



Tangail district administration destroys a truckload of mangoes, *left*, at Tangail bypass area labelling them formalin-tainted while people pick up allegedly formalin-soaked litchis and make a run for it when the authorities concerned were destroying them in BRTC area of Chittagong.



PHOTO: FILE

Confusing battle fought so far

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machine is mostly used for measuring formalin in the environment, said Barc.

Also, the way the device is used is unscientific. During the drives, officials put it in polythene bags containing food items to detect formalin.

Monirul Islam, director (nutrition) at Barc, said, "If fruits, fishes or vegetables are packed in polythene bags, polyethylene glycol can leach into the food from the bags. This might affect the accuracy of the formalin detection machine."

Despite the findings of the government agency, the DMP has not suspended the use of the device.

During its drives, it also followed the method of the US-based Association of Analytical Chemists. Under this testing standard, fruits are washed in water, and some chromotrophic acid is dissolved in

it. There will be purple colour (ring) in the solution boundaries if there is artificial formalin in fruits, said Kamal Prashad Das, director of Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI).

The test, however, only detects formalin in food, not its level. Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (public relations) of the DMP, said the authorities followed the World Health Organization's (WHO) permissible level of 0.15 ppm formalin for foods.

DMP Assistant Commissioner (operations) Noor Alam, however, said they stuck to the Pure Food Ordinance, 1959, which has no mention of any permissible limit of formalin in foods.

"As per law, formalin is a highly toxic substance. So, we are destroying fruits containing any level of formalin," he noted.

There is no mention of any permissible limit of formalin in any

WHO documents, claimed Noor Alam.

PERMISSIBLE LIMIT

WHO says fruits and vegetables typically contain 3–60 mg (microgram) formaldehyde per kg, milk and milk products about 1 mg, meat and fish 6–20 mg and shellfish 1–100 mg.

"The daily intake of formaldehyde is difficult to evaluate, but a rough estimate from the available data is in the range of 1.5–14 mg a day for an average adult, most of it in a bound and unavailable form," according to a report of the WHO regional office in Europe.

A Barc study says there is a certain amount of formaldehyde in the human body which is vital for metabolism. If consumed within the permissible limit, formaldehyde transforms into less toxic formic acid and gets out of the body through urine. Some part of formaldehyde also transforms into carbon dioxide and

gets out through the respiratory system.

However, the authorities concerned are yet to conduct any research on it to fix a permissible limit for formalin intake.

The BSTI, said Kamal Prashad Das, has no idea about the permissible limit of formaldehyde. Recently, it came to know that formaldehyde existed in some foods naturally.

"If this was true, we've to fix a permissible limit," he pointed out, adding that he was not aware of the DMP using the formaldehyde meter.

Agriculture ministry officials said they oversee the production of fruits, but the DMP did not consult them before launching such a major drive when tonnes of fruits were destroyed.

TRADERS HIT HARD

Amid such chaos, fruit traders have been counting huge losses from anti-adulteration drives.

A trader at Haripur, Pabna, Tofazzal Hossain said he invested Tk 12 lakh in business, but would not be able to recoup it.

"I bought mangoes at Tk 1,200-1,400 a maund, but had to sell them at Tk 800-1,000, whereas the selling price was Tk 2,200-2,900 last year," he told The Daily Star.

Abdul Wahed, president of Chapainawabganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said though mango traders faced huge losses, consumers in the capital and other cities had to buy the fruit at prices between Tk 90 and Tk 120.

Mohammad Sanaullah, president of Dhaka Metropolitan Fruit Traders Association, said they had incurred huge losses from the destruction of fruits at police check-posts.

"I had bought a truckload of litchis at around Tk 3 lakh which were destroyed. My brother too faced similar losses," he added.

Many more traders lost their capi-

tal due to the DMP drive though they did not treat fruits with formalin, claimed Sanaullah. He, however, admitted that growers sprayed pesticides on fruits well before harvesting.

CONSUMERS SCARED

Shusmita Khan, an NGO official in Dhaka, said as she was scared of buying fruits at city markets, she brought some from her village in Manikganj.

Prof Nazma Shaheen of the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science at Dhaka University said, "What good the anti-formalin drives have done to all is not clear, but it has caused panic around. Many have stopped eating fruits."

The claim made by some so-called experts that there should not be any permissible limit of formalin in foods is not right at all. The questions raised about the formalin detection method must be resolved immediately, she insisted.

BNP learns

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Asked, BNP standing committee member Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, who was present at the rally, told The Daily Star that he was not aware of any such work plan.

"But I think the BNP chairperson has some innovative ideas regarding development of the country," he added.

Khaleda said, "Under this work plan we will drive all merit, quality, capability and workforce in one direction."

The Association of Engineers, a pro-BNP professional body, organised the rally titled "democracy for development" at the Institution of Engineers in the capital.

"People gave me the mandate to run the country a couple of times out of their love for and trust in me. My experience has been enriched through carrying out these responsibilities. We have also identified our past mistakes," she said in a written statement.

In her around-30-minute speech, Khaleda urged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina again for talks with the BNP for holding an all-inclusive national election afresh.

At the same time, she also warned her political archival that "there is no reason to think that people would wait for an uncertain period for the dialogue".

"We are now preparing and organising our parties. We are also coordinating other social forces. We are going to people and presenting our statements before them. We are also taking their opinions. We will have to take to the streets taking people with us to put pressure [on the government] and realise people's demand if no initiative

is taken after end of this part [ongoing work to organise BNP]."

The BNP chief called upon the people in advance to take part in that movement to save the country and democracy.

"BNP is a democratic political party that practices patience. We do not want conflict, tension and unpleasant situation or to wage tough street movement all on a sudden. But people will have no alternative to taking to the streets if all doors [to a peaceful solution] were closed."

Portraying a sorry state of the country's roads, economy, gas, electricity, employment, business, banking sectors, law and order, education, and drug abuse among youths, Khaleda said this situation could not go on for ever.

"Stability of the entire region, not only of Bangladesh, will be threatened if this situation went on."

The BNP chief said Hasina had said holding the January-5 "farcical" election was necessary due to constitutional requirement and dialogues [with the opposition] would continue and there would be a fresh election dissolving parliament if there was an understanding to that end.

"But she [Hasina] has forgotten that promise and is now refusing to sit for a dialogue. But today once again I urge them to return to the path of dialogues," she added.

The BNP chief lambasted the government for its move to restore parliament's authority to remove the Supreme Court judges. She said independence of the judiciary would be harmed if that power was given to the "illegal and unelected" parliament.

US at war with IS

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Kerry on Thursday, who told CNN in an interview that the United States was not at war with ISIS, saying the administration's strategy includes "many different things that one doesn't think of normally in context of war."

"What we are doing is engaging in a very significant counterterrorism operation," Kerry told CNN's Elise Labott in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. "It's going to go on for some period of time. If somebody wants to think about it as being a war with ISIL, they can do so, but the fact is it's a major counterterrorism operation that will have many different moving parts."

On Thursday, Deputy State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf sought to clarify the lexicon of the anti-ISIS campaign.

"Well, I know there has been a lot of questions about what words we use

but as the president said the other night this is a very different campaign from the Iraq War, the last time we used that term," she said. "It will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil. We utilize our air superiority and support for partner forces on the ground."

Instead, she calls the action "a steady, relentless counterterrorism campaign to take out ISIL wherever they exist."

"This is not also America's war with ISIL," she added. "The world is joining us in the fight because of the threat they pose to countries in the regions. So we are at war with ISIL in the same way we are at war with al-Qaeda and its affiliates around the world."

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest on Friday said it was ISIL that had "indicated that they are ready to go to war against the world and this presi-

dent, as is expected of American presidents, is stepping up to lead an international coalition to confront that threat."

He added, "Ultimately, this international coalition will be responsible for degrading and destroying ISIL. So I think what you can conclude from this is the United States is at war with ISIL the same way that we are at war with al Qaeda and al Qaeda affiliates all around the globe."

The Pentagon had a similar take.

The United States is at war with ISIL "in the same way we're at war and continue to be at war with al-Qaeda and its affiliates," press secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby said.

"There's not going to be a purely military solution to the threat that ISIL poses in the region, specifically inside Iraq," Kirby said. "There's not going to be a military solution here."

Criminal snatched from cops

About 60-70 houses ransacked over his arrest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Locals snatched a criminal from police in the district's Chirirbandar upazila yesterday morning.

Mukul Hossain, 32, son of Sahir Uddin of Singranagar village, was served an arrest warrant in a robbery case, according to police.

Police said acting on a tip-off, some 10-12 policemen raided Singranagar around 9:30am and nabbed Mukul from his house. They also put handcuffs on Mukul.

When the policemen were taking Mukul to the police van, some 20-25 locals attacked them and snatched Mukul, said Rawshan Mostafa, officer-in-charge of Chirirbandar Police Station.

To recapture Mukul, policemen conducted a drive. During the drive, the law enforcers damaged furniture, doors, windows and other things of around 60-70 houses, locals alleged.

But police denied the allegations.

Ferdousi Begum, wife of Abdus Sattar of the village, alleged that police entered their house without informing them anything.

However, they could not catch Mukul.

Police also detained three persons, Motiar Rahman, Arif Hossain and Yakub Ali, for their involvement in the snatching incident, said Rawshan Mostafa.

PM wants unity across Bay

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regional organisation's headquarters in the capital.

The PM unveiled the plaque of the permanent secretariat of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) at the city's Gulshan.

"Opening of the secretariat is the culmination of our collective resolve to create a better and more prosperous future," she said.

"Today is truly a historic day for Bangladesh and the BIMSTEC. It makes the beginning of a new journey towards greater and more intense cooperation for this unique regional organisation that bridges South Asia and the Southeast Asia," added Hasina.

She put forward a six-point proposal, which includes poverty alleviation, cooperation in agriculture sector, making effective the Framework Agreement on BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, improvement of the regional connectivity, cooperation in energy sector and united efforts to

face the challenges of climate change.

About poverty alleviation, she said unless the platform can address the issue of poverty most comprehensively, all economic gains would be meaningless.

She suggested that the BIMSTEC members bolster cooperation in agriculture as majority of the people of this region depend on agriculture for their employment.

On the BIMSTEC FTA, she said though the agreement on goods trade is at the final stage, the deals on other issues like service trade and investment protection still remains at a very initial stage. She emphasised prompt signing of the agreements in the interest of economic harmony in the region.

She underscored the importance of developing communications system. Underdeveloped communications system is one of the main barriers to economic development of this region, the PM pointed out.

"The BIMSTEC is a huge potential area for hydropower in the Himalaya basin

and hydrocarbon in the Bay of Bengal. The member nations have to work together to tap the potential and build up energy security in this region," she mentioned.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam and BIMSTEC Secretary General Sumith Nakandala also spoke.

Later, the PM unveiled a commemorative postal stamp of Tk 4 denomination and a 10-taka opening envelope on the occasion.

Ambassadors and high commissioners of BIMSTEC countries, foreign diplomats and top government officials were present.

The BIMSTEC secretariat has been set up on an abandoned property at House-6, Road- 53 of Gulshan-2, which was previously occupied by Haris Chowdhury, then political secretary to the prime minister during the BNP-led alliance government's tenure of 2001-2006.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina unveils the plaque of BIMSTEC Secretariat at Gulshan in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS