

Harvest fest

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five feet of water. At the same time, the paddy harvest in other districts is still a month away.

"The paddy grown in these areas is harvested earlier to avoid storm and flood damage," says SM Mustafizur Rahman, additional director at the Department of Agricultural Extension in Rajshahi.

"At this time of the year, labourers in districts like Kushtia, Jessore, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari don't have much work to do," Prof Elias Hossain from Rajshahi University's economics department explains. "That's why they take their chances in the beel areas."

In recognition of the paddy payment system, the professor calls the biannual migration the economics of non-employment. Yet to the many labourers and their families who rely on it, it's a system of vital importance.

One of them is Akbar Ali, who has arrived as part of a group of 25 from Sirajganj's Shahjadpur. They've set up a makeshift camp of bamboo and corrugated iron sheeting on the roadside.

"We will stay here for the harvest's duration and organise our own food," Akbar says. They get five kilograms of paddy for every 40 kg harvested. After working for about a month, each of them will amass at least 1.2 tonnes of paddy before returning home.

Sammer meanwhile has found even more favourable circumstances. The land owner he is working for has agreed to provide both him and his buffaloes with food and shelter in addition to his share of paddy.

"It's easier for us to pay labourers with paddy," says one farmer, Aftab Hossain, from Achrakhali village in Natore's part of the beel area. "We save on rice processing costs and the cost of taking that paddy to market. We also don't need to have cash at hand."

The Department of Agricultural Extension estimates a Boro harvest of four tonnes per hectare in the beel areas this season. Across the Rajshahi region, around 3.71 lakh hectares has been sown with Boro paddy this year.

Rejoinder

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existence of the list of 21 officials. The board led by Arastoo Khan had asked five out of the 21 to step down. The officials -- an additional managing director, three deputy managing directors and a senior executive vice-president -- handed in their resignations on April 3 and the board accepted the resignations two days later.

At least two of the officials were set to retire this year with full benefits.

The other factor that led to Arastoo's resignation was his tough stance on disbursement of large loans, which stemmed from the bank's high loan-deposit ratio.

As of March 31, Islami Bank's loan-deposit ratio was 92 percent, which was well above the regulatory ceiling of 89 percent.

If the bank issues fresh loans, especially large ones, the ratio will shoot up further, which may result in penalty from the Bangladesh Bank. The central bank has already sent a warning letter to the lender in November last year in this regard.

Keeping this in mind, Arastoo as the bank's chairman shot down all the proposals for large loans. He even admitted this to The Daily Star soon after his resignation on April 17.

Trump admits

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former New York mayor who recently joined the president's legal team, disclosed Wednesday that Trump had reimbursed Cohen for the payment over a period of several months.

It also followed an FBI raid in early April on Cohen's home, office and hotel room in which information related to the payments was reportedly seized.

Daniels, who claims she had an affair with Trump in 2006, has sued to have the non-disclosure agreement invalidated on grounds that he never signed it.

In his tweets, Trump insisted the agreement is "in full force and effect and will be used in Arbitration for damages against Ms. Clifford (Daniels)," he said.

Giuliani told Fox News host Sean Hannity the money was funneled through a law firm "and the president repaid it."

"That was money that was paid by his lawyer, the way I would do, out of his law firm funds or whatever funds, it doesn't matter. The president reimbursed that over a period of several months," Giuliani said.

He added that the payment did not represent a campaign financing violation because it was "not campaign money."

Giuliani told The New York Times he had documentation proving Trump had reimbursed the sum, which he said "removes the campaign finance violation" prospect.

At least 125 killed

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Some districts reported 45 minutes of destructive winds followed by fierce lightning storms.

Similar storms kill many people each year in India but this was one of the most severe in recent decades.

Shivam Lohia, who owns a resort hotel in Alwar district of Rajasthan, abandoned his car on the road and ran for his life after it was almost blown away.

"I haven't seen such a devastating storm in at least 25 years. Everyone was scared and running for cover as trees and homes were getting blown away. It was a nightmare," Lohia told AFP.

BRACED FOR MORE

There were 73 confirmed deaths in Uttar Pradesh in the north, 36 in the desert state of Rajasthan to the west, and two in Punjab.

Agra district in Uttar Pradesh was one of the worst hit areas, with at least 43 people killed. The Taj Mahal is in Agra city but officials said the monument escaped damage.

Last month, a similar storm killed at least 15 people in Uttar Pradesh and destroyed two minarets over an entry house to the Taj Mahal.

Rescuers were still going through the rubble of felled homes on Thursday. Media reports said more than 20 people were found dead in the village of Kheragarh southwest of Agra.

TP Gupta of the Uttar Pradesh relief commissioner's office told AFP the death toll was "unprecedented" from such a storm in the past 20 years.

More than 150 cattle and other animals were also killed across the state.

"There is a forecast for more storms in the next 48 hours across the state so people should be alert," he added.

Hemant Gera, head of Rajasthan's Disaster Management and Relief

Department, said emergency services were on alert and that people should not sleep outdoors.

In Punjab, Kumar Amit, deputy commissioner of Patiala district, told AFP that a wall collapsed killing two people.

POWER CUT
The India Meteorological Department warned there would be more storms over a wider area up to Saturday.

Three districts in Rajasthan, a state popular with tourists for its heritage palaces and desert safaris, were hit the hardest on Wednesday.

There were 19 deaths in Bharatpur, nine in Alwar and eight in Dholpur.

Weather department officials in New Delhi said the storm was caused by a collision of rival eastern and western weather systems over the humid northern plains.

Charan Singh, a scientist at India Meteorological department, said winds of 132 kph hit Agra while even in the capital Delhi there were gusts of 59 kph.

Power was cut in many parts of Rajasthan as thousands of electricity pylons were destroyed. Officials said it could take more than two days to restore power.

The state government quickly released funds to compensate the families of those killed or for damage. About \$6,000 would be given to the families of each of the dead.

"Saddened by the loss of lives due to dust storms in various parts of India. Condolences to the bereaved families. May the injured recover soon," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter.

"Have asked officials to coordinate with the respective state governments and work towards assisting those who have been affected," he added.

BNP stages token protest

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League to score a goal in an empty field," he said at a press briefing at his house.

In a sudden crackdown on BNP men early yesterday, law enforcers detained 21 leaders and activists of the party, including Khulna city unit Publicity Affairs Secretary Asaduzzaman Murad and Jubo Dal President Mahub Hossain Piaru.

This prompted the BNP to come up with the demand of immediate withdrawal of Khulna Metropolitan Police Commissioner Humayun Kabir.

Yesterday, the party also demanded that the Election Commission take prompt measures to withdraw Superintendent of Gazipur Police Harun Ar Rashid for holding a free and fair election in the two cities.

A four-member BNP delegation, led by party's Standing Committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan, placed the demands at a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda and other election commissioners in the capital's Nirbachan Bhaban.

The team also raised doubts over holding elections in the two cities in a free and fair manner.

"The situation in Gazipur and Khulna city corporations was normal even after announcement of the election schedule. But in the last two days, we saw that police arrested our leaders and activists involved in the campaigns," Moyeen Khan told reporters after the two-hour meeting.

"Police are intimidating and harassing our people. Two standing committee members of the BNP have gone to Khulna for taking part in election campaigns of the party-nominated candidate. But police have apparently cordoned off the hotel where they are staying. Police have also taken position on every floor [of the hotel]."

Moyeen said the EC is the supreme authority to look after law and order after the election schedule is announced. "But how could the polls be held in a free and fair manner if police create problems in the name of maintaining law and order, intimidate BNP leaders and activists and create obstacles to election campaigns?"

"The police commissioner will have to take responsibility for the present situation in Khulna," he added.

Pointing to recent arrests of BNP men in Gazipur, Moyeen said they were worried as police were arresting the opposition men, terming them outsiders. "For the sake of a fair election, we have demanded withdrawal of Gazipur SP."

Asked whether the EC had given them any assurance, Moyeen said it was not a matter of assurance. "It is their constitutional obligation to take steps in this regard. We hope the Election Commission will carry out their responsibility properly."

CEC'S COMMENTS
After the meeting with the BNP delegation, CEC Nurul Huda told reporters that BNP's allegation of creating obstacles to polls campaign was not correct as they had no such information.

On the BNP's demand of withdrawing Khulna metropolitan police commissioner and Gazipur SP, he said, "I will have to consult all the election commissioners before taking a decision on this issue. We will fulfil their demand if it is found logical."

BRIEFING

In the briefing, Monju said a few days ago, AL leaders Mahubul Alam Hanif and Sheikh Helal held a meeting with top government and police officials

while visiting Khulna.

He alleged that police launched the sudden crackdown on BNP men following the directives of Hanif and Helal.

After the press conference, Monju submitted a memorandum to the returning officer of KCC polls, demanding release of all BNP men to ensure a level-playing field for all contestants.

The BNP mayoral candidate also threatened that if the level-playing field was not ensured in the election, they would boycott the meeting with the CEC on May 6.

Elections in Khulna and Gazipur city corporations are scheduled to be held on May 15.

Our Khulna correspondent contributed to this story.

Upazila

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Complex where the duty doctor declared him dead.

The OC added that police were yet to know the motive behind the attack. The injured victim was sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Shaktimaan's body was taken to Rangamati hospital for autopsy.

The body was later taken to Rangamati Bar Association office where his colleagues paid tributes to him.

Alamgir Kabir, superintendent of police in Rangamati, said a team of police rushed to the spot hearing gunshots. They found three criminals fleeing the scene. However, as the distance was long, the law enforcers could not arrest the killers, the SP was quoted by UNB as saying.

Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader directed the police super of Rangamati to take the crime seriously and find the killers.

UP CHAIRMAN SHOT DEAD
Sirajul Haque, 70, who was shot dead by criminals yesterday, was also the president of Banshari union unit Awami League, our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports.

He was elected union parishad chairman seven times.

Delwar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Raipura Police Station, said Sirajul was returning home by a motorcycle after attending a meeting of Raipura upazila disaster management committee.

Around 1:30pm, the criminals intercepted the motorcycle in Alinagar Arakanda village on Raipura-Banshari regional road. They beat up the man who was riding the motorcycle and opened fire on the chairman.

The attackers had fled the scene by the time locals rushed to the spot. Sirajul was taken to Raipura Upazila Health Complex, from where doctors referred him to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital. He died on the way to the hospital.

MN Mizanur Rahman, resident medical officer of Narsingdi Sadar Hospital, said the victim was shot in his head and neck. He died due to heavy bleeding.

OC Delwar said there had been a longstanding conflict between two groups-- one led by Sirajul and the other by former UIP chairman Shahed Sarkar-- over establishing supremacy in Banshari union.

This conflict might have led to the killing of Sirajul, the officer added.

Hearing the news, locals set fire to the houses of Shahed and two of his supporters.

Into those

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These birds are often seen flying around in or nestled in the trees of the Satchari National Forest in Habiganj.

Wildlife photographer Masuk Ahmad said that this bird, scientifically known as Zosterops Palpebrosus, belongs to the White-eye family. They are mainly insectivores, which help in pest control, but may also feed on nectar and various tender fruits and seeds which helps pollination.

He said the presence of the bird is more visible during the summer-time in the Satchari National Park as their breeding seasons are between April to October.

Wildlife expert Dr M Monirul H Khan, professor of the zoology department at Jahangirnagar University, said that the bird's height is about 8-10 cm and the average weight is 9 grams.

An adult Oriental White-eye's back and head are yellow in colour, with black wings and a tail, white breast and stomach, dark yellow throat and lower tail, and a brown beak.

They attract potential mates during this season with their melodious tunes.

Hanging their nests made of cobwebs, lichens and plant fiber, on high tree branches, the females lay two to four pale blue, spotted eggs. The chicks hatch in nine to eleven days and can fly within 10 days of hatching.

Tofazzal Sohel, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, Habiganj, said the Oriental White-eye is classified in the "least concern" category in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

However, once found in almost every forest, grove, garden, orchard, and village of Bangladesh, the species is now decreasing in number due to habitat loss, deforestation, and, especially, poachers.

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shelter here," she said.

Talking about militancy, she said it had now become a global problem but Bangladesh had set an example in containing the menace.

She thanked Rab for playing a special role in curbing militancy through conducting drives against militants.

Terming Islam a religion of peace, the PM said there was no room for terrorism and militancy in any form here.

She said those who were terrorists and believed in militancy had no religion, country and nation. "They're terrorist and militants. They're the enemies of society, nation and the country."

"It's possible to contain militancy through waging a social movement with coordinated efforts of all, including guardians, teachers, Imams of mosques, other religious clerics. We've proved it...now Bangladesh is acclaimed for it throughout the world."

"Parents will have to know where their children go. There are many rich people who always run after money and think they have performed their big responsibility by giving a bundle of money to their children to fulfil their demands. They've hardly any time to know where their children go and what they do," she added.

About the pirates in Sundarbans who have surrendered, the PM said they had to surrender and returned to normal life due to the rigid stance of Rab as the elite force had intensified its drives against them in the world's largest mangrove forest.

The government provided financial assistance to the pirates who surrendered to the law enforcement agencies. If any other pirates surrender, the government will rehabilitate them and make arrangements for their livelihoods.

Regarding question paper leaks, Hasina said the drive continued against this criminal act during public examinations. "And ministries concerned, intelligence and Rab are active against the problem. I think the presence of Rab [in the drive to contain question paper leak] gives a message to them [criminals]," she added.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan also spoke on the occasion, while Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed delivered the welcome speech.

Earlier on her arrival at the venue, the PM was given a guard of honour by a contingent of Rab.

At the event, she also laid the foundation stone of Rab Headquarters Complex and inaugurated "Prerana Dhara", a monument built in the memory of the Rab members who sacrificed their lives while performing duty.

Govt not reluctant

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of Journalists and Association of Television Channel Owners will attend the meeting, he said.

The minister talked to reporters after attending a discussion organised by the National Human Rights Commission.

He also said that Bangladesh's media were more independent and enjoyed more freedom than those in other countries.

The Editors' Council, an organisation of editors of the country's national dailies, in April expressed grave concern over sections 21, 25, 28, 31, 32, and 43 of the proposed law.

It said the sections would hamper freedom of speech and independent journalism. The controversial law was placed before parliament on April 9.

According to section 32 of the proposed Digital Security Act, a person may face up to 14 years in jail or Tk 25 lakh in fine or both on charges of computer spying or digital spying if he or she illegally enters the offices of the government, semi-government, autonomous or statutory bodies and collects or preserves or sends any top secret or secret documents through a computer, digital device, computer network, digital network or any electronic form and help others to do that.

Govt finds proof

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set were leaked, the minister said, just two days before the SSC results are due on May 6.

"We have a meeting [later in the day] and you [journalists] can attend it. If you have any questions, I will reply to those after the meeting," Nahid said.

He did not take any questions from journalists, although he spoke for around 30 minutes about the findings of the probe and other issues related to the education sector.

This year, the SSC question leakers caught the government off-guard, offering question papers online, in some cases for free.

Despite several government steps, including the announcement of Tk 5 lakh bounty for information leading to the arrests of the perpetrators, questions papers of almost all the subjects were available online, sometimes a couple of hours before the exams.

This is the largest-ever reported question leak that has drawn fierce criticism from educationists and guardians worried about the education system.

The issue was also discussed in parliament and many called on Nahid to quit. As the leak continued, the High Court intervened, asking the authorities to stop it.

In response to the leak, the education ministry formed an 11-member committee headed by Md Alamgir, secretary of technical and madrasa division, on February 4. Representatives from the Cabinet Division, public administration ministry, home ministry, police, SSC section of the education ministry and education boards were also on the committee.

The committee submitted its report last month with four recommendations to the ministry and the ministry endorsed it.

Citing from the report, Nahid said MCQ questions of just "Kha" set containing 30 marks were leaked. No question paper of creative portion (comprehensive question), which contains 70 marks, was leaked.

But the fact is questions of all the sets were exactly the same, but in different orders. Also, exams under all the boards were held with the same questions. This means, if a particular set of question paper gets leaked in Dhaka, students from any other board could benefit from the leak.

However, pointing to the probe findings, Nahid said, "The question papers were not leaked publicly, meaning most of the students did not get those."

"Only an insignificant number of students linked with 'close groups' [in Facebook or WhatsApp] got the questions some 20 minutes or so before the exam."

But during the exams, which began on February 1, The Daily Star found comprehensive parts of the two English papers were also leaked.

A handwritten mathematics comprehensive question paper, which was identical to the original questions, was found online at 5:56am on the exam day. The exam began at 10:00am.

Besides, "Ga" set MCQ question papers of ICT and physics were also found online around an hour before the test.

"Around 4,000/5,000 students might have got question papers before the examinations through 'close groups,'" Nahid said, claiming these "close groups" had some 10 to 100 members.

But, The Daily Star found some leaked questions went viral around an hour before the exam through Facebook close groups, some of them having more than 1 lakh members.

For example, the Facebook group titled "PSC JSC SSC HSC Exam Helping Centre" has 1.49 lakh members now. During the exam, it had

In another discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu said the government would not enact any law to curb freedom of expression.

Addressing the event marking World Press Freedom Day, he said the Digital Security Act was being formulated to combat cyber crimes, not to target journalists.

The minister also rejected the Reporters Sans Frontières findings of increasing self censorship among journalists in Bangladesh amid violence against them and the media outlets.

He slammed the RSF report as it did not take any account of the government before preparing the report.

Sohrab Hasan, joint-editor of the Prothom Alo, said although more than one minister had promised to repeal section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act, which is infamous for its widespread misuse, it was still in place.

Jatiya Press Club President Muhammad Shafiqur Rahman, General Secretary Farida Yesmin, Senior Vice President Saiful Alam, Vice President Azizul Islam Bhuiyan, Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta, Janakantha Executive Editor Sawdesh Roy and journalist Harun Habib, among others, spoke at the event.

around 1 lakh members.

Downplaying the leak further, the minister said students had to enter the exam halls 30 minutes before the test. So they might have got only 10 to 20 minutes to find out answers of 30 questions, "which is not so easy."

"So it won't have much of an impact on the overall results," he said, adding that most of the question papers shared on the social media were "fake" and uploaded by "tempering time."

RECOMMENDATIONS
The committee said only 0.25 percent of the examinees (about 5,000) were the beneficiaries of the leak.

"So there is no possibility of having any impact of question paper leak as 99.75 percent students did not get question papers before exams," it said.

As a result, it would not be logical to cancel and then retake the exams, it said.

The committee recommended taking stern actions, including cancellation of the certificates of those who benefited from the leak.

Nahid said police so far arrested more than 250 people over the leak.

According to him, some people circulated "fake question papers" while others leaked question papers to embarrass the government.

He also said no question papers of Higher Secondary Certificate exams were leaked as the government took various measures.

About the MCQ questions in future exams, he said they would decide on the matter soon.

Universe

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universe was created just a moment after it happened, as the universe started expanding more and more quickly. Many believe that in some parts of reality the expansion never stops, meaning that the universe that surrounds us is just a strange place where that expansion has stopped and space has become inhabitable.

That theory suggests there are other places in that vast multiverse that might have wildly different laws of physics to our own, and where that inflation is still happening. Our universe is just one of a range of small pockets sprinkled throughout space -- which, by chance, has the conditions required for our complex life and everything needed for it to form.

"The usual theory of eternal inflation predicts that globally our universe is like an infinite fractal, with a mosaic of different pocket universes, separated by an inflating ocean," said Professor Hawking in an interview last autumn.

"The local laws of physics and chemistry can differ from one pocket universe to another, which together would form a multiverse. But I have never been a fan of the multiverse. If the scale of different universes in the multiverse is large or infinite the theory can't be tested."

But Professor Hawking's last work suggests that idea of eternal inflation is wrong. It will eventually come to an end, he writes with his collaborator.

"The problem with the usual account of eternal inflation is that it assumes an existing background universe that evolves according to Einstein's theory of general relativity and treats the quantum effects as small fluctuations around this," said Professor Hertog. "However, the dynamics of eternal inflation wipes out the separation between classical and quantum physics. As a consequence, Einstein's theory breaks down in eternal inflation."

In fact, the universe is a rather more simple and smooth than previously thought, the study suggests.

"We predict that our universe, on the largest scales, is reasonably smooth and globally finite. So it is not a fractal structure," said Professor Hawking.