

# Govt pins hope

**FROM PAGE 1**  
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.

"We have imported five tonnes [of Nerica seed] recently. The most positive aspects of Nerica are that it is drought-tolerant and requires less water to grow. Besides, it has got no lodging or shattering problems and its grains have better protein values. It is a short-duration variety that grows in less than 100 days," explained the agriculture minister.

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

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.

## Earth dodges geomagnetic storm

AFP, Washington

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

But the Earth appears to have escaped a widespread geomagnetic storm, with the effects confined to the northern latitudes, possibly reaching down into Norway and Canada.

"There can be sporadic outages based on particular small-scale events," said Dean Persnell, project scientist at NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory at Goddard Space Flight Centre.

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.

## Politics

**FROM PAGE 1**  
said not the party but the country and its culture were highlighted throughout the programme.

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

BNP secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain said, "Watching the entire inaugural 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.

"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 Paltan 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, Khaleida 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 country-men 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 Abidin Faroque said Khaleida 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.

## 2 'outlaws'

**FROM PAGE 20**  
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 shot gun, a rifle, a shutter gun, nine bullets, three cleavers, four bottles of phensedyl, 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.

Rivals gun down Pabna outlaw

An outlaw of banned Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCB- Lal Patakia) 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.

Criminals caught him at Chandai Bazar on Thursday night and shot him to death around 3:00am yesterday, said Md Enamul Karim, Officer in-Charge of Atghoria Police Station, quoting the victim's family sources.

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.

# Govt blamed

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Amin placed before the assembly on February 22 was shockingly devoid of any expression of condolence for those killed on the preceding day. Neither was there any indication in it of any planned investigation of the incidents by the government. The resolution was passed by an acquiescent assembly, quite naturally, because it was dominated by members belonging to the ruling Muslim League.

Students at various educational institutions lowered the national flag to half mast in memory of those killed in police firing and held demonstrations at several places in Dhaka. For its part, the government, through press statements, stayed busy trying to demonise the students. As a press note reported:

"On the Nawabpur Road another unruly crowd overpowered the police officers in charge of the forces... Since it would not disperse, firing was resorted to in order to disperse it. A lathi charge was also made in the university area."

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 Bangladeshis 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.

As February 23 drew to a close, the Tamaddun Majlis issued a statement severely criticizing the action of the government. It resolved to continue the struggle for Bangla as the language of the

state. Condemnations of the police firing also came from the Alia Madrasah, Islamic Brotherhood, Dhaka Traders Association and other organizations. Interestingly, a fairly good number of organizations 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 Dhacca. 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.'

## Indigenous

**FROM PAGE 20**  
Md Alamgir, owner of a hotel in Bahaddarhat, and its manager Md Shiblee.

Police said the 14-year-old victim came from Bandaran on Wednesday to visit Chittagong with her uncle. They checked in the hotel at night.

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 Bandaran Sadar Police Station on Thursday.

Being referred, 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.

# Cricket rules

**FROM PAGE 1**  
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.

"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.



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

PHOTO: STAR

# Popular writers draw attention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amar Ekushey Boi Mela drew a huge crowd yesterday in the presence of popular writers and cultural personalities.

The swarm of people seemed unusual compared to other days as the queues of visitors went up to Shahbagh intersection from the entrances of the book fair.

Popular writers were seen busy giving autographs and talking about their recent publications in the fair. The young visitors were even crowding stalls to take snaps with their favourite writers.

Prominent writer Muhammad Zafar Iqbal was seen surrounded by a number of fans at Nazrul Mancha who were taking autographs on his new books.

Eminent writer Syed Manzoorul Islam, cultural activists Mamun-or-Rashid, Nasir Uddin Yusuf, Ramendu Majumder,

Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof AAMS 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.

## 8 held

**FROM PAGE 20**  
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 Dhakeswari 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.

According to the DB inspector the five placed on remand were directly involved in the thefts while the other three in dealing and selling the gold ornaments.

He said, "Garibullah admitted that led by him the gang stole from Dhakeswari and Kali temples and other temples in and around the capital. However, most of the looted ornaments were sold in the black market."

On information that a gang of thieves who were sent to Narayanganj jail allegedly for looting a temple in Munshiganj continued robbing temples after obtaining bail, DB officials headed for Narayanganj and found two of the gang members Garibullah and Md Monir still in jail. The officials brought the two to the DB headquarters for interrogation, said a DMP press release.

Based on the information gleaned from the two, DB police recovered some gold ornaments and other stolen items from Munshiganj and Narayanganj and arrested Monir Hossain at Raipur of Laxmipur district, said the press release.

DB officials also recovered 11 broken locks of Dhakeswari Temple from the roof of a nearby workshop upon Garibullah's information.

Replying to a query, the DB inspector said, "The gang targeted temples as those are less secured and offer minimum risk."

Nirnal Chatterjee, joint secretary of Mahanagar Sarbojanin Puja Committee, said they have heard about the arrest and the recovery.

He demanded fair investigation into the mysterious incidents of burglary at 23 temples across the country in the last two months.

# No forced share

**FROM PAGE 1**  
losses. In this situation, if the merchant banks go for forced sales, investors will have to incur even greater losses, and this is unfair," said AMA Muhith at a press briefing in the capital 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 went 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.

Market experts have been emphasising the need for self-financing against the backdrop of the recent debacle in the stockmarkets.

The merchant banks were repeatedly requested

to go for buying but they did not do so citing liquidity shortage due to some existing rules.

Muhith also spoke of forming Financial Reporting Council to observe the companies' portfolio and investigate the manipulation. "It has been discussed twice in the cabinet meeting."

On engaging five state-owned enterprises in share buying, he said the government had done so to stop further fall in share prices.

## Teesta river

**FROM PAGE 20**  
Krishna on Thursday during talks with AH Mahmood Ali, who is heading a Bangladesh delegation in the ministerial meeting on "Harnessing the positive contribution of South-South cooperation for the development of Least Developed Countries" in New Delhi.

Mahmood, also chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sought reestablishment of rail connectivity between the two neighbours at Chilahati-Haldibari and Kulaura-Mahishashon.

They discussed Bangladesh's connectivity with Nepal and Bhutan through India as well as the use of Chittagong port as a regional hub of connectivity.

Mahmood stressed the need for early operationalisation of Rohanpur-Singhabad rail link and dual gauge conversion of Parbatipur-Birol rail section.

He said the passenger coach factory in Saidpur could be modernised with India's support under the \$1 billion credit line extended by India during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in January last year.

They also discussed bilateral issues including barrier-free trade, killings of civilians on the border and unfettered access to Tin Bigha enclave.

Tariq Ahmad Karim, Bangladesh high commissioner to India and AK Abdul Momen, Bangladesh permanent representative to the UN in New York, accompanied Mahmood to the meeting.

# Laptop for schools

**FROM PAGE 20**  
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 multimedia 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

on let's say how water is produced through a chemical reaction between oxygen and hydrogen," he explained.

The classroom learning would be more attractive to them, he added.

Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, co-chairman of National Education Policy Formulation Committee, termed the initiative a good one as it goes accordingly with the National Education Policy, 2010 as well as the government policy for Digital Bangladesh.

"The government has to take such initiative to control the digital divide between urban and rural areas," he said.

Ahmad, also a noted economist, suggested proper training of teachers.

However, Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal considers the project a 'waste of public money'.

The teachers, mostly in the rural areas, do not have much technological background to operate the electronic equipment, said Prof Iqbal, an eminent writer and professor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology.

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.