



PHOTO: PMO

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina congratulates her daughter Saima Wazed Hossain after the WHO yesterday honoured the latter with Award for Excellence in Public Health. Story On Page 3.

## Tearful goodbye to Feroza Begum

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fittingly -- *Ami chiro tore dure chole jabo, tabu amare debona bhulite* (I'll go far away for ever, yet I won't have you forget me).

Hundreds of mourners walked behind the coffin in silence, tears rolling down their cheeks, as they paid their last tribute to the legendary Nazrul singer at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday.

The eminent singer passed away around 8:30pm on Tuesday. She was 84.

Born on July 28, 1930, in Faridpur, she began singing at the age of 12. In the seven decades that followed, she sang in a voice that many say a nightingale has. She received the Independence Day Award in 1979 for her contribution to music.

"As long as the nation and music survive, Feroza Begum will live on," said Nasiruddin Yusuf Bachchu, president of Sammilita Sangskritik Jote.

The sincerity with which people mourned said it all about a devoted artiste on her final journey, after a life replete with work and struggle to uphold the essence and spirit of Nazrul Islam, the national poet.

She was laid to rest beside her husband at Banani graveyard in the capital around 6:00pm.

In a statement, Indian High

Commissioner in Dhaka Pankaj Saran expressed his deepest condolences.

Feroza Begum was a great exponent of Nazrul Geeti and ruled the hearts of music lovers not only in Bangladesh but also India for almost seven decades, he said, adding that the cultural world of the sub-continent has lost one of its greatest icons.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia last night visited the bereaved family members and expressed her condolences. Later, BNP leader Osman Faruk told reporters that it was unacceptable that the government did not give her state honours before her burial.

Earlier in the day, hundreds of her fans and well-wishers thronged the Shaheed Minar after her body was taken there around 1:30pm from her Indira Road residence.

People from all walks of life, irrespective of their political identities, leaders and activists from different socio-cultural and political organisations paid their rich tribute to the maestro there.

Cultural affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor paid tribute on behalf of the government.

He said the Shilpakala Academy, Bangla Academy, Nazrul Institute and National Museum would work together to preserve her songs and

works for the future generation.

Laila Akhter, a housewife from the city's Jigatola, came with her two children and one sister.

"Our entire family loves her songs. Even the day before yesterday, I was listening to her songs.... Yesterday I got the news on television. I came here to pay my respects," said Laila.

Not only for Laila's family, Feroza Begum was an endless source of inspiration for thousands of others, particularly the singers.

Noted singer Shabnam Mushtari said singers like her were encouraged by Feroza Begum.

"Though she is no more, she will remain in our hearts," said an emotion-choked Mushtari.

Khilkhil Kazi, granddaughter of national poet Nazrul Islam, also paid her tribute to Feroza Begum, who struggled hard to promote Nazrul songs across the globe.

"I have lost my soul. I am feeling the pain that I had endured after losing my grandfather," she wrote on the condolence book.

"She [Feroza Begum] defeated those who tried to stop Nazrul's voice.... She is the winner, she is infallible," Prof Mansur Musa, former director general of Bangla Academy, wrote in the book.

Eminent artist Mustafa Manowar

## No law to ban hartal

PM tells Sangsad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday ruled out the possibility of passing any law banning hartals, saying everything cannot be solved by enacting laws.

"I cannot say anything about it at this moment. It depends on the people. If people want...then all members of the parliament may take a decision in this connection," she said while participating in a question-answer session of the parliament.

The session began at about 5:00pm with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair.

Responding to a supplementary question by MA Hannan from Mymensingh-7 constituency, the PM told the House that observing political programmes is a basic right of political parties.

said, "Singers like her come but once in a life time.... It's a great loss."

Feroza's son Hamin Ahmed said, "Her death marks the end of an era."

Shafin Ahmed, another of her sons, said, "She devoted her life to promoting Nazrul's songs worldwide."

Besides Hamin and Shafin, Feroza's three brothers and other family members and relatives were present at the Shaheed Minar. One of her sons, Tahsin Ahmed, is outside the country.

Prof Anisuzzaman, Nazrul researcher Prof Rafiqul Islam, jurist Rafique-Ul Huq, cabinet members AMA Muhith, Hasanul Haq Inu and Rashed Khan Menon, painter Hashem Khan, singers Khalid Hossain, Abdul Jabbar, Sadya Afreen Mallick, Sujit Mostafa, Khairul Anam Shakil and Ayub Bachchu, BNP leader Abdul Moeen Khan, Awami League leader Mahbubul Alam Hanif, among others, paid their tributes.

From the Shaheed Minar, her body was taken to Gulshan Azad Mosque for her namaz-e-janaza after a minute's silence in respect to her memory.

As the mourners departed in tears, another of her tracks played at the Shaheed Minar: *Aamay nohe go bhalobasho shudhu, bhalobasho mor gaan* (love not me, love only, only my songs).

## Pesticides used 15 times

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monitoring at the field level is weak and must be intensified to ensure both quality and proper doses of pesticides.

THE RESEARCH

For the study, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) collected 32 pesticide samples of different brands.

After testing them, it found 30 percent of the pesticides contained half the prescribed quantity of active or key ingredients.

"The findings indicate a lot about the overall standard of pesticides," said Dr Monirul Islam, director (nutrition) of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), who coordinated the study released in July.

The research, commissioned and published by the BARC, also says that due to the diminished impact of the pesticides, farmers now have to use pesticides 10-15 times the prescribed amount for producing fruits and 8-10 times for growing vegetables.

The truth of this was found in what Tarikul Islam, a farmer from Kodalia of Jessore Sadar, said: "About 10 years ago, we used to apply pesticides once a month or sometimes twice. But now many of us have to apply those every week, and even twice or thrice a week in some cases."

"I know of some incidents in which agriculture officials prescribed a particular pesticide but it did not work. Then farmers mixed two or three different pesticides and sprayed the mixture on vegetables," he told The Daily Star by phone.

BARI Director General Dr Rafiqul Islam Mondal said while adulteration could be a reason behind the excessive use of pesticides, many farmers did not know the right doses either.

Farmers' awareness of proper application of pesticides is crucial in checking extensive use of these toxic chemicals, he added.

THE PERILS

Ataur Rahman Milton, member of Bangladesh Food Safety Network (BFSN) that closely works with farmers, said the use of substandard pesticide raises production cost.

"If a farmer needed Tk 50 for pesticides earlier, he now needs Tk 500 for the same. And the additional cost is passed on to the consumers," he said. Naturally, more use of pesticides means more business for the marketing companies.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman, director at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control & Research, says due to the overdose of pesticides, the produce may retain toxicity even after harvest. And exposure to or consumption of these fruits and vegetables may even lead to death.

"Initially, mild symptoms like headache and nausea are experienced," he said. But in the long run, it can affect kidney and liver as well.

There's more.

According to the US Environment Protection Agency, excessive use of pesticides can affect the nervous system, irritate the skin or eyes and cause cancer and even hormonal damage.

"Pesticide residues remain in the soil and air for many years. If applied excessively, these can affect human health for generations," Prof Rahman said.

However, Rafiqul Islam Mondal of BARI said the effects can be minimised if farmers stop spraying pesticides at least a week before the harvest.

THE BLAME GAME

Rafiqul Islam, former secretary general

of Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA), an organisation of pesticide companies, admits the fact of adulteration of pesticides, but puts the blame on small traders.

"Big companies cannot adulterate pesticides ... because if it's detected, their reputation will be at stake," he said.

But small traders say otherwise. Mustafizur Rahman, owner of Classic Agrovet Ltd, a small pesticide company in Dhaka, thinks an adulterator can be any company -- big or small.

"We have recently seen that a big company was found manufacturing adulterated consumer products," he said, without naming the company.

Ketabur Rahman, a pesticide retailer of Bholahat upazila in mango-rich Chapainawabganj, said there's no chance of tampering with pesticides at their level.

"We deal with the farmers directly. If their produce is affected by any of the pesticides we sell, farmers won't let us get away with it," he told The Daily Star over the phone.

However, both sides agree on one thing: the government should strengthen its monitoring mechanism.

There are nearly 400 companies, which import and market about 37,000 tonnes of pesticides annually, but only some 200 are members of the BCPA, Rafiqul Islam said.

There are companies that are not registered even with the Department of Agriculture Extension's Plant Protection Wing (PPW), which regulates the pesticide business, he went on.

Though the government has made it mandatory for pesticide traders to be members of the BCPA, the responses are weak. It proves the government's monitoring mechanism is feeble, he added.

THE REBUTTAL

Rejecting the traders' allegations, Shah Alam, deputy director (pesticide) of the PPW, said they regularly monitor pesticide quality.

There's a Pesticide Testing Advisory Committee comprising entomologists and agriculturists who conduct laboratory and field tests before approving the import and marketing of a pesticide, he said.

Also, the PPW randomly tests pesticide samples every month. If found to be adulterated, pesticides of the batch concerned are cancelled and withdrawn from the market, he said.

Twelve types of pesticides were banned and destroyed in 2013-14 for their substandard quality, Shah Alam added.

The Pesticides Act (Amendment) 2010 provides for up to two years' imprisonment and cancellation of licences for adulteration of pesticides.

On unregistered traders, he said if they have information, actions are taken against such companies. Three unregistered traders were sued in the last fiscal year.

Ataur Rahman of the BFSN, however, commented that agriculture officers at the field levels were negligent in monitoring the quality and quantity of chemical inputs.

"Food safety has become a serious public health concern. So, it is time that we shifted towards natural pest control mechanisms. And, in the meantime, quality of pesticides must be checked properly to ensure safer products for consumers," Ataur concluded.

## At cost of people

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secure better prices.

"Pests stay away from crops as long as there is the effect of pesticides. For this, it is necessary to use pesticides twice a week," Siddique told The Daily Star by phone.

This profit motive is further fuelled by dealers of big chemical companies. In the absence of adequate monitoring and supervision by agriculture officials, these dealers woo farmers into applying toxic elements, including banned pesticides, to crops, vegetables and fruits.

Their representatives visit farmers at their homes and farms to persuade them into buying chemicals that can cause serious harm to humans. These agents have their sales target set by the companies, agro officials said.

"We have to visit farmers regularly to achieve the target," said one representative, seeking anonymity.

The use of pesticides is so indiscriminate that farmers apply those 10-15 times on fruits and 8-10 times on vegetables, according to a study by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC).

Helal Uddin, a banana farmer at Madhupur in Tangail, said, "Everybody wants to have fresh-looking and big bananas. If we do not use pesti-

cides, there will be pest attacks and spots will develop from the attack. Nobody will buy them."

Syed Nurul Alam, chief scientific officer and head of entomology division of BARI, said farmers use pesticides indiscriminately without even identifying the pests. Sometimes they do not even know if the pesticides are working.

"Farmers do it basically on the advice of dealers, who have little knowledge about pesticides."

He blamed weak surveillance on pesticide sales and its uses.

Nurul said pests developed resistance due to the haphazard use of pesticides over the years. This is why farmers need to apply even more pesticides on their farms.

"Many farmers also believe that the toxicity lessens after cooking. But, in fact, toxicity of some fungicides rises under heat," he added.

Residues of most of these chemicals can be present in the food items for up to seven days after application, but the consumers have no way of knowing when pesticides were last applied, experts said.

After harvest, begins the preservation stage. At this stage, a section of farmers and traders uses chemicals such as calcium carbide for ripening

fruits and formalin, aldrin and ethion to preserve fruits, vegetables and fish, according to the National Food Safety Laboratory and Bangladesh Food Research Institute.

Farmers and traders rely on harmful preservatives as there are no improved preservation technologies, packaging materials and proper transport system for perishable commodities. There is no proper check on the sales of these chemicals either, analysts said.

Md Miaruddin, a principal scientific officer of BARI, said ripening agents are used mainly by middlemen to ensure uniform ripening of various fruits and vegetables such as tomato.

The growing use of pesticides and preservatives is linked also to the expansion of commercial farming. While the commercial farming has facilitated increased production to meet the rising demand, government agencies are doing little to ensure safe food.

Akhteruzzaman, director of plant protection wing under the agriculture ministry, which is responsible for regulating sale and use of pesticides, dismissed that farmers apply excessive pesticides to crops.

"We have field officers at grassroots level and they are monitoring the use of pesticides."

Asked why residues of various banned pesticides like DDT are being found in food items, he said they were looking into it.

Bangladesh Plant Protection Association General Secretary Syed AM Asfakul Abedin claimed that representatives of pesticide companies helped create awareness among farmers on crop protection.

According to him, there has been no overuse of chemical pesticides because of high cost. "It is not overuse; the frequency of the use is high."

THE WAY OUT

Wais Kabir, former executive chairman of BARC, said time has come to focus on food quality.

"So far, our focus has been on increasing food production on a small piece of land. Production has increased but the quality aspect of food remains out of focus," said Kabir.

M Asaduzzaman, a professorial fellow at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said tax on chemicals should be increased to discourage their use.

"Safe preservation technologies should be introduced and made available to prevent adulteration. The packaging system also requires improvement for marketing," he said.

## Sinohydro gets contract

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bank-financed contract upon completion of the bank's sanctions proceedings as per its sanctions procedures, including, inter alia: (i) temporary suspension in connection with ongoing sanction proceedings."

The legal expert said, "It appears that temporary suspension does not equal 'sanction' under the bank's sanction procedures. Therefore, on the face of it, Sinohydro's declaration at both stages that 'we, including any of our subcontractors or suppliers for any part of the contract, have not been declared ineligible by the bank', appears not to be false."

"However, for the sake of good order, it would be advisable to obtain a clarification from the World Bank as to whether or not Sinohydro had been declared ineligible by the bank," it added.

The tender committee, while selecting Sinohydro's bid, reflected the same spirit. It said the BBA should obtain a clarification from the World Bank on the issue.

But the road transport ministry which sent its recommendations to the purchase committee only on Tuesday ignored the recommendations of the legal expert, saying that there was nothing

ing against Sinohydro on the World Bank's website and the allegation raised by the two co-bidders were false.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith echoed the views of the road transport ministry. Asked if the government had cross-checked with the World Bank on this matter, he said, "No, it was not necessary. We've checked the World Bank website and its name was not on the blacklist."

The Daily Star talked to him after the purchase committee meeting, but quite unusually, no briefing followed the meeting yesterday.

The river training works are the second most costly component of the government-financed \$3 billion Padma bridge project. It deals with stopping erosion of the river, maintaining navigability and dredging over 11 km area near Jajira and three km area at Mawa.

FALTERING IN DHK-CTG HIGHWAY JOB

Sinohydro faced strong criticism for its pitiable performance in the Dhaka-Chittagong highway expansion job which it had won in 2010 by making a low price offer.

Soon after the beginning of the expansion works, the company totally stopped work on a 140km part of the

highway and started demanding higher payment. Till date, the company has completed less than half of the project that was supposed to be completed by December last year. Its delaying tactics have now doubled the project cost from Tk 1,655 crore.

The firm blamed the delay in the project on bureaucratic bottlenecks.

"Their complaints were genuine because there were mosques and temples [that needed to be removed], but we didn't do anything on time," said Muhith. The road transport ministry told the purchase committee that the ministry was at fault about stalling the project, he added.

An expert of the tender evaluation committee told this newspaper that their decision of picking Sinohydro was not influenced by the prime minister's comment at a cabinet meeting in early July. When the finance minister drew the PM's attention to press reports on Sinohydro's performance in the Dhaka-Chittagong highway project and its handling of the river training tender, Sheikh Hasina said Sinohydro should get the river training contract, according to cabinet meeting sources.

Sinohydro, Korean Hyundai and Belgian Jan De Nul submitted finan-

cial proposals on June 19.

The Chinese company quoted Tk 9,224 crore for the river training job. It later offered a 5.6 percent discount on its offer price, slashing the amount to Tk 8,778 crore.

Hyundai offered Tk 12,122 crore and Jan De Nul Tk 12,324 crore for the same job.

"There is a big price difference between Sinohydro and the other bidders due to qualitative difference in the proposals. Any failure in the river training works can have grave consequences," said an official of an aggrieved bidder.

One of the aggrieved bidders in a letter to the BBA earlier this month said, "The tender terms specifically mention that if a bidder is under temporary suspension by the World Bank, it is to be disqualified."

The tender, said the letter, was floated after the suspension of the World Bank loan for the Padma bridge project and no amendment was issued to rescind this criterion, which confirms the tender's intention about applying this criterion to tender evaluation. The consequences of the temporary suspension by the World Bank are an integral part of the tender criteria, it added.

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the JP chief. And it was Ershad who persuaded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to include Ranga in her cabinet.

The JP chairman announced his latest decision through a press release yesterday.

A number of JP leaders told The Daily Star yesterday that the party was in trouble, as conflicts between Ershad and his wife Raushan Ershad, the leader of the opposition, has reached its peak over some issues, including the appointment of deputy leader of the opposition in parliament.

Asked, a senior JP presidium member said the situation was such that none in the JP knew what was happening inside the party and what would happen next.

"It is hard to say who is running Jatiya Party at present and what the party's position on a particular issue is," added the JP leader.

During a break at yesterday's parliament sitting, four JP lawmakers -- Ranga, Tajul, Kazi Feroz Rashid and Ruhul Amin Hawlader -- informed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina about Ershad's latest decision and sought her interference.

A JP lawmaker, who was present there, told The Daily Star that Hasina had advised them to stay calm.

"We have informed the prime minister that the Jatiya Party chief is destroying the party. He is making unilateral decisions one after another."

"In reply, she said the party should run smoothly, and asked us to show restraint," said the JP lawmaker.

Several JP leaders told The Daily Star that Ershad's latest decision was "autocratic," and it was the outcome of a serious rift between the party chief and

Raushan.

Wishing anonymity, a JP leader said Ranga and Tajul were victimised for extending support to Raushan on the issue of appointing Feroz as deputy leader of the opposition.

At a meeting of JP parliamentary body at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban on Monday, Ranga and Tajul criticised Ershad for his recent statement that the JP should quit the government to play the role of a "real" opposition.

In the absence of the party chairman, Raushan at the meeting decided to appoint Feroz as deputy leader of the opposition.

On Tuesday, Raushan sent a letter to Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, requesting her to take steps to this end.

On the same day, Ershad met Hasina at her parliament office and requested her to stop the move.

The JP chairman also urged the Speaker not to make Feroz deputy leader of the opposition, saying he is the party chairman, and the party didn't make any decision on Feroz's appointment as deputy leader of the opposition.

Early last month, Raushan wrote to the Speaker and made the same request. But the Speaker refrained from taking any measures due to Ershad's objections.

The JP chief later suspended Feroz from the party's Dhaka city unit.

Party insiders said JP lawmakers Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu and Anisul Islam Mahmud had influenced Ershad not to make Feroz deputy leader of the opposition.

"Bablu persuaded Ershad to make him party's secretary general. And now he [Bablu] wants to become deputy leader of the opposition with the party chief's blessings," said a JP presidium member, asking not to be named.