

Govt pins hope

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that she has high hopes on NERICA, a high-yield rice variety, imported from Uganda for utilising the Aus season's potentials for a bumper harvest.

"We will go for adaptive trials and produce 100 tonnes of seed out of the five tonnes, and popularise it among the growers to have significant gains in Aus output," said Matia.

"I will not be surprised if we manage to reap up to four million tonnes of rice in the Aus season by sowing NERICA," she said.

If the minister is right, Bangladesh can increase rice production by at least 2.5 million tonnes annually, which is more than double this year's import target.

The good news comes at a time when people are struggling to cope with soaring rice prices in Bangladesh as well as many other nations in Asia. Rice prices that reached a record high during the global financial meltdown have never stabilised thereafter and popular coarse varieties in Bangladesh saw 30 to 35 percent rise in their prices in the last one year.

Matia said only half a kilogram of NERICA seed was first brought to Bangladesh in 2009 and trials were done to see how it works in Bangladesh conditions.

Earth dodges geomagnetic storm

AFP, Washington

A wave of charged plasma particles from a huge solar eruption has glanced off the Earth's northern pole, lighting up auroras and disrupting some radio communications, a NASA scientist said.

Officials at Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation said they have started implementing the NERICA Seed Enhancement Project to distribute the seed among farmers.

Agricultural Research and Development Centre of Brac, a non-governmental organisation, has been assessing the performance of short-duration rice varieties such as NERICA and a few Vietnamese varieties at its Gazipur farm.

Matia said vertical growth in crop production remains within a limit unless new technology and scientific methods are applied to sustain the growth.

"We are reaping more than three crops a year from our farmland putting strain on soil fertility. Moreover, repeated use of chemical

Laptop for schools

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However, the initiative received mixed reactions from academicians.

The aims of the project are to teach the students through information and communication technology (ICT), making classroom teaching more attractive and bridging the digital divide between rural and urban students.

"The project would soon be placed before the Executive Committee of National Economic Council's meeting for approval," said an official of the planning wing under the Ministry of Education (MoE) seeking anonymity.

He said the government-funded project is a step to materialise the plan to build Digital Bangladesh.

Through a survey, the government figured out 20,500 educational institutions for the project those have electricity connection, he stated.

There are over 26,500 registered schools, colleges and madrasas in the country.

Under this project, the teacher on computer subjects will be trained about the operation of the multi-media projectors, said ministry sources, adding that digital contents or subject-based compact discs will also be provided.

Another MoE official said it would be a nice introduction of technology to the students.

"The students will feel the interest when they would see the visual presentation

Politics

FROM PAGE 1

fertilisers is making the soil acidic."

She pointed out that there is a scope for "lateral expansion" of Aus production.

"We must tap the potentials of Aus season by helping farmers grow more short-duration rice between the Boro and Aman seasons."

The minister said it is a major challenge to feed a growing population while the country's farmland continues to shrink. She hoped the census next month after a decade will give a clear picture of the size of the population.

In search of a high-yield rice variety suitable for the Sub-Saharan region, Africa Rice Centre, previously known as the West Africa Rice Development Association, developed NERICA in 1996 by crossing some of the best rice varieties in Africa and Asia. In recognition of this achievement, Dr Monty Jones, the man behind the NERICA breeding, was awarded the World Food Prize in 2004.

Agriculture officials said the introduction of NERICA has increased rice production in Uganda and helped the landlocked East African country bring down its rice import.

"Even I was not invited though I don't know whether I am eligible or not to be invited," said Delwar, a former chief whip, said during a press briefing at the Naya Palta office of BNP.

Quader, a former state minister for Youth and Sports admitted that there might have been a few small errors in organising such massive event but as a whole it was highly praised by the world community. "Such massive event was not organised in the history of world cricket."

"It's the achievement of the 16 crore people of the country. Like Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia is also part of the pride. It has nothing to do with Awami League-BNP division," said the AL leader, adding so far he knows the BNP leader [Delwar] was invited to the event.

Delwar, however, said the programme was otherwise good and thanked the International Cricket Council (ICC) for giving Bangladesh a chance to arrange such a big event that made the countrymen proud.

Both the leaders wished the Bangladesh national cricket team a big success and welcomed the players and officials of all the participating nations.

On behalf of BNPP, Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Faroque said Khaleda Zia was not sent any ticket with the invitation. Even where she will sit and what will be the protocol had been mentioned, he claimed.

He told AFP the official forecast is "for generally quiet conditions today, perhaps some minor storming tomorrow, but nothing extraordinary."

The event began Tuesday at 0156 GMT with a spectacular solar eruption in a sunspot the size of Jupiter that produced a Class X flash -- the most powerful of all solar events.

2 'outlaws'

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Shailakupa upazila around 3:45am on information that a group of outlaws gathered there, said Rezaul Karim, superintendent of Jhenaidah Police.

Sensing danger, the gang opened fire on the law enforcement team compelling them to retaliate. The 'gunfight' continued for at least 20 minutes before the terrorists retreated, added the SP.

Police found the two bullet hit and rushed them to Shailakupa Health Complex where doctors declared them dead.

A member each from Rab and police suffered minor injuries during the clash.

Law enforcers recovered a 9mm pistol, a shotgun, a rifle, a shutter gun, nine bullets, three cleavers, four bottles of phenesedyl, ten pairs of slippers and a cash amount of Tk 1,325 from the spot.

The deceased are accused in several cases, including murder, noted police.

Rabals gun down Pabna outlaw

An outlaw of banned Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCB- Lal Pataka) was allegedly gunned down by activists of another faction of the outfit in Chandai of Atghoria upazila early yesterday over suspected party rivalry, reports our Pabna correspondent.

The deceased is Md Hazrat Ali, 35, of the same village. He is an accused in seven cases, including murder, police said.

What would happen if a bulb of the multimedia projector that costs Tk 25,000 becomes dysfunctional, questioned Prof Iqbal. "Who would replace it," he added.

The schools in the country are having numerous problems and it would be better if the government spends the money to solve those problems, he said.

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Govt blamed

FROM PAGE 1

said not the party but the country and its culture were highlighted throughout the programme.

Expressing resentment, BNP Parliamentary Party said Khaleda Zia, the leader of the opposition in the House, "was not invited to the programme with dissemblance of courtesy."

BNP secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain said, "Watching the entire inauguration ceremony, it seemed it was a campaign of boat [election symbol of AL] and Bangabandhu. The country's history and culture were absolutely ignored."

Talking to The Daily Star AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader said the boat was portrayed as the symbol of the Liberation War as well as the country's heritage. And the whole world knows Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the father of the nation.

Delwar said despite adequate preparation, mismanagement and ticket manipulation overshadowed the programme. He alleged the government could not be generous even in inviting guests.

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Cricket rules

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tries are next-door neighbours.

A full house is expected and tickets have all been sold out. And without a doubt, millions of cricket fans across the world will be sitting in front of the TV to see how the match transpires.

Following a gala opening ceremony, the world will be looking forward to watching how Bangladesh transforms their grand opening success onto the pitch when the highly anticipated battle gets underway from 2.30 pm at the newly decorated "Home of Cricket" in Mirpur.

Since the fixture was set, this battle took centre stage. Not only the media, but the cricket fans as well as the pundits have been showcasing huge interest in the game. Understandably there have been justifiable reasons behind the fervour and it is mainly because of the valiant effort of the Tigers at the Queen's Park Oval, Port of Spain four years back, when a five-wicket defeat wrote the fate of the formidable Indian team in the 2007 tournament.

Which is why the main question doing the rounds was whether Shakib Al Hasan's men can repeat the act against Mahendra Singh Dhoni's troops?

Indian skipper Dhoni played down what happened four years back while he was talking in the pre-match press briefing at Mirpur yesterday, but the smart money is on the fact that the Indian team is still haunted by the nightmarish defeat.

Police recovered the body around 10:00am and sent it to Pabna General Hospital morgue for an autopsy. There were injury marks on his body, added the OC.

"We haven't thought about it but definitely we would not like to see a repeat of it [the loss to Bangladesh]," said the India skipper.

state. Condemnations of the police firing also came from the Alia Madrasah, Islamic Brotherhood, Dhaka Traders Association and other organisations. Interestingly, a fairly good number of organisations in West Pakistan stepped into the scene with their criticism of the government action of February 21.

On February 23, 1952, the Karachi-based newspaper Dawn, in a long editorial on the tragedy of February 21, had this to say in substance:

"All Pakistan will grieve and our enemies will derive comfort and cheer from the tragic happenings at Dacca. First and foremost we offer homage to those who have paid the forfeit of their lives in the conflict between their convictions on the one hand, and the principle that law and order shall be maintained, on the other hand....

But every dark cloud has a silver lining and out of these grievous happenings has emerged the final knowledge of how deeply our people and our kith and kin in East Pakistan feel on the language issue. . . We can assure the people of East Pakistan that the people of West Pakistan will not grudge them the equality with Urdu which Bengali has at last won."

The authorities went to every extent possible to paint the students in dark colours. It even reported that Hasan Ali, the minister for communications, had been injured as a result of student violence.

The strike called in the province went beyond February 22 and well into February 23. Shops stayed closed and no vehicles were seen on the streets of Dhaka. Railway workers stayed away from work, which meant that trains did not leave Dhaka or enter it. Clashes between citizens and the police were reported from various parts of the city. Despite a heavy presence of police and soldiers on the streets, thousands of Bangalis poured out to condemn the government over the killings of February 21.

Women students of Dhaka University, besides their male fellow students, came together to condemn what they called the barbaric act of the government. On the whole, the students demanded the resignation of the chief minister.

According to the girl, Alamgir and Shiblee tied up her uncle and raped her that night. They also took footage of the rape on a cellphone and threatened the girl and her uncle of releasing the tape if they disclosed the matter to police or anyone.

The accused also took away Tk 70,000 and two mobile phone sets from them, she claimed.

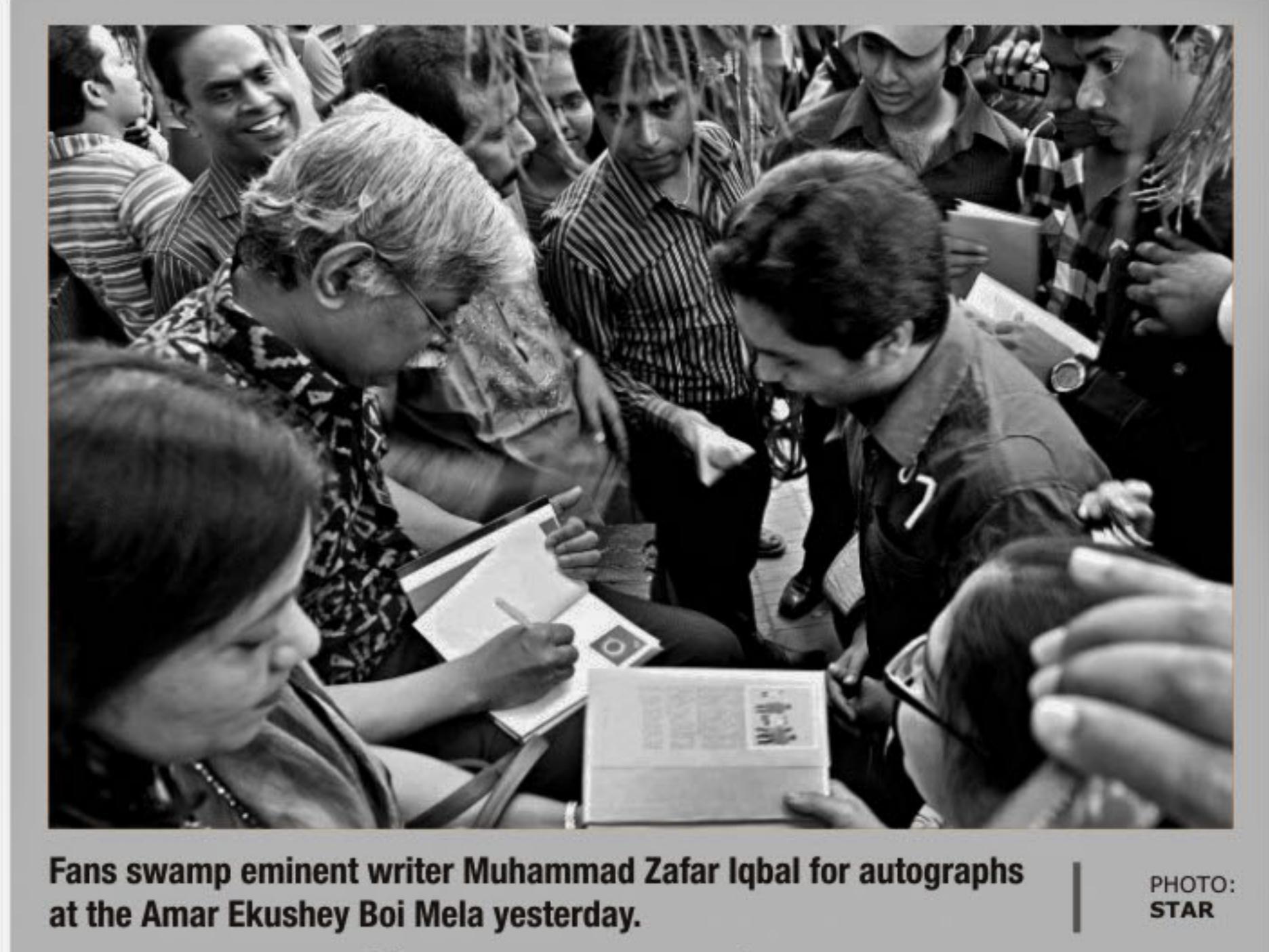
The victim filed a case with Bandarban Sadar Police Station on Thursday.

Chandgaon police are probing the case, said Sub-inspector Monir Uddin of the police station.

A process is underway for medical examination of the victim, added the SI.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

MD ALAMGIR



Fans swamp eminent writer Muhammad Zafar Iqbal for autographs at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Popular writers draw attention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof AAMAS Arefin Siddique also visited the fair. Novelist Imdadul Haque Milon was at the stall of Ananya publication and busy giving autographs.

"He [Imdadul Haque Milon] is one of my favourite writers and I am too excited as I got a book of him with his autograph," said Ayesha Khan.

In the evening, the fair premises were so full of people that it became difficult to get close to the stalls which brought out new novels and poetries.

The fair also received the highest number of new titles on the day as publishers and writers chose the weekend to bring out new books. As many as 164 new books on different topics hit the fair yesterday.

The vendors outside the fair premises also had busy hours in serving their customers.

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Garibullah alias Aslam, 24, Mohammad Monir, 25, Monir Hossain, 27, Mohammad Selim, 35, Shahid Jamal, 34, and Chandu, 30. The identities of the rest two could not be known immediately.

In the early hours of January 9, gold ornaments of around 200 tolas and Tk 4.5 lakh were stolen from Dhakeshwari Temple, while over 100 tolas of gold ornaments were looted from Sutrapur Kali Temple on December 22 last year.

DB Inspector Ashraf Hossain, who conducted the drives, told The Daily Star that five of the arrestees Garibullah, Md Monir, Monir Hossain, Selim and Jamal were each placed on five days' remand yesterday.

The briefing came after a meeting with the Bangladesh Merchant Bankers' Association and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to discuss merchant banks' role in the stockmarket.

Usually, merchant banks or loan providers opt for forced sales when the portfolio value of an investor, who trades on loan, comes down to the debt level, that is, the amount of money the banks lent him.

Last week, the minister told reporters that the government would formulate a set of guidelines to control such sales, also known as trigger sales.

It is believed that some merchant banks have been making forced sales when the market is plunging deeper and deeper.

Although such sale is legal, banks should not do it for the sake of the small investors and the market, Muhith said at the briefing at the SEC.

"Do they go for forced sale when the market goes up? Then why they will do so when the market goes down?"

The government is formulating a guideline to stop this, and the relevant law will be amended if necessary.

The minister admitted that some of the government's interventions in stabilising the market were futile. But, he said, the government is serious about bringing back stability.

He blamed some chartered accountants for market manipulation.

The minister asked the SEC to come up with a guideline for the merchant banks for raising their equity that will reduce their dependency on others for financing.