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Patients continue to suffer as indefinite ambulance strike enters its fifth day today

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PENTAGON'S TOP JOB

Obama to name Ashton Carter to replace Chuck Hagel as defence secretary

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Farming nearly mechanised

Farmers bag more crops; come new jobs, go old ones

SOHEL PARVEZ

Gone are the days when farmers had to put in backbreaking labour and depend fully on animals to prepare land and thresh harvested crops.

Farmers now thresh more than 90 percent of their grain crops by machines and till nearly 90 percent of cultivable land by power tillers and tractors -- a transition that took place over the last two and a half decades.

This has enabled growers to produce more crops in a year and bag more produce with lower production cost, according to experts at agro-research institutions and Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU).

Aware of the benefits of mechanised farming, more and more farmers are now using machines for harvesting, seeding and planting.

"It has become a big boon for our farming. Using power tillers, we can prepare land quicker than we do by using animals. Use of machines has reduced our time for tilling and given us scope to grow more crops," said ASM Sinsabi Mandal of Dinajpur district, a major crop zone in the northwest.

The 40-year-old farmer grew only two rice crops -- Aman and Boro -- in a year on his 10-acre farmland when he had to depend on bulls or buffaloes for land preparation. Now by using power tiller, he gets one additional crop every year.

"Now I grow potato or mustard after harvesting Aman rice. It is possible because less time is required for land preparation by using machines," he said. Sinsabi is one of the tens of thousands of farmers in the country who are reaping the advantage of using modern tools in farming.

No official estimate on agricultural mechanisation is available. But

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FAREWELL TO TRADITIONAL FARMING... Machines are fast replacing labour-intensive agricultural tools. In the recently shot pictures, a farmer is using a power tiller to plough his land in Keraniganj near Dhaka while a group of labourers, inset, carrying a hand plough and a ladder is looking for work in Narsingdi.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

KHALEDA'S MEETING WITH GOVT OFFICIALS

March plan was on agenda

BNP officially denies, privately admits; govt warns of legal action

HASAN JAHUD TUSHER and RASHIDUL HASAN

The public officials who met BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on Thursday night assured her of support from the Bangladesh Secretariat for an "upcoming" anti-government movement.

Convinced that the government will hold a general election in March under national and international pressure, the BNP is preparing for an all-out movement targeting the month, party insiders said.

It wants to mobilise pro-BNP officials and employees to turn the screw on the government. It even plans to have the movement centred on the Secretariat, the country's administrative hub, they added.

Some BNP leaders believe movements involving public servants like what the Awami League did in 1996 by forming the Janatar Mancha (people's platform) would be more effective than street agitation.

"Thursday's meeting between the BNP chief and some aggrieved government officials was part of

that plan," said a BNP leader preferring anonymity.

The media was not allowed in the meeting, but the matter leaked out, putting the party high-ups in an unpleasant situation. The same night Khaleda held a separate meeting with some ex-army officials leaning towards BNP, sources said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday warned of action against the public officials who would be found to have participated in the meeting.

"If any government official has violated law by attending the meeting, legal action will be taken," she told a press conference at her Gono Bhaban residence. "Law will take its own course."

The public administration ministry said it would probe the reported meeting and decide on punishments that may include withholding of promotion, salary slash or forced retirement.

"The government won't take this lightly. It is a matter of discipline within the service," said State

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Hasina nudges US

Says country can survive on its own; takes a swipe at TIB

(The Gono Bhaban yesterday denied The Daily Star reporter access to cover the PM's press briefing without giving any reason. The Daily Star, however, carries the report based on information obtained from secondary sources.)

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the US had made all-out efforts but failed to thwart the January 5 parliamentary election in Bangladesh.

She also alleged that the World Bank cancelled its loan for the Padma Bridge project on Washington's instructions.

"America made all kinds of efforts so that the January 5 election does not take place. But it failed," she told a press conference at the Gono Bhaban.



"It is not that everyone in the US government is of the same opinion. There are people of different views too. Bangladesh certainly has friends in there. We have always had their support -- in the times of our Liberation War and in other times."

On the WB cancelling its \$1.2 billion loan, she said the Bank president stopped the funding without any approval. "We heard that it was done at the directives of the then US Secretary of the State [Hillary Clinton]."

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Hydropower-ed talks likely

Bhutanese PM due today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay arrives here this morning for holding talks with his Bangladesh counterpart on increasing bilateral trade, establishing connectivity, cooperation in power sector and tri-nation hydroelectricity generation.

Diplomatic sources said the Bhutanese PM will lead a 26-member high-profile team of ministers, business delegates and media persons to renew the bilateral trade agreement between two countries and discuss other issues.

Bangladesh and Bhutan signed the agreement in 1980, granting each other the "most favoured nation" preferential status of trade development.

Officials of foreign and commerce ministries said the bilateral trade agreement will be renewed for five years but Bhutan wants to renew the agreement for a further ten-year

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The AF Mujibur Rahman Mathematics Building on Dhaka University campus. Equipped with advanced amenities for maths studies, this Tk 26-crore facility is built with funding from AF Mujibur Rahman Foundation.

Love for maths stands tall

Son of maths genius helps build 8-storey building at DU for students to excel in science

WASIM BIN HABIB

For philanthropic causes, some people donate a hefty amount of money to a charity or help out a disadvantaged community. Others like to set up facilities for orphans or provide indigent students with tuition scholarships.

But the AF Mujibur Rahman Foundation, a charitable trust, has done an awe-inspiring job of building an eight-

storey modern academic building for about 850 students of pure and applied mathematics of Dhaka University when many of its departments are facing shortage of classrooms.

The AF Mujibur Rahman Ganit Bhaban is next to the Science Annex Building of DU. It is all set to open its doors to teachers and students today.

The building has 15 classrooms, each

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Mujibur Rahman

Truck kills mother in front of 7-yr-old son

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Right in front of her seven-year-old boy, a woman was crushed under the wheels of a truck in Satkhira town yesterday morning.

The horrific accident left the boy, Shuvo Karim, speechless. He only gazed at people in blank astonishment.

The dead, Ruma Sarker, 45, is the wife of Golam Rosul of Itagachha Bazar in the district town.

Rosul said he along with his wife was taking Shuvo, a class-two student of Asmani Shishu Niketon in the town, to a coaching centre on his motorbike around 6:00am. Shuvo was seated between him and his wife on the motorbike.

Little did Shuvo know that it would be his last journey with his mother. After around 15 minutes of the ride, a bicycle hit their motorcycle on Satkhira-Kaligang road in Itagachha Bazar area. Ruma fell on the road.

Just then the Kaliganj-bound potato-laden truck, coming from the opposite direction, ran over Ruma in front of Shuvo and him.

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