



PHOTO: MINTU DESWARA

Early flooding inundates boro paddy fields in Tanguar Haor of Sunamganj's Tahirpur. The photo was taken on April 6.

Govt plans

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The government's rice and paddy procurement drive will start on May 2 and continue till August 31, while wheat procurement period is set from April 18 to June 30.

This year's procurement drive comes at a time when hundreds of farmers in the northeastern haor (backswamp) region have lost nearly half a million tonnes of rice due to an unusually early flash flood.

The food minister, however, said the loss in haor would not affect the total rice output in the country.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed and other officials concerned attended the meeting.

Village

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baseless, said Sekandar Akanda, member of Hatilet ward.

Before shaving the heads of the couple, who are day labourers, the arbitrators beat them up with shoes in front of hundreds of villagers, he said quoting locals.

"The perpetrators did not inform us [local representative]. I was informed of the matter by local people on Friday morning. Then I visited the spot," Sekandar said.

Laxmi yesterday filed a case against 16 people including 12 named with Phulbaria Police Station.

Police have visited the spot, said Rifat Khan Rajib, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Drives are on to arrest the people responsible for the incident, the OC said, adding that they fled the area after the matter spread.

While talking to The Daily Star, Koyes and Laxmi, mother of two girls, said they wanted exemplary punishment for those involved in the crime.

For the love

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"I learnt some primary treatment from vets. What we do at Paw is whenever we hear about any animal being abused or injured we reach out and rescue," Emil, who designs interiors when he is not tending animals, said.

"Cats and dogs are friendly, making it really easy for people to abuse and torture them," he added.

PAW also creates awareness against animal abuse, he said.

In the first few months, PAW was financed by Emil himself. Others began to chip in later.

Emil dreams of establishing a larger animal welfare institution where he wants to run a modern veterinary hospital, diagnostic centre, day-care, physiotherapy. Courses on veterinary would also be there, he hopes.

PAW foundation is currently running a few programmes and campaigns to dispel superstition about animals. PAW also tries to get the rescued animals adopted.

3,000 migrants rescued off Libya coast

AFP, Rome

The Italian coastguard and other boats rescued some 3,000 migrants from unseaworthy boats off the Libyan coast on Saturday, as the good weather pushes the numbers up, a participating NGO said.

In all 35 rescue operations were launched during the day, with 15 of them still underway as night fell, the coastguard said.

German NGO Jugend Rettet, which took part in the rescue operations on Saturday, said 3,000 people had been plucked to safety during a particularly busy day due to the fine Spring weather in the Mediterranean.

Jugend Rettet spokeswoman Pauline Schmidt told AFP that a further 1,000 people remained to be rescued from inflatable dinghies and other craft, with the rescue ships reaching capacity.

Erdogan 'winner'

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well behind in the early count, but failed to overtake the "Yes".

"The presidential system, according to unofficial results, has been confirmed with a 'Yes' vote," Prime Minister Binali Yildirim told jubilant supporters from the balcony of the headquarters of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Ankara.

"This is a decision made by the people. In our democracy's history, a new page has opened."

But voting patterns showed Turkey deeply divided over the sweeping changes, with the "No" vote victorious in the country's three biggest cities.

The "Yes" vote held up strongly in Erdogan's Anatolian heartland but the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal regions and Kurdish-dominated southeast had backed the "No" camp.

In a major disappointment for the president, the 'No' vote was just ahead in his hometown of Istanbul and in the capital Ankara and clearly ahead in the third city of Izmir.

In an interview with state TV late Friday, Erdogan had predicted a far clearer victory saying polls showed a 55-60 percent share of the vote.

"VOTE FOR DESTINY" But Turkey's two main opposition parties said they would challenge the results after alleged violations.

The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) said that whatever the final result, it would challenge two-thirds of the vote, saying: "There is an indication of a 3-4 percentage point manipulation of the vote."

The deputy head of the Republican People's Party (CHP), Erdal Aksunger, said it could appeal up to 60 percent of the vote.

"Believe me, this election is not over," he told CNN Turk, quoted by the Dogan news agency. "This is totally invalid. We are declaring this here."

The opposition had already complained that the referendum has been conducted on unfair terms, with 'Yes' posters ubiquitous on the streets and opposition voices squeezed from the media.

The poll took place under a state of

emergency that has seen 47,000 people arrested in an unprecedented crackdown after the failed putsch of July last year.

Closely watched on Monday by the initial assessment of the international observer mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

'DRASTIC SHAKE-UP' Beyond changing the government system, the vote could also have even wider implications for Turkey which joined NATO in 1952 and for the last half-century has set its sights on joining the European Union.

Erdogan has warned Brussels that in the event of a 'Yes' vote he would sign any bill agreed by parliament to reinstate capital punishment, a move that would automatically end its EU bid.

Western reactions to the referendum outcome will be crucial after Erdogan accused Turkey's allies of failing to show sufficient solidarity in the wake of the July 15 failed coup.

The new presidential system would dispense with the office of prime minister and centralise the entire executive bureaucracy under the president, giving Erdogan the direct power to appoint ministers.

The system would come into force after the elections in November 2019. Erdogan, who became president in 2014 after serving as premier from 2003, could then seek two more five-year terms.

Supporters see the new system as an essential modernisation step for Turkey that will remove the risk of the political chaos that blighted the 1990s and is blamed for the 2000-2001 financial crisis.

Opponents fear it risks granting Erdogan authoritarian powers and allow him to ride roughshod over key institutions like the judiciary and parliament.

Sinan Ekim and Kemal Kirisci of the Brookings Institution think-tank said in a report the changes if agreed "would set in motion the most drastic shake-up of the country's politics and system of governance in its 94-year-long history".

In tears they mourn

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family. His sudden death has made us helpless," Monirul's wife Parvin Akther told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I don't know what to do now. I have a 15-month-old son to raise."

"I'll try my best to bring him up in such a way that he can join the police force and serve the country."

She appealed to the government to provide her with a job to help raise her son and support the family.

In an emotion-choked voice, Kaiser's wife Sayra Farhana Chowdhury said, "What should I say... I have nothing left to say. I hope no one will ever fall a victim to such a tragic incident."

"Moments before the blast, my husband phoned me and asked me to pray for him. But I couldn't even imagine that it would be our last conversation."

Sayra said her husband had worked in UN missions abroad and faced many tough situations, but she had never thought that he would die that day.

She believes people from all walks of life would join the fight against militancy and help prevent recurrence of such incidents in the future.

Kaiser from Sunamganj was taken in the police as a sub-inspector in 1991, while Monirul from Noakhali joined the force in the same rank in 2004.

Seven people, including the two inspectors and director of Rab intelligence wing Lt Col Abul Kalam Azad, were killed in two blasts during the anti-militancy drive.

Yesterday, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Haque handed over Tk 24 lakh each to the families of the two slain officers.

Sayra received Tk 4 lakh in cash from Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP) and saving certificates of Tk 20 lakh.

Monirul's wife Parvin got savings certificates of Tk 10 lakh and Tk 2 lakh in cash from the SMP while his mother Firoza received Tk 12 lakh.

Seven police officials, who were injured in the recent anti-militancy drives in Sylhet, Moulvibazar and Chittagong, were also given Tk 50,000 each in financial help.

Apart from them, Tk 10 lakh was given to the family of slain Rab official Lt Col Azad more than a week ago.

Speaking at yesterday's programme, Shahidul said the police have been fighting militancy with great courage.

He termed some political leaders' recent comments on anti-militancy drives "irresponsible".

"Some political leaders' irresponsible comments on the recent anti-militancy drives have drawn our attention. They are trying to demean the law enforcers' efforts to curb militancy," he said.

"Such comments will encourage militants..."

He also called for refraining from making such "irresponsible", "fictitious" and "false" comments at a time when the nation is united against militancy.

Thanking people for their support during anti-militancy drives, the IGP said, "We will carry on our efforts against militancy with people's support."

Additional IGP Mokhlesur Rahman, DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Miah, Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit Chief Monirul Islam, and SMP Commissioner Golam Kibria, among others, were present at the function.

Mt Everest

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camp a month before the start of the season to acclimatise.

"Everyone will be in a hurry to reach the peak when the weather clears; there is no management up there to fix turns for the climbers," said Sonam Sherpa, who has scaled Mt Everest five times working as an aide to climbers.

"So there is a possibility of a traffic jam this year. Returning climbers in general have depleted stock of oxygen with them and they are exhausted, which means life hangs in the balance," he said.

A good weather means expedition teams will start climbing up from camps two, three and four, resulting in "traffic jam", the report said.

Those with 2014 permission are likely to return to scale the peak this year as in 2015, the government introduced a new law allowing climbers a three years' window to scale Mt Everest with a single permit and fare.

"This is the final year of the three-year period and the climbers who had taken permission earlier have also arrived to ensure that they do not miss the chance. That is why the number of climbers this season is high," Durgadatta Dhakal, information officer at the Department of Tourism, was quoted as saying.

This year, 267 climbers have already started trekking from Namche to the Everest base camp, said Kapindra Rai, programme officer of the Everest Pollution Control Committee.

Around 290 climbers had arrived at the base camp after acquiring permission to climb Mt Everest last year when hundreds were able to reach the summit following two years of disasters on the mountain.

Yaba trader

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Karim to free him after a Chittagong Court denied him bail.

Detectives arrested Fazlul, his HC Lawyer Abdus Samad and his clerk Boni Amin in the capital's Bangshal on Saturday and came to know about a gang of crooked lawyers and clerks that recently forged documents in at least 12 other cases and freed the accused.

Briefing reporters at Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Media Centre, Detective Branch (DB) Joint Commissioner Abdul Baten yesterday said most of the suspects who went on the loose through forgery were arrested under Narcotics Control Act.

After Fazlul was arrested with the haul of yaba tablets by Bayezid Bostami Police last July, he was sent to jail. But he was freed on bail on February 29, Baten said.

Besides, forged documents of 13 cases, police found 81 seals of different district and session judges courts and deputy jailers in the arrestees possession.

The arrested lawyer and his clerk admitted in primary interrogation that they had recently secured bail of another drug dealer Hasan, who was arrested with 6,000 pieces of yaba in the capital's Mughdah area last year.

"They used to help criminals secure bail by forging documents and concealing facts," Baten said.

In some cases, the gang simply forged bail orders from courts and took those to respective jail authorities and hoodwinked jailers, added the police official.

Samad charged between Tk 50,000 and Tk 2 lakh for securing bails, Baten said, adding that the gang had been active for years.

Detectives said they identified at least six other lawyers and some clerks involved in the crime and were looking for them.

On March 22, a Dhaka court sentenced five people, including a bench assistant (peshkar) of another court, to 14 years' imprisonment each, for faking bail orders and forging the signature of a judge.

The verdict came in a case filed against them in 2015 in connection with freeing 106 suspects in 76 criminal cases.

2 girls 'raped'

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held in front of his residence in Mir Hazirbagh, said Jatrabari Police Station Officer-in-Charge Anisur Rahman.

Two rape cases have been filed against him and the other accused, Rifat, Rabbi and Zahid, who are all aged around 18 years, he added.

The girls, friends and also neighbours in Dayaganj, were returning home from the residence of one of their grandmothers in the adjoining neighbourhood of Mir Hazirbagh in the afternoon, said the father of one victim.

They happened to meet Yasin, with whom they were acquainted with along with one of the other youths, he said.

Yasin started up a conversation and tricked them into entering an under-construction building in Mir Hazirbagh around 10:30pm, he said.

Yasin and one of the youths carried out the assault while the other two assisted them, said the parent. The attackers fled when the victims managed to scream out and attract locals' attention, he added.

Police rescued the victims on being informed by the locals.

Kitchen fire kills wife of BNP chief's press secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The wife of BNP chief's press secretary died from her burn injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) on Friday.

Sohel Mahmud, head of the forensic medicine department of DMC, who performed autopsy on Tania Khan, said he did not know the deceased was the wife of Maruf Kamal Khan.

The hospital sources also echoed the same.

Tania, 47, was admitted to the Burn and Plastic Surgery unit of DMCH around 2:30am on Thursday with 75 percent burns. She died there around 11:30pm on Friday, said Partha Shankar Pal, resident surgeon of the unit.

Tania's son Rifat Kamal Khan filed an unnatural death case with Adabor Police Station on Saturday.

Tania, mother of five, was burnt when she was cooking food at her house in the capital's Adabor area, said Durul Hoda, sub-inspector of the police station and also the investigation officer of the case.

Quoting Tania's family members, the police official said Tania had a minor "mental" health issue.

This correspondent could not reach Maruf as his mobile phone was switched-off.

In June 2016, Tania had filed a case with Mohammadpur Police Station against Maruf in connection with torturing her.

Britain uniting around Brexit

Says Theresa May

AFP, London

Prime Minister Theresa May said yesterday that Britain was beginning to unite behind Brexit, 10 months after the divisive referendum that saw the country narrowly vote to leave the European Union.

"This year, after a period of intense debate over the right future for our country, there is a sense that people are coming together and uniting behind the opportunities that lie ahead," May said in her Easter message.

May backed remaining in the EU but is spearheading Britain's drive to the departure gates.

She formally notified Brussels last month of Britain's intention to leave the bloc, triggering two years of exit negotiations.

"For at heart, this country is one great union of people and nations with a proud history and a bright future," May said.

"And as we face the opportunities ahead of us -- the opportunities that stem from our decision to leave the European Union and embrace the world -- our shared interests, our shared ambitions and above all our shared values can -- and must -- bring us together."

The Sunday Telegraph newspaper reported that support for Brexit has hit a five-month high, with 55 percent backing Britain's exit from the EU, according to a poll by research company Orb International.

"Since November, the British public are slowly becoming more comfortable with the idea of Brexit," said Orb

International managing director Johnny Heald.

However, "the public is increasingly concerned more about free trade than immigration -- marking a reversal of the preference aired during the campaign".

May, 60, is the daughter of an Anglican vicar.

Turning to faith in her Easter message, she said: "We should be confident about the role that Christianity has to play in the lives of people in our country."

LAND DISPUTE

Vietnamese cops 'held hostage' by residents

AFP, Hanoi

At least a dozen Vietnamese police have been held hostage over a land dispute with residents near Hanoi, activists and state media said yesterday, in a rare show of defiance of communist authorities.

The incident began on Saturday in the suburban My Duc district when authorities clashed with villagers who alleged their land was illegally seized for sale by a military-owned telecoms firm.

The exact number of policemen and officials being held by residents could not immediately be confirmed, but images on social media showed at least 12 uniformed men under guard.

Cops searching

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My husband was a former lawmaker. It is the government's duty to find him."

Ilias, the then organising secretary of the BNP, went missing along with his driver in the wee hours of April 18, 2012. His car was found abandoned in Banani with all its four doors wide open.

"The government or the law enforcement agencies might have thought that we have forgotten him as years passed by. But memory of Ilias Ali haunts me and my children every night," a weeping Rushdir said over the mobile phone yesterday.

After a brief pause, she added: "The word joy has deserted the lives of my three children. The two Eids, Pahela Baishakh or their birthdays -- nothing makes any difference now."

Her two sons are now in the UK for study and only daughter, a seventh grader, is with her in Dhaka.

Pointing to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's assurance in 2012 that Ilias would be traced, Rushdir said she didn't see any initiative on the part of the PM in this regard.

In an emotion-choked voice, Rushdir said the lack of initiative on the part of the PM disappointed the family so much. They thought that at least Sheikh Hasina would feel their

pain as she lost almost all her family members and relatives in a tragic incident.

"We still appeal to the PM to take initiative for finding out Ilias Ali. We desperately want him back."

After Ilias went missing, Rushdir claimed several times that her husband was a victim of political enmity.

Quoting Ilias, Rushdir on a number of occasions told reporters that intelligence agencies had prepared a list of opposition leaders who were vocal against the government on some international issues. Ilias told her that he was on the list.

Five law enforcement agencies, including police and Rab, in May 2012 had submitted reports to the HC as ordered by the court, claiming Ilias is not in their custody since they have not picked him up or detained him.

Following a writ petition filed by Rushdir on April 19 that year, the HC issued a rule upon the law enforcement agencies to explain within 10 days why they should not be directed to produce Ilias before it or prove that he was not detained by them.

Petitioner's counsel M Mahbub Uddin Khokon yesterday told The Daily Star that they believe Ilias Ali still remains under the custody of law enforcement agencies.

Mujibnagar Day today

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Quader will join it as the chief guest. Health and Family Welfare Minister Mohammed Nasim will chair the discussion.

Different political parties and socio-cultural organisations also have chalked out programmes to observe the day.

On April 17, 1971, the tiny mango grove-covered village in Baidyanthala witnessed the ceremonial formation of the provisional government of Bangladesh and millions of freedom loving people listened to the announcement of the formation of the government through radio.

Following the Pakistan occupation army's attack on unarmed people on the night of March 25 in 1971, the first government of an independent People's Republic of Bangladesh was formed on April 10 in 1971 comprising

the elected representatives with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as its president, Syed Nazrul Islam as vice-president and Tajuddin Ahmad as prime minister.

On April 10, the elected representatives firmly supported and approved the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu on March 26, 1971, and issued a formal proclamation of independence.

Cyclone

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hoisted distant warning signal number two.

All fishing boats and trawlers over the north Bay and deep sea have been advised to remain close to the coast and proceed with caution until further notice so that they can take shelter immediately.