs at least for another 15 years beyond 2015.

Hasina told the WIPO DG that Bangladesh is now in the process of finalising its IP policy, which will also identify the key elements of a strategy that needs to be put in place for achieving the development goals.

In response, Dr Gurry said the WIPO would continue to assist Bangladesh in attaining its development targets in related fields.

He highly praised Hasina's leadership in all development activities and expressed strong hope that Bangladesh and its people will be able to successfully implement the development programmes.

Call to take integrated dev plan for Aila-hit areas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of two social organisations at a press conference yesterday urged the prime minister to take initiatives for an integrated development programme for the Aila-hit people in southwestern region.

Nagorik Sanghati and Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihood (CSRL), which are campaigning to press the government to relieve the sufferings of the Aila-hit people, made the demand ahead of the premier's scheduled visit to the region on July 23.

They also urged the opposition leader to visit the area to see for herself the hardship of affected people and put pressure on the government to rehabilitate them.

Cyclone Aila hit the country's coastal areas on May 25, 2009 claiming 190 lives and damaging 1,742.53 kilometre stretch of embankments.

Reading out a statement at the press conference held at Dhaka Reporters Unity, Nagorik Sanghati General Secretary Sharifuzzaman Sharif said the ordeals of the people have not been over even after 14 months of the cyclone.

They are still leading an inhumane life on the roads under open sky without shelter, food and work.

He requested the prime minister to declare the region affected and create work opportunity for the people of the region.

He also demanded steps against some shrimp farmers who are still supplying water through the embankments violating High Court order ultimately damaging the embankments.

ASML Atiqur Rahman, chairman of Nagorik sanghati and Mohammad Umar Faruque were among those who attended the press conference.

Muggers kill one, snatch Tk 5 lakh

A CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

A businessman was killed and a shop employee injured after a group of muggers stabbed them and snatched Tk five lakh away on Dhaka-Barisal highway at Rajoir upazila in the district yesterday.

Radhiye Shyam Karmakar, 48, a businessman of the upazila's Tekerhat area, died on way to Faridpur Medical College Hospital from Rajoir Upazila Health Complex.

Moshiur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Rajoir Police Station, said the body of the deceased was sent to his house at Tekerhat.

Injured Adhir Saha, the shop employee, was under treatment at the health complex.

Adhir said they were returning to their shop at Tekerhat on a motorcycle after collecting arrears from their customers at about 1:00pm. When they reached near Kamoldi Bridge, a private car, coming from opposite direction, struck their motorcycle.

As they fell down, four to five muggers came out from the car and started beating them.

At one stage, they snatched Tk five lakh away after stabbing Radhiye Shyam and fled away, the victim said.

DHAKA TODAY

Discussion
Colonel Taher Sangsad will hold a discussion marking the 34th Colonel Taher Day. Venue: TSC auditorium, Dh. Time: 5:00pm.

Exhibition
Conference and Exhibition Management services Ltd (Cems) USA in association with Cems Bangladesh will organise an exhibition focused on the export industry. Venue: Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Time: 12:30pm.

Fieries week
The National Fisheries Week will be inaugurated. Venue: Osmani Smriti auditorium, Time: 10:00am.

Roundtable
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) will hold a roundtable on "The Millennium Development Goals and Bangladesh: Present Status and an Outlook for the Future". Venue: Biiss auditorium, 1/46, Old Elephant Road, Time: 11:00am.

Seminar
SME Foundation and MIDAS will organise a seminar on "Women Entrepreneurs in SMEs: Bangladesh Perspective". Venue: Cirdap auditorium, Time: 5:00pm.

Meet the press
Prince Marketing Ltd will launch "BIC shavers" at meet the press. Venue: Meghna Lounge, Sonargaon Hotel, Time: 11:30am.

Seminar
The Police Resource Programme of BIDS will organise a seminar on "India, Bangladesh and the North-east: Transit and Transhipment-Strategic Considerations". Venue: Cirdap auditorium, Time: 11:00am.

Certificate presentation
Paradise Cables will organise the "British Approvals Services for Cables Certificate Presentation Ceremony". Venue: Ball room, Sonargaon Hotel, Time: 7:30pm.

Meeting
Dhaka Metropolitan BNP will hold a meeting. Venue: Bhasani auditorium, Time: 6:00pm.

Seminar
Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) will organise a seminar on "Traffic congestion in Dhaka city and its impact on business: Some remedial measures". Venue: MCCI building, Time: 10:30am.

Rathayatra
Iskcon will organise a rathayatra. Venue: Dhakeswari National Temple, Time: 4:01pm.

Meeting
Ministry of Environment and Forest will hold a view exchange meeting on the industrial pollution in Gazipur with the industry owners. Venue: Bon Bhaban, Time: 4:00pm.

Roundtable
Zia Brigade Central Committee will hold a roundtable on contribution to mass media by the late president Ziaur Rahman. Venue: VIP lounge, National Press Club, Time: 4:00pm.