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Bags promise banana boost

Farmers eye spotless chemical-free bananas for export

ANWAR ALI, RABIUL HASAN and ANDREW EAGLE

For a long time the banana plantations in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj have relied on pesticides. Now, eco-friendly bags to protect the ripening fruit promise to revolutionise the industry and make chemical-free bananas the marketplace standard. Moreover, the new 'safe' bananas open the door to exports.

"Most bananas [skins] are full of spots, which indicates chemical use," says senior scientific officer from the regional horticulture research station in Chapainawabganj, Sorof Uddin. "In many cases, immature bananas are ripened in shady trenches using smoke and harmful carbide." The scientist has long been seeking a healthier production alternative.

During his three-year stay in China as part of his PhD study, Sorof observed a bagging method to produce safe fruit. Polythene-paper bags are used to cover the fruit as it ripens, offering protection from strong sunshine, rain, fog and pest attack without the need for chemicals. From 2015, after his return to Bangladesh, Sorof worked to popularise the idea among mango growers. He also had an eye on the banana industry. Sorof hoped to find banana-growers willing to give the new system a try.

In 36-year-old pesticide trader Sujammel Haque, Sorof found an unlikely ally. Sujammel owns two pesticide shops in Baya market of Poba upazila in Rajshahi. Selling pesticides is the mainstay of his livelihood but the inherited business has never pleased him.

Sujammel's nephew Momin who works in one of the shops said, "My uncle says pesticides are killing us."

"He says commercial bananas are laced with chemicals and he's always wished for an alternative."

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PHOTO: RABIUL HASAN

Ramez Mir is covering ripening bananas with an eco-friendly bag meant to protect the fruit from strong sunshine, rain, fog and pest attacks.

AL secys want action against ministers, MP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some members of the ruling Awami League secretariat have demanded organisational action against Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Railways Minister Mazbul Hoque and Comilla-6 lawmaker AKM Bahauddin Bahar for their role in the run-up to the Comilla City Corporation elections.

They alleged that the AL candidate was defeated for their anti-party role. Some of them even demanded their expulsion from the party, said sources of meeting of the AL secretariat held yesterday.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader chaired the meeting.

Election to Comilla City Corporation was held on March 30. BNP-nominated mayor candidate Monirul Haque Sakku won the polls, beating AL candidate Anjum Sultana Shima by over 10,000 votes.

After the AL's candidate defeat, AL leaders pointed out that party's internal

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Women rebuilt Rwanda from ashes of genocide

Lawmaker Gakuba shares her thoughts with The Daily Star

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RASHIDUL HASAN

The twilight on April 6 in 1994 appeared darker than the night in Rwanda.

A plane carrying the then presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down over Kigali, the country's capital, leaving no survivors.

It could not be known who were responsible. But within an hour, the presidential guards together with the members of the Rwandan armed forces and Hutu militia groups set up roadblocks and barricades and began slaughtering the Tutsis and moderate Hutus with impunity. Among the first victims of the massacre was the then Hutu prime minister who was killed the next day.

An estimated one million Rwandan men, women and children were killed by their fellow citizens only in three months between April and July in 1994.

The country's social, economic and political institutions were wiped out by the genocide. Rwanda plunged into a deep crisis.

A different chapter of the country's history then began in 1998 as Vice President of Rwandan Senate,



Jeanne d'Arc Gakuba

upper house of parliament, Jeanne d'Arc Gakuba recalls the day when the leadership of her country, elderly people and others sat together to discuss how to rebuild the nation.

"Among different strategies, they decided very firmly to open space for women as they [women] were the majority of the population after killings of a huge number of males in the three months of genocide," said Gakuba in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on Saturday.

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FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IPU members debate on preventive mechanism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has sought to set up a mechanism to prevent foreign interference and intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

The organisation of world parliaments yesterday urged parliamentarians from more than 100 countries who had gathered to attend its five-day-long conference in Dhaka to support the establishment and effective functioning of IPU observatory in this regard.

The observatory will put in place a system to issue warnings of outside interference and intervention in state affairs, according to a draft resolution discussed on the second day of the IPU assembly.

People have exclusive right to determining their own political future, based on specific features of their countries, according to the resolution.

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Trudeau 'challenges' Perry to fight rematch



CNN ONLINE

Justin Trudeau has three words for actor Mattew Perry: Bring. It. On.

The Canadian prime minister is asking for a rematch of an elementary school fight after the "Friends" star said he beat up Trudeau when the two attended school in Canada.

"My friend ... who was also in the fifth grade in Canada, reminded me that we actually beat up Justin Trudeau," Perry revealed on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" last month.

"We both beat him up. I think he was excelling in a sport that we weren't, so it was pure jealousy."

Trudeau's father was the prime minister at the time, so we're not sure what Perry was thinking.

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DB probing Maldivian model's death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The unnatural death case filed after the death of Maldivian medical student and model Raudha Athif was transferred to the Detective Branch (DB) of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) yesterday.

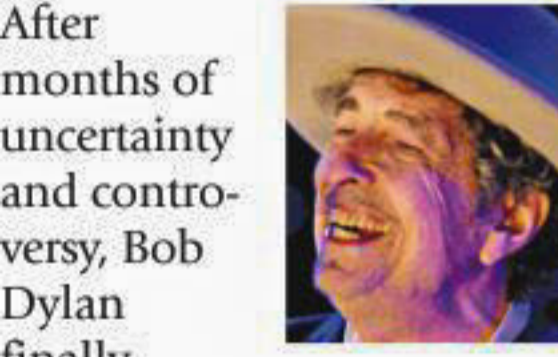
RMP Commissioner Shafiqul Islam ordered the transfer after Raudha's parents and brother met him at his office on Friday and expressed their dissatisfaction over the investigation, said Rajshahi police.

"We have already started the investigation. Inspector Rashidul Islam of the DB has been assigned the task and he is working on it," said Al Ameen Hossain, an assistant commissioner of the DB.

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Dylan finally accepts 2016 Nobel Prize

AFP, Stockholm



After months of uncertainty and controversy, Bob Dylan finally accepted the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature at a jovial, champagne-laced ceremony on Saturday, the Swedish Academy announced.

The academy, which awards the coveted prize, ended prolonged speculation as to whether the 75-year-old troubadour would use a concert stopover in

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

Students line up to enter examination halls at Dhaka College centre on the first day of HSC exams yesterday.

COLOMBIA MUDSLIDE Rescuers race to reach survivors

Death toll tops 254; hundreds missing; state of emergency declared to speed up aid ops

AGENCIES

A grim search for the missing resumed at dawn yesterday in southern Colombia after surging rivers sent an avalanche of floodwaters, mud and debris through a small city, killing around 254 people and leaving many more injured and homeless.

People pried through piles of rocks and wooden planks that entombed homes. Streets were covered in thick sand, mud and tree limbs from the rivers and rainforest that surround the town of Mocoa.

At the Vatican, Pope Francis said he was "profoundly saddened" by the disaster, which struck the town with little warning late Friday after days of torrential rains that caused flooding of three area rivers.

"I pray for the victims and want to assure those who weep for the missing of my closeness to them," the pope said in a statement.

The Colombian army said in a statement that 254 people were killed, 400 people had been injured and 200 were missing. More than 1,100 soldiers and police officers were called in to help dig people out in 17 affected neighborhoods, reported Reuters.

The Pacific rim of South America has been hard hit in recent months by floods and mudslides, with scores killed in Peru and Ecuador as well.

President Juan Manuel Santos was scheduled to return to Mocoa yesterday along with cabinet ministers to supervise rescue efforts in the heavily forested region.

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PRAYER TIMING APRIL 3
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-40 12-45 4-45 6-21 7-45
JAMAAT 5-15 1-15 5-00 6-24 8-15
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION