



Farmers spread paddy on the street at Satmatha of Rangpur city yesterday demanding that the government immediately buy paddy directly from them. They also claimed that middlemen were preventing them from selling their produce to the government.

PHOTO: STAR

Get rid of the middlemen

Farmers hold unorthodox demo; demand govt buy rice, wheat from them directly

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Farmers yesterday staged a demonstration in Rangpur city, demanding that the government immediately buy paddy, rice and wheat directly from them during the ongoing procurement drive across the country.

Farmers from different places gathered at Satmatha and staged the demonstration on Rangpur-Kurigram highway with festoons and banners at the call of the Rangpur unit of Samajtantrik Khetmajur O Krishak Front.

Speakers at the programme said farmers of eight northern districts in Rangpur division were incurring losses despite this season's bumper production of Boro paddy due to favourable weather.

Besides, the paddy procurement drives are disappointing farmers as genuine paddy producers are allegedly not being allowed by middlemen and influentials to supply their paddy and

rice to the government.

The speakers also criticised government officials for the delay in starting the procurement drive. The drive was to start on May 5, but it began after May 12 in many places.

The government fixed the prices at Tk 23 and Tk 32 per kilogram of paddy and rice respectively, while the rate of per kg of wheat was set at Tk 20.

They also alleged that not a single gram of paddy or rice was procured directly from the genuine paddy growers since the drive began.

As the farmers cannot take advantage of the procurement drive, they are selling their produce at throwaway prices.

The speakers called upon the government to consider the farmers' demands seriously.

Palash Kanti Nag and Anwar Hossain Babul, leaders of the farmers, were among those who spoke at the programme.

No fuss with Fizz, please

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on to feed him the famous *Balish misti* (pillow-shaped sweet) from Netrokona, a district town some 40 kms away from Dhaka. Hard to tell how the specially made, heavily-sweetened Balish tasted in Mustafizur's mouth late in the night at the airport. Just a little flinch! Affectionately called The Fizz by the world media and cricket buffs, Mustafizur could cleverly disguise how it tasted the way he disguises his cutter, slower delivery or fast-swinging toe-crusher with no visible change in the bowling action.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recognised him as a national hero, the deputy minister informed Mustafizur, who starred in Sunrisers Hyderabad's epic journey to winning the trophy for the first time. The shaven-headed footballer-turned-politician also disclosed that a grand reception by the government will follow soon.

Isn't this reaction from the sports ministry a bit much?

Indeed, our little Mustafizur stood apart in the prestigious Indian T20 league this season. No other foreign cricketer, let alone someone from Bangladesh, has been such an instant hit, seized so much of the media spotlight and created such a fan frenzy in India. Whether his team was playing or not, his bowling remained the

subject of absorbing analysis by cricket greats everyday throughout the tournament.

Yes, his 17 wickets in 16 matches at a 6.90 economy rate were simply unbelievable in the ball-bashing version of cricket. Not surprising therefore, that the 20-year-old was voted the Emerging-Player-of-the-IPL for the way he dictated terms to the world's top batsmen like Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers. It was a sight to behold the way the left-arm pacer unleashed a perfect yorker that not only rattled Andre Russell's middle stump but also brought down the big West Indian to the floor.

Cricket lovers and the media have plenty of reasons to go gaga over Mustafizur for his IPL epic. But how should our government react to a cricketer's performance in India's cricket league? Should it too act like the cricket fraternity? After all it's Sunrisers Hyderabad who won the IPL championship, not the Bangladesh national team.

What Mustafizur did made us mighty proud. He is indeed the source of many cheers for Bangladesh ever since he made his debut in international cricket only 13 months ago. He is our cricket's hottest property and should be handled with extreme care. The sports ministry must not go overboard. A reception or awarding of a flat to Mustafizur will only

make the government a laughing stock internationally. And this unnecessary pampering may greatly hamper the youngster's progress to a greater level.

Rather, the sports ministry should leave Mustafizur to the devices of the cricket board, which must ensure that The Fizz does not fizzle out anytime soon. Mustafizur has to work hard on his fitness and skills to prolong his international career. He has to hone his mystery deliveries and add a few more weapons to his arsenal in order to stay effective, and even to increase his efficacy. The cricket board needs to take good care of the pipeline for new Mustafizurs. It has to have a system in place so that Mustafizurs do not just slip into oblivion after some time.

One just wishes the sports ministry could spare some of its enthusiasm for some other games. The under-14 girls clinched the AFC regional championships twice, in Nepal and Tajikistan, but that phenomenal achievement could hardly stir up the sports ministry. No cash bonanza, no reception for them. Those wonder girls do not know yet what the future holds for them. The gold medal winners in the South Asian Games in India this year also missed the attention of our sports bosses. So, what are they up to? Wake up, sports bosses!

Keep your bowling secrets unexposed

PM advises Mustafizur

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday suggested that cricketer Mustafizur Rahman should take required precautions to stretch his career.

"He [Mustafizur] needs to be more cautious so that the secrets of his bowling techniques remain unexposed... he should play limited matches to avoid injuries as first bowlers generally get exposed to repeated injury problem," Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal quoted the PM as saying after witnessing a video documentary on the cutter master along with her cabinet colleagues after an ECNEC meeting.

The minister said the premier took pride in the player's performance and expressed her all good wishes for him.

Kamal, former chairman of International Cricket Council, said careers of several renowned fast bowlers like Michael Holding and Joel Garner didn't last long as they were exposed to repeated injuries.

6 militants to die

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accused Palash in the dock. But I did not notice any sign of repentance on their face or demeanor. I do not find any mitigating circumstances justifying a lenient approach in determining appropriate sentence for the accused persons," observed the judge in the judgment.

The court on January 21 framed charges against the accused. The trial has been completed within 26 working days after recording statements of 64 prosecution witnesses.

On April 21 last year, a gang of 8-10 people aged between 25 and 40 looted Tk 35 lakh from a branch of Bangladesh Commerce Bank in Ashulia Industrial Area on the outskirts of the capital in broad daylight, according to case document.

They attacked bank officials, clients and locals with sharp weapons, fired

shots and hurled crude bombs while escaping the scene, leaving seven people dead.

A mob later beat one of the robbers dead and handed another over to police.

On December 1, Ashulia police submitted two charge sheets in the two cases -- one for the killings and robbery and the other for possession of explosives. The second case is pending with another Dhaka court.

Ashulia police during the investigation into the cases found involvement of 13 people.

One of them was killed by the mob and the mastermind of the robbery, Abdullah Al Baki, died in a "shootout" with law enforcers in the capital's Gabtoli area in November last year, police said.

Baki was said to be a member of Ansarullah Bangla Team and a former JMB operative.



Mizanur

Miah Rubel

Jabath Kysar

Sohel Hawlader

4 Bangladeshis convicted

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The four along with two others were charged on Friday under the country's terrorism (Suppression of Financing) Act (TSOFA) with providing or collecting money to fund terrorist acts in Bangladesh.

The other two -- Zaman Daulat, 34, and Mamun Leakot Ali, 29, -- denied the charges. A pre-trial conference for them has been set for June 9, the report said.

Prosecution sought a three-week adjournment to prepare submissions for sentencing. The four men are expected to appear in court on June 21.

Citing court documents, the report said Rahman led the group and Mamun was the group's deputy leader.

"Miah was in the group's financial council, while Jabath handled the group's media. Zaman and Sohel were in the group's security and fighter councils respectively," it said.

Miah and Jabath were also accused of possessing money for terrorist purposes.

"Court documents show that Jabath was in possession of \$1,360 -- this includes a sum of \$1,060 that he was handed by Miah last month," the report added.

For involvement in terrorist financing, the men face up to 10 years in jail, a maximum fine of \$5,000,000 (\$362,000), or both, reports AFP.

The six were among eight men arrested between late March and early last month. Working in the marine and construction industries, they called themselves the Islamic State in Bangladesh (ISB). The Straits Times report said.

They were planning attacks in Bangladesh in hopes of toppling the government, it added.

The report also said their goal was to set up an Islamic State in Bangladesh and bring it under the self-declared caliphate of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The Bangladesh government, however, repeatedly denied existence of IS in the country.

The Straits Times report said that according to the statement of facts presented to the court, Rahman was radicalised in Bangladesh by one Jahangir Alam in April last year.

Rahman, who went to Singapore to work in December 2015, met Miah, Zaman and another Bangladeshi, Sohag Ibrahim, 27, in January this year in Sembawang where he convinced them to join ISIS, the report said.

Sohag was among the group of eight detained under the ISA.

"The documents also show that the men had discussed 'waging an armed jihad', and that they would find and kill non-believers when they returned to Bangladesh," it added.

Meanwhile, officials of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, who were investigating a case following the arrest of five Bangladeshi workers deported by Singapore authorities, said the Bangladeshi expatriates were radicalised in Singapore.

Earlier, Singapore authorities deported 26 out of 27 Bangladeshi construction workers arrested late last year for "supporting armed jihad ideology of terrorist groups such as Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda".

Arresting 14 of them on December 21, police after investigation said 26 deportees had no links to Islamic State or al-Qaeda. But the 14 had links with banned local outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team.

Tree man

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The 26-year-old, thought to be the fourth man in the world with the rare skin disorder caused by human papilloma virus, was admitted to the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery of DMCH on January 30.

Samanta Lal Sen, chief coordinator of the institute, said five operations had so far been conducted on his hands and legs.

The warts have mostly been removed from his limbs and now the surgeons are working on beautification.

"We are hopeful of completing his treatment in four to five months," Samanta said, adding that the overall health condition of Abul, who hails from Khulna, has improved significantly in the last couple of months.

Abul told The Daily Star, "After the completion of my treatment, I want to live like a healthy man and to run a business."

Budget to get 30pc bigger

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The main focus of Finance Minister AMA Muhith's eighth consecutive budget would be on speeding up implementation of some mega infrastructure projects and boosting private investment with the aim of creating more jobs.

He would project an economic growth of 7.5 percent in the coming fiscal year as the government seeks to inject life into stagnant private investment and create more jobs, say finance ministry officials.

For the last two fiscal years, the government closely monitored the progress of the fast-track projects.

This time, the finance minister would include them in a separate capital budget to demonstrate the government's emphasis on them, according to the officials.

If some of the big projects are to be completed before the next national elections due in 2019, the work of these projects must be carried on in full swing from FY 2016-17.

The government's main target is to finish the construction of the Padma Bridge, the largest ever infrastructure project that would connect the country's south-western part with the capital. Once completed, it would boost economic output by up to 2 percentage points.

The Awami League-led government had pledged to complete the project in its previous term that ended in 2013.

But it was not possible as the project was delayed following the World Bank's withdrawal of financing over corruption allegation. The project was the source of a prolonged debate.

In FY 2015-16, the government allocated more than Tk 7,000 crore for the project but brought it down to Tk 3,592 crore in the revised outlay. Only Tk 892 crore was spent on the project as of March.

Of the Tk 28,000 crore estimated cost of the project, around 32 percent was spent till March this year.

Government high-ups are keen to open the much-talked-about bridge to vehicles by December 2018.

"There was delay in project work due to some technical reasons in the current fiscal year. But the construction will go on in full swing in the coming

fiscal year," said an official of the project, seeking anonymity.

The government also wants to complete at least one unit of the Rooppur Nuclear Power project by 2018 though the deadline for its completion is 2023.

It is also eager to show visible progress in the construction of some other projects such as Padma Bridge Rail Link, Matarbari coal-fired power plant and Metro Rail.

The document for the mega projects would be titled "Big projects in Transforming Infrastructure: New dimension in Accelerating Growth".

Experts have stressed the need for paying special attention to major infrastructure projects for attaining higher growth and moving more people out of poverty.

"We would like to see much more serious attention to transformative projects both in terms of budgetary provisions and implementation support," said Zahid Hussain, lead economist of the World Bank in Bangladesh.

To carry forward Bangladesh's dream of graduating to a middle income country by 2021, the finance minister in his budget speech would outline ways to put the country on a higher growth path for attaining 8 percent GDP growth at the end of the government's tenure.

Job creation for over two million youths joining the workforce every year would receive attention, as job growth slowed in recent years.

Of the total budgetary outlay, Tk 110,700 crore would be set aside for development expenditure and Tk 229,900 crore for non-development expenditure.

Salaries and allowances of government staffs, interest payment and subsidies would account for almost half of the non-development expenditure.

In the current fiscal year, the new pay scale has been partly implemented. An allocation of Tk 45,153 crore was made for salaries and allowances of public servants. The amount is 54 percent higher than that of the previous fiscal year.

In the next fiscal year, Tk 51,000 crore may be allocated for payment of salaries and allowances.

Over the last several years, the

government had to spend a huge amount on subsidies.

However, the amount of subsidies has been declining after fuel prices started falling since mid-2014.

Subsidies stood at Tk 25,000 crore in the original budget of FY 2015-16 but it came down to Tk 18,000 crore in the revised budget.

This time, there would be no subsidy on fuel.

However, Tk 5,500 crore would be set aside for gas subsidies. Besides, subsidies on food are going up. In total, subsidies are likely to surpass Tk 28,000 crore.

Zahid Hussain said, "We would like to see smarter subsidies. The global commodity price situation has presented to us a unique opportunity to completely reorient subsidy management towards promoting the often conflicting goals of efficiency and equity. We have missed out so far. The tailwinds are fading."

The government is going to set an ambitious revenue generation target to meet the expenditure though the country couldn't achieve its revenue targets in the last four fiscal years.

The revenue generation target may be set at Tk 242,750 crore. The National Board of Revenue would have to generate 84 percent of the targeted amount.

The NBR revenue target would be Tk 203,150 crore, 35.43 percent higher than that in the revised budget of the current fiscal year.

Of the revenue target, 36.47 percent would come from value added tax and 35.93 percent from income tax.

In FY 2015-16, the share of income tax in the revenue target was higher than that of VAT.

In the outgoing fiscal year, the government set 30 percent revenue generation growth. But it could manage a growth of only 15.91 percent as of March.

The new VAT Act is supposed to take effect from July 1 as per the government's commitment to the International Monetary Fund.

But it appears the government wouldn't be able to fully implement the Act from the first day of the new fiscal year amid opposition from the business community. Some of the