

## Lawmakers

**FROM PAGE 1**  
With the severe power shortage badly hampering irrigation, many such "unlucky" MPs of the AL-led ruling alliance have been facing farmers' wrath in their areas. Lawmakers, particularly those in the northern region which is considered the main food pocket in the country, fear that this year's Boro production will fall due to the power crisis. The production was around 1.86 crore tonnes last year.

With the summer approaching, the demand for power has reached about 6,700 megawatts a day. But the production hovers around 5,000MW to 5,200MW since November last year.

The demand has soared as farmers alone require around 1,500MW electricity for irrigation in this Boro season.

According to a government announcement, farmers are to run irrigation pumps from 11:00pm to 7:00am every day. But they rarely get uninterrupted power supply.

Local MPs say farmers can run their pumps for four hours at best -- and that too not at stretch.

Over the last few days, The Daily Star talked to 25 MPs from Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Bogra, Sarajganj, Naogaon, Natore, Rajshahi, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Magura, Mymensingh and Brahmanbaria.

They described how farmers are suffering from the power crisis and seeking remedy from them.

AKM Mayeedul Islam, Jatiya Party MP of Kurigram, said he had never experienced such acute power shortage in his life. "If the situation remains unchanged, angry farmers may lay siege to local power offices."

One such siege by farmers indeed took place in the middle of last month in Nilphamari where local leaders and activists of AL took part to sympathies with the farmers, AL lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor said.

In efforts to soothe farmers' anger, lawmakers had been in constant touch with the Rural Electrification Board (REB), which supplies power in rural areas, asking it to ensure nonstop power supply for irrigation.

But the REB could do little as it did not get electricity from the Power Development Board in line with the demand.

"I was so fed up with the electricity crisis that I left the matter to Allah," said Brahmanbaria MP Shah Jikrul Ahmed.

The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal lawmaker added: "People and farmers of my area are heavily criticising me for electricity crisis. Sometimes they even hurl abuses at me but I cannot leave the area as my home is there."

The meteorological department said it rained in 19 districts of Dhaka and the southern belt. Bogra is the only northern district to experience rain -- just 8mm. Sylhet and Feni saw 18mm and 25mm rain.

Abul Kalam Mallik, an assistant meteorologist, forecast a few light showers in some parts of the country in the next few days.

"If the power situation does not improve, I fear farmers will cut paddy cultivation in the next season and will turn to other crops that need less irrigation," said AL MP Dabirul Islam of Thakurgaon. And if things do not better, people will not vote for the AL in the next general election, he added.

Gaibandha AL MP Monowar Hossain Chowdhury has been urging domestic consumers to use less electricity to save for irrigation.

Sirajganj MP Shafiqul Islam and Mymensingh MP Reza Ali have "convinced" owners of local shops and mills not to run their businesses after evening. "By saving the power, we are trying to meet as much as possible the demand for irrigation in our area," said Shafiqul Islam.

Jatiya Party lawmaker Zafar Iqbal Siddiqui said he had been receiving at least 1,000 phone calls every day from farmers over power shortages.

"I informed the power adviser, the state minister for power, and other top officials about the farmers' woes. I had tried my best. And they assured me. But the situation remains the same," Siddiqui said.

"As I had no good news for the farmers, I left my constituency and came to Dhaka (on Sunday)," said the Nilphamari lawmaker.

## Hazari back

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He insisted that he will arrange a big showdown in Feni and regain the "lost organisational strength" of local AL.

Hazari also sought prime minister's assistance to get back his licenced arms which were seized from his Feni residence during the last caretaker government regime.

This latest development has sparked resentment among both the central and local leaders and activists of the party.

Several AL leaders said if Hazari is rehabilitated in politics, the party would have to face a major blow due to his past criminal records.

He was expelled from the party in April 2003 for creating chaos at a meeting in Feni in presence of the then party general secretary Abdul Jalil and also for working against the party-backed chairman candidate in the Sadar upazila election in the same year.

Contacted, acting general secretary of Feni AL Abdur Rahman said they do not believe the party high command would accept Hazari back in the party after nine years.

"But as the supreme leader of our party, the prime minister can give him any responsibility and in that case we won't oppose. As party activists we must accept her decision," he added.

According to AL constitution, there is no scope for an expelled leader to return to his previous post, maintained Rahman, also chairman of Feni Sadar upazila. "A new council can only decide on this."

AL deputy office secretary Mrinal Kanti Das told The Daily Star that Hazari would take a top position in the district AL committee only if the party and people want him. "Even our party chief can directly nominate him for any post in the committee as per the party constitution."

AL Organising Secretary Ahmed Hossain, who looks after the Chittagong divisional affairs of the party,

claimed although Hazari does not hold any party post now, he is still an AL leader. "So it is irrelevant to talk about his comeback in politics."

Ahead of the 2008 parliamentary polls, AL had withdrawn the expulsion orders against many of its leaders including Hazari who once had acted against the party favourites in some local elections, argued Ahmed.

Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, who contested the Feni-2 constituency in the last parliamentary elections from AL, claimed Hazari's expulsion still remains in force.

"As our prime minister had placed the charter for change before the nation ahead of the last general elections, she stayed away from the controversial leaders. So I hope she won't take any decision that would ultimately harm the party," said Sobhan, also president of a faction of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists.

"I believe she will seek opinion from Feni Awami League leaders before deciding on this as the people want peace," he mentioned. AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif however said he has no idea about any move to bring Hazari back to politics and the party is yet to discuss the matter.

Hazari went into hiding in August 2001 and appeared in public in February 2009. He was awarded a total of 60 years' imprisonment in five cases in absentia.

He was wanted over 19 criminal cases filed with different police stations in Feni on various charges including killing, possessing illegal arms, laundering money and carrying out arson attacks. He had been in Kolkata of India in August 2001 when the joint forces raided his residence "Shailla Kutir" at Masterpara in Feni town.

The law enforcers seized arms and ammunitions including one rifle, two loaded revolvers, magazines of sub-machine gun, 431 bullets and some contraband items from the house.

## Govt to go

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Chairing the meeting, the prime minister said a Memorandum of Understanding would be signed with the Malaysian government regarding the bridge project, meeting sources told The Daily Star. Communications Minister Obaidul Quader would go to Kuala Lumpur today or tomorrow to sign the MoU. A special envoy of the Malaysian prime minister would be his counterpart.

The premier said she would be present during the MoU signing ceremony via teleconference with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Hasina said Bangladesh and Malaysia would benefit with the construction of the bridge. She also hinted that had the bridge been built with the World Bank funding, people would have had to pay excess toll.

It would be better if the bridge is constructed with Malaysian funds rather than the World Bank's, she said, assuring her party lawmaker Abdur Rahman that a second Padma bridge at Paturia would also be built.

The Malaysian cabinet recently approved the Padma bridge investment proposal. According to the proposal, a Malaysian consortium would be set up to undertake the \$2.19 billion project.

In October last year, the World Bank suspended its funding for the mega construction project in connection with foul play in the bidding process. The other financiers of the project--Asian Development Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency and Islamic Development Bank--also suspended release of their promised funds.

The government had signed loan agreements with World Bank for \$1.2 billion, Asian Development Bank for \$615 million, Japan International Cooperation Agency for \$400 million and Islamic Development Bank for \$140 million to construct the 6.15-kilometre bridge.

The World Bank last week temporarily banned a unit of the Canadian company SNC-Lavalin from taking part in any World Bank-funded project for its alleged involvement in corruption in the Padma bridge project.

Kuala Lumpur had proposed Dhaka about its wish to fund the project and a MoU was supposed to be signed in this regard.

Meanwhile, at the meeting last night, a few party leaders urged the prime minister to take immediate measures to resolve water crisis in metropolitan cities.

Hasina directed party leaders to immediately complete holding councils of the party grassroots. If any designated leader failed to hold the councils, the party would form the committee from Dhaka, she said.

She also expressed dissatisfactions over comments made by Jubo League leaders against Awami League leaders and lawmaker on Thursday.

## BNP secy

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Some influential leaders, however, have been opposing the idea as they think a senior leader should be designated to the post considering the tougher political scenario.

"Tougher days are looming. Only an experienced leader can face the challenges," said a member of BNP standing committee seeking anonymity.

He, however, declined to comment on Mirza Fakhrul's performance as the party's acting secretary general.

Some party stalwarts observed BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia should name the secretary general soon to avoid any dissension within the party.

The post fell vacant following the death of Khandaker Delwar Hossain, who passed away in Singapore on March 16 last year.

Four days later, Khaleda had asked Fakhrul to carry out the duties of the secretary general.

The National Standing Committee of BNP on April 7 in the same year had decided to retain him in the post.

## 10 killed in 6 dists

**FROM PAGE 1**  
In Jamalpur, a class-IV madrasa student was killed and 50 people were injured when the storm swept over Sadar upazila around 11:30pm on Thursday night, reports our Jamalpur correspondent.

Momin, 12, was killed when the wall of their house collapsed on him.

The hailstorm hit Lakkhichar, Itail, Ghoradap, Ranagasa, Narundi, Sreepur, Rashidpur and Bashchora unions and damaged hundreds of houses and trees, several educational institutes and disrupted power supply.

Contacted, Deputy Commissioner Siraj Uddin Ahmed said the loss in the storm is yet to be assessed.

In Dhaka, the nearly three-hour-long downpour in the morning submerged several streets and alleys, and disrupted power supply for hours in different areas.

In the next 24 hours, weathermen forecast rain and thundershowers accompanied by gusty

winds at few places in the country. The Met Office also said there is no sign that the daytime temperature would fall significantly.

In Dhaka, the wind speed during yesterday's nor'wester was recorded at 37km per hour while it was 56kmph in Sylhet.

The highest rainfall in the country until 12:00pm yesterday was recorded at 64 millimetres (mm) in Faridpur and 60mm in Dhaka, said Assistant Meteorologist Muhammad Abul Kalam Mallik.

### LIGHTNING KILLS SIX

Two farmers were killed in lightning strike at Arua village under Keshobpur upazila in Jessore yesterday morning, our correspondent in Benapole reports.

Police and locals said a thunderbolt killed Sureh Shil, 50, and Harun-or-Rashid, 40, when they were working at a nearby field.

Our Rangpur correspondent reports that a couple was killed in lightning strike on Thursday night at Daudpur village under

Pirganj upazila.

They were Babu Mian, 40, and his wife Minara Begum, 32. The couple was returning home from Daudpur bazaar around 10:30pm.

Seven-year-old Sweety Begum, daughter of Nurul Islam of Kathaliapara in Palash upazila in Narsingdi, was killed by a thunderbolt yesterday afternoon when she went out to collect mango, our Narsingdi correspondents said.

In Noakhali, class-IX student Nargis Akhter, 14, was killed and her brother Rakib Hossain, 12, sustained injuries when lightning struck them around 8:00am yesterday, reports a correspondent.

They were residents of Rajapur village under Eojbalia union of Sadar upazila. Their father Kamal Hossain said they were near a paddy field during that time.

Simu Akter, 30, a housewife of Charmahiuddin in Subranchar upazila, was injured in a lightning strike around 9:00am yesterday.

## Slum demolition

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Rag-picker Sabbir said a child of a domestic help died under the bulldozer. She had left the child home when she went to work, he said.

Md Dulal, a clothes trader at Beltoll intersection near T&T High School, said, "I saw the mother wailing and saying her child was in the shanty."

The neighbours said the mother left with the body and they could not know where she was going since they had been too busy dealing with their own deals.

Police had cordoned off the eviction area and restricted people's movement, they said.

MA Sobhan, president of a section of Karail Slum Development Committee, said he also heard about a child's death during the eviction drive and that two girls, Mili and Baishakhi, were missing.

"The authorities made nominal public announcements of the eviction drive Tuesday noon saying that they would just demolish shops within 10 feet of the satellite station road but they embarked on wholesale eviction of the slum dwellers the following day without rehabilitating them," he said.

The High Court in an order in 2008 asked the government to make arrangements for rehabilitation before evicting Karail slum dwellers.

In January, another High Court bench in a suo moto rule ordered the government to evict all illegal structures occupying the 170 acres of land of BTCL, PWD and the ministry of information technology.

Md Selim Hossain, executive magistrate of Dhaka district administration, who conducted Wednesday's drive, said they had carried out the eviction drive as per the High Court order.

"Nobody came up with

court's stay order on eviction drive," he said, adding, "The January rule of the High Court stands valid until an appeal is filed against it."

NGOS' SAY  
According to DSK-Shiree Project, an NGO working for slum dweller, over 2,000 structures including dwellings and shops were demolished on less than a day's notice by BTCL at Karail, Ershadnagar, Bairdar Bostee, Beltola, and Jheelpar slums.

Informal primary schools, community based clinics and toilets have been crushed during the eviction. Most of the evicted people lost their belongings during panic of the eviction drive. Many became victims of looting and some were physically harassed by law enforcement agencies and miscreants.

Sara Hossain, a High Court lawyer, said it is the duty of the government to rehabilitate slum dwellers before evicting them. "The way they have been evicted is completely inhuman," she said.

Sultana Kamal, eminent human rights activist and executive director of legal aid organisation Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), said eviction without rehabilitation is undesirable. "Slums are not mere places, there are people and it is a matter of managing human lives," she said.

Even a formal notice is not enough to evict slum dwellers, she said, adding that the government has not taken initiatives for rehabilitation despite their request to do so time and again.

Abu Obaidur Rahman of ASK said following a petition filed by ASK and Bangladesh Legal Aid Trust in 2008, the High Court barred the government from evicting slum dwellers from 43-acre area of Public Works Department.

District administration carried out Wednesday's drive on 80-acre land of BTCL.

The court in January,

however, ordered eviction of illegal structures on 170-acre area owned by three government organisations.

Obaidur said they were preparing to file an appeal against the order.

## Bravery costs

**FROM PAGE 1**  
home was talking to his friend Kabir Hossain at a nearby lane when the incident took place around 6:45am.

Hearing screaming, Ali noticed that four people coming out of a private car were mugging three elderly women.

Ali rushed to the spot alone, and at one stage, picked up a brick chip and threw it at the gang. As the gang shot at him, Ali received the bullet in his chest, Shamim said.

Officer-in-Charge Kazi Wajed Ali of Mirpur Police Station said Ali died on the spot and the armed gang fled away in their fleeing blankets.

The muggers snatched a mobile set and bangles from victims Azizun Nesa, 60, and Tawhida Hossain, 55, when they were near their residences.

Rawshan Ara, 65, who was with the victims began screaming at the sight, he added. As it was early in the morning, there was no traffic and people on the road except Ali and Kabir, the OC said.

The body of Ali, who was father of two children, was taken to Dhaka Medical College Morgue for an autopsy.

Ali's wife Salma Khatun filed a murder case with the police station accusing unidentified four muggers.

## Suranjit

**FROM PAGE 20**  
Khatun and State Minister of Home Affairs Shamsul Huq Tuku while speaking at a discussion in the city's Dhakeswari National Temple.

According to reports, a group of bigots set several houses belonging to Hindu community on fire and looted their valuables as a drama performed by school students and directed by a Hindu school teacher in Satkhira hurt the Muslim religious sentiment.

The play was based on a story by noted politician and acting prime minister of erstwhile Pakistan Abul Mansur Ahmed. Students of Fatehpur Secondary School under Kaliganj upazila in Satkhira district staged the drama at their school field on March 27 marking the Independence Day.

UNB adds: On Thursday night, three cases were filed with Kaliganj Police Station against 1,500 people in connection with the incident.

Of the cases, police filed one against 1,000 unidentified people and 37 identified ones, and Habibur Rahman, a resident of Fatehpur village, lodged another against 5000 unidentified and identified 29 ones for ransacking 15 houses.

The other case was lodged by one Khalilur Rahman, a resident of Kaliganj, against a local journalist for publishing a false report inciting violence.

## No scope

**FROM PAGE 1**  
The US under secretary of state for political affairs in an exclusive TV interview aired yesterday said, "I think Bangladesh has well-passed the days of military affairs and well-passed the days of non-democratic situation."

Asked what would be the US's stance if any situation like the last changeover of January 11, 2007 re-emerged in future, Sherman told private television channel ATN Bangla that the United States was interested in supporting Bangladesh towards ensuring a sustainable democracy.

About the ongoing political debate over how to hold the next parliamentary elections, she said the people and politicians would have to find out the mechanism so that the democratic process continues. Sherman is the third top boss in the US State Department. This is her first visit to Bangladesh after being appointed US under secretary of state for political affairs on September 21, 2011.

**GRAMEEN BANK NEEDS LONG-TERM LEADERSHIP**  
During her visit to a project area of Grameen Bank at Katigram in Manikganj yesterday, Sherman said the long-term leadership of the bank should be decided as soon as possible.

"I am sure the leadership [of Grameen Bank] of the long-term will be sorted out, and the international community very much wants to see it happen as quickly as possible," she told journalists.

The post of the MD fell vacant after Prof Muhammad Yunus, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Grameen Bank in 2006, was unceremoniously relieved of his duties at the microfinance institution in March last year.

In May, he stepped down from the post in order to avert disruption in the Grameen Bank activities.

Sherman said even though Grameen Bank is in the process of selecting its future leadership, it is still functioning very well and helping people for the better future of their children.

The US official said Grameen Bank has a reputation of being an internationally-recognised institution founded and created by Prof Yunus.

During her trip to Manikganj, she talked to Grameen Bank's beneficiaries, met school children and enjoyed cultural programme rendered by a group of young kids.

Sherman said she came to the village to meet the children as "they are the future of this wonderful country". Grameen Bank is helping parents to create a better future for their children through providing microcredit and other services, she said, adding, "So they [children] can have education, food, and healthcare and grow up as entrepreneurs and strong adults."

Dan W Mozena, US ambassador to Bangladesh, and Mohammad Shahjahan, acting MD of Grameen Bank, accompanied the US under secretary during the trip.

## Titanic wreck

**FROM PAGE 20**  
water off the coast of Canada.

The ship will fall under the 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage once it passes the 100th anniversary of its sinking on April 15.

The convention aims to prevent unscientific or unethical exploration.

Irina Bokova, director-general of Unesco, said the sinking of the Titanic was "anchored in the memory of humanity" and it was important to protect the site where 1,500 people lost their lives.

"There are thousands of other shipwrecks that need safeguarding as well... We do not tolerate the plundering of cultural sites on land, and the same should be true for our sunken heritage," she added.

The 2001 convention only protects vessels that sank more than a century ago.

The Titanic, built in Belfast, sank on its maiden voyage after setting off from the British port of Southampton.

It hit an iceberg off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada en route to New York, sinking two-and-a-half hours later.