

## Cost-cutting

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however, mentioned that a massive programme involving huge funding was required for this.

Guti urea (the other type is prilled urea) technology was introduced in the country in the 1980s and promoted by the US-based International Fertiliser Development Centre (IFDC) in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

It reduces use of urea fertiliser by about 40 percent and raises rice output by 20 percent. Despite this, it was used only in 5.95 lakh hectares out of 48 lakh hectares during the Boro season, which sees the highest yield among the three rice seasons, in 2010-11.

Guti urea is placed beneath the soil in a paddy field only once in a season. It ensures adequate nutrients for paddy plants and reduces weeds, said AKM Farhad, director of DAE's guti urea expansion project.

To use guti urea, farmers have to plant seedlings in lines. This ensures more sunlight. All these result in increased yields. The method can be used in around 80 percent of the land under rice cultivation, saving nearly 5 lakh tonnes of urea, he added.

Dr Sattar Mondol, Planning Commission member (agriculture, water resources and rural institutions), said this is a good technology, but many farmers are reluctant to go for it since it has to be applied manually. Efforts are on to develop a user-friendly applicator to resolve this problem.

But a DAE official said many farmers are using this method manually, and it is only a matter of practice.

AWD method reduces production cost by 15 percent on an average by saving 25 percent of irrigation cost and increasing yield by 10 percent, according to Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRRI) officials. It was experimented during 2006-09 and found to be an effective method.

For using it, a farmer needs perforated pipes to measure availability of water beneath the surface soil in a paddy field. Based on this, the field is irrigated, instead of flooding it throughout a season.

Dr MA Sattar, national consultant of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation's (BADC) minor irrigation wing, said farmers usually use 3,000-4,000 litres of water for producing one kg of rice although 1,500-2,000 litres are enough.

AWD can halve the use of water, he said, adding massive use of the technology is needed. Policymakers too want it, but effective steps are yet to be taken.

Agriculture economist Dr Mahabub Hossain said it is mainly the irrigation pump owners who will benefit by supplying less water under AWD method in the present irrigation arrangements. If pump owners charge farmers less for reduced water supply, farmers will be interested in AWD, he noted.

Buried pipe technology developed by the BADC in the 1980s is a fuel and water-saving method. It requires laying concrete pipes beneath the surface in paddy fields. The pipes are to have opening points where required.

Irrigation channels on the surface of paddy fields cause wastage of almost 50 percent water, but this could be saved when buried pipes are used. And it can save almost 10-15 percent of the total production cost, said Sattar.

This method is now mainly used by the Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) in Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions. Around 2.7 lakh hectares of land are irrigated through buried pipes in Boro season and 1.56 lakh hectares in Aman season, according to BMDA sources.

BADC also uses a small number of buried pipes, Sattar mentioned.

Dr Shaharuk Ahmed, an agriculture expert working at the IFDC in Dhaka, said a combined use of AWD and Gutu urea this Boro season was being promoted.

## Biman seeks 2

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During the last caretaker government rule, Biman signed a deal with the US aircraft maker on procuring 10 aircrafts by 2019 at a cost of \$1.3 billion aiming at making the airlines profitable by replacing its age-old fuel-guzzling fleet.

As part of the purchase deal, Boeing has already delivered two new Boeing 777-300ER aircrafts in October and November last year.

But for the purchase of the third and fourth planes Biman now needs a lender and to convince the lender it needs the government to be the guarantor.

"Once the finance ministry gives the guarantee, we will invite request for proposal and select the lowest

bidder for the loan," said the Biman MD.

Biman sources said the national flag carrier owed over Tk 500 crore to 36 local and foreign organisations because of various purchases and maintenance costs. A good number of staff, including pilots, had started demonstrations against the board of directors and chairman of the airlines alleging that Biman is incurring losses due to their inefficiency.

The Biman MD, however, said they are up to date on the payments of instalments against the loan it took for the purchase of the first two aircraft.

The national flag carrier has to pay a three-month instalment of Tk 120 crore for the aircraft.

## Arrests shoot up

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did not provide any details of the arrests.

In a statement, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday alleged that the government started mass arrests and detained hundreds of leaders and workers.

Khaleda had declared the programme--Cholo Cholo Dhaka Cholo (March towards Dhaka)--from her January 9 rally in Chittagong aiming to mount pressure on the government for the restoration of the caretaker government system.

Police yesterday morning in Cox's Bazar town and Teknaf detained 14 leaders and activists of Jamaat and pro-Jamaat student body Islami Chhatra Shibir accusing them of having a meeting intended for sabotage.

In Thakurgaon, police detained Shibir's district unit President Abdul Bashir at a dormitory in Hazipara area near the Government Women's College yesterday afternoon.

Law enforcers Thursday night arrested 40 people from different areas in Noakhali. Local BNP claimed that most of the arrestees were leaders and activists of the main opposition BNP and its associate bodies. Police, however, said the arrestees were fugitives.

In Khulna, police arrested 27 supporters of BNP, its associate organisations, Jamaat and Shibir early yesterday for what they claimed to prevent them from carrying out criminal activities centring the rally in Dhaka. The arrestees include Saidur Rahman, president of Shibir's Khulna city unit. Shibir leaders alleged that apart from the arrests, police ransacked 12 rooms of a private hostel on Nazirghat Road, which police denied.

Meanwhile, police

## KSA alerts

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The ministry has also advised diplomatic staff to be cautious and contact the heads of missions if they are threatened or notice anything suspicious like being followed by vehicles or persons.

The directive comes after the assassination of Saudi official Khalaf Bin Muhammad Salim Al-Ali in Dhaka last Tuesday.

Al-Ali, 45, was shot by unknown gunmen near his Gulshan house.

Meanwhile, a special aircraft carrying the body of Saudi official landed in Riyadh Thursday late night, reports Arab News yesterday.

"The body was received by a large number of Saudi officials mainly from the ministry of foreign affairs led by Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah," said Alauddin Al-Askary, deputy minister for protocol affairs at the ministry.

Al-Askary said a team of Saudi officials and investigating experts mainly from the ministries of interior and foreign affairs had arrived in Bangladesh to assist Bangladesh security officers and investigators in solving the murder.

Contacted, Hassan Mahmood Khandaker, inspector general of police of Bangladesh, said he has no information about the arrival of any Saudi investigation team in Dhaka.

Earlier, Bangladesh police handed over the body of Al-Ali to Mohammad Jashim Uddin Sarker, legal adviser to the Saudi embassy in Dhaka.

## Negligence caused Honduras jail fire: US

AFP, Tegucigalpa

The US ambassador in Honduras on Thursday blamed a fire last month at an overcrowded prison in the Central American country that killed 361 inmates on official negligence.

An investigation by agents from the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) earlier found that the February 14 fire was accidental and may have been caused by a cigarette.

The agents "also established that there was negligence and violation of the law on the part of authorities by allowing these prisons to remain overcrowded and in dangerous conditions," said US Ambassador Lisa Kubiske.

The ATF experts carried out the investigation one week after the blaze following a request from Honduran authorities.

## Gruesome

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where the sacks were found. The sacks could have been dumped anytime during the night."

The body was sent to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for autopsy.

On Monday, law enforcers recovered another beheaded body from Pyaridas Road of Sutrapur.

## Truck ploughs

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Eyewitnesses said the accident occurred around 4:30pm as a mini-truck coming from Feni Police Lines lost control on the Gopalganj-Tekherhaat road after one of its rear tyres blew out.

The runaway vehicle hit four rickshaw-vans before careering into Boultoili haat. Five people died on the spot and two on the way to hospital.

Sub-inspector Hasanuzzaman of Boultoili police camp said police rushed to the spot immediately and with the help of locals, rescued the injured from under the truck, which had by then ended up into a dry ditch.

They arrested Munna, 20, and Abdur Rahim, 32, at the scene, suspecting the two were the driver and helper.

## Suicides

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more than 20 percent up on the same month a year earlier.

Figures released by the Cabinet Office and the National Police Agency showed 30,651 people committed suicide in 2011, the 14th consecutive year the figure has exceeded 30,000.

"The whole of Japanese society was anxious after the disaster, and we suspect that to be a contributing factor," said an official of the Cabinet Office, adding suicides in May were particularly high among men in their 30s.

Last March's quake and tsunami, which claimed 19,000 lives and sparked the world's worst nuclear crisis in a generation, greatly hampered the Japanese economy and led to a surge in corporate bankruptcies.

Japan has one of the world's highest suicide rates, according to the OECD.

## 4 Bangladeshis

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ministry official.

Two other Saudi nationals also died in the road crash.

The accident happened in the evening as the driver of the pick-up tried to save a camel in a road, Sultana Laila Hasan, director general of the consular and welfare wing at the Bangladesh foreign ministry, told The Daily Star.

The bodies of the deceased have been kept at the mortuary of a local hospital, she said.

Bangladesh consulate in Jeddah has been trying to contact with the relatives of the deceased and their employers to arrange repatriation of bodies and their compensation, she added.

Meanwhile, Rezaul Karim, chairman of Chakoria upazila parishad, said they have received news of their death over cell phone from other Bangladeshis residing in Saudi Arabia.



A BNP worker hiding his face pastes a poster on a wall yesterday near the Jatiya Press Club in the capital urging people to join the BNP rally on Monday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Restrictions all around

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Ultra-conscious and over-enthusiastic, police have stepped up their vigil for the last couple of days, saying they are working to prevent subversive activities centring the March 12 rally of BNP.

The opposition called the rally to press home their demand for the caretaker government system.

Yesterday morning, Yeasin said, all the boarders gave names, professional details and mobile phone numbers to the house owner who needed those for submitting to Uttara Police Station.

"It was quite scary... the way the men searched and inquired us," he told The Daily Star. "Where will we go if we cannot be in peace even in our rooms?"

The situation in many city hotels is also not that different. Police are issuing threats to conduct sudden raids if their instructions are not followed. The hoteliers are not taking any new boarder; some even put on notice that reads, "No room available".

Police have orders to

arrest suspected strangers from messes, hotels, residential buildings in the capital. They have to strictly monitor all the entry points so that no strangers can enter the city.

Around 11:30am on Wednesday, two persons were harassed by police as they arrived at Jatrabari from Comilla.

One of the two, Mohammad Jasim, said law enforcers stopped them at Jatrabari intersection and without explaining the reason asked them to go back to Comilla.

Finally, the duo managed to reach their destination in Old Dhaka after one of their acquaintances talked to police over the phone.

Around 10:30pm on Thursday, a team of six police men came to Japan Garden City, said a resident of Building No 11 at the housing project, wishing not to be named.

They asked all the security guards to convey a message to the residents not to allow any "guests, especially males" till March 13. If any guest arrives, nearby Adabor Police

Station must know it.

A similar instruction was passed to city hotels, pushing many to closure till March 12.

Yesterday, a notice was found at the gate of Hotel Midway International in the city's Paltan. It reads, "Due to unavoidable reason, the hotel will remain closed till March 12."

Some hoteliers told The Daily Star that they were asked not to receive any guest until the opposition's March 12 programme passes off.

"Because the boarders might carry arms," said a hotel manager at Farmgate, preferring anonymity.

A Naya Paltan hotel staff said they were refusing guests, saying the intelligence officials might raid any time looking for opposition leaders and activists.

As a correspondent of The Daily Star approached a hotel in Rampura area to be a boarder, the manager said, "Please don't stay in a hotel, not even in a mess with friends. Try to stay at your relative's for the sake of your own security."

## Defy threat

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use megaphones for campaigning," she said.

Accusing the ruling party leaders including the prime minister of making indecent and hostile remarks about the upcoming rally, she alleged that they were spreading panic across the country in a planned way.

She said people's movement would reach a new height with the March 12 rally and the government would be forced to respect their demand. "We will have no way but to go for tougher movements if our peaceful programme is hindered."

"It would be an attack on democracy if the rally is obstructed. Don't put the democracy at stake. It will not bring good result," she said.

She asked her party men to maintain peace avoiding confrontation and provoca-

tion.

The BNP chairperson said an illegal administrative order has been issued to keep the residential hotels and restaurants closed on the day of the rally. She claimed that threats have been made that mobile courts would be used to punish people wishing to join the rally. She claimed that the administration has issued an order so that her party workers could not hire vehicles to come to Dhaka and join the rally.

Khaleda declared the rally from her January 9 rally in Chittagong aiming to mount pressure on the government to restore the caretaker government system.

As per party decision, the rally would be held in front of the BNP central office in Naya Paltan since police did not give permission to use

Manik Mia Avenue or Paltan Maidan.

Party leaders said they would try to avoid confrontation but would resist attempts to obstruct them from joining the rally.

Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, member of the standing committee, said they would give their best effort to avoid confrontation and hoped good sense would prevail on the government.

A senior leader of the party said, "Nothing will go unchallenged," adding that it would be a wrong thing to do if police or the ruling party men tried to hinder the rally on Monday.

BNP city unit leaders said leaders, workers and BNP supporters have started to gather in the capital to attend the rally and the work on setting up of a dais would start today.

## Iran war not inevitable

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The only time Iran backed away from its nuclear programme was in 2003, when they thought there would be a credible military threat against them, he said. "So in fact, the paradox is that if they actually believe that they're going to face the military option, you probably won't need the military option."

US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta reiterated the military threat on Iran by saying that Washington has been preparing the plans for an attack "for a long time".

But in an interview with the National Journal, he marked out the sharp difference with Israel over the timing of any assault by effectively saying that if an attack becomes necessary it would be better to wait and let the US carry it out. "If [Israel] decided to do it there's no question that it would have an impact, but I think it's also clear that if the United States did it we would have a hell of a bigger impact," he said.

At their White House meeting this week, Obama sought to persuade Netanyahu to

hold off on any attack against Iran with a promise that even if Tehran was able to move its nuclear programme to fortified underground facilities beyond the reach of Israel's military, the US would still be able to destroy them.

But that requires Netanyahu to place the decision on whether to attack Iran in Washington's hands, something he has said he will not do.

The Israeli premier declined to discuss a possible timeline for Israeli military action but said the Iranians are getting "very, very close".

He said increasingly stringent sanctions are taking their toll on Iran, but not where it matters. "It's hurt their economy. But it has not stopped their [nuclear] programme by one wit."

While Obama has said the US assessment is that Iran has not yet made the decision to develop a nuclear bomb, Netanyahu repeated his assertion that he has no doubt that is what Tehran intends to do.

Netanyahu was sceptical a new round of talks agreed between Iran and the five permanent members of the

UN Security Council plus Germany will change very much.

The group appealed in a statement on Thursday for Iran to enter into a "serious dialogue" on its nuclear programme and said it was "concerned that, despite efforts made so far, no agreement was reached, including on the access to relevant sites in Iran, requested by the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]."

Netanyahu said Tehran has previously used negotiations to "deceive and delay" and could do so again.

Asked whether the intelligence on Iran might prove to be as flawed as the false reports of weapons of mass destruction in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Netanyahu said there was "no comparison."

"In the case of Iraq, I was on the Israeli cabinet when we discussed this issue. We didn't know. We couldn't say that they didn't have a nuclear weapons programme, we couldn't say if they did. In the case of Iran there is absolutely no question.... I don't think that's comparable."

## Israeli strike kills Gaza militant leader

AFP, Gaza City

An Israeli air strike on the Gaza Strip yesterday killed the head of the Popular Resistance Committees militant group, the movement said.

The PRC said General Secretary Zohair al-Qais was one of two Palestinians killed in the strike, along with fellow-member Mahmud Halani, hours after Palestinians fired mortar rounds into Israel.

Medical officials told AFP a third man was seriously wounded in the attack on a car travelling in the Tel El-Hawa neighbourhood, west of Gaza City.

The Israeli military said Qaisi "was among the leaders who planned, funded and directed" a deadly cross-border attack into southern Israel from Egypt's Sinai last August, among other operations.

## Yahya

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Throughout Bangladesh, support for Bangabandhu's position, indeed the non-corporation movement, widened to include various segments of society. Students, teachers, lawyers, medical practitioners, government servants --- all agreed that political authority was now symbolized by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, indeed that it was absolute necessity that he be given full support for his position on the crisis.

Even as all of Pakistan waited to see what General Yahya Khan planned to do, reports of clashes between the army and Bangalee civilians came in from various regions in the province. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the army had become a special target for Bengalis because of the repressive role it had played in East Bengal over the years. Moreover, the fact that the army was constantly being reinforced in numbers through soldiers being brought in along the circuitous route of overflights across Sri Lanka from West Pakistan was not lost on anyone. Such acts on the part of the regime raised some credible questions over what political course it planned to follow or whether it was indeed ready to go for a political solution at all.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was naturally the focus of attention in the national and global media. Asked if he would be willing to welcome General Yahya Khan to Dhaka should the president decide to travel to the restive province, the Awami League leader said, "He will be our guest." Among political circles, Mujib's response, with special reference to the term 'guest', was taken as yet another hint of how swiftly and surely Bengalis were moving away from the idea of Pakistan.

## Woman kills

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Malibagh Chowdhuripara, and his wife Sheuli Khanam Shilpi, 30, a homemaker, hailed from Rupsha in Khulna.

Officer-in-Charge Delwar Hossain Khan of Rampura Police Station said on information they recovered the hanging body of Sheuli around 9:30pm.

Rafiqul getting home at night found a room locked from the inside, Delwar said. He repeatedly knocked on the door and after getting no response he and locals broke into the room around 9:15pm. They found Sheuli hanging from the ceiling fan with a scarf around her neck.

Unable to take it, Rafiqul ran away, Delwar said.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Monwar Hossain of Government Railway Police at Kamalapur Station said Rafiqul jumped in front of Upaban Express near Malibagh around 9:55pm.

Sources said the couple had a fight in the morning but they could not say what it was about. They said the couple met in Jagannath University where they had studied. They left behind a four-year old son.