

2 out of the three agri colleges to lose identity

By Reaz Ahmad

The government has decided to convert the Haji Danesh Agriculture College and Patuakhali Agriculture College into science and technology universities ordered the agriculture ministry to hand over those to the education ministry, disregarding the Agriculture Commission's report and views of experts, researchers, agricultural scientists and officials concerned.

The order was issued last week, official sources said.

The decision is a deliberate attempt to squeeze agricultural education in the country, the experts commented.

The Agriculture Commission suggested that the Haji Danesh College be upgraded to an agricultural university and three more agricultural universities be set up in the eastern, south-western and northern regions, keeping all those under

the agriculture ministry.

The Commission, headed by Prime Minister's Food and Agriculture Advisor AM Anisuzzaman, stressed that agricultural education was a specialized one and both its theoretical and practical sides were linked with research and agricultural extension work.

"Institutions for agricultural education should be under agriculture ministry", the Commission said in its report.

The seven-member commission includes Shahidul Islam, former director general of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) and Dr. Zahurul Karim, Executive Chairman of BARC.

It noted that Bangladesh's economy would continue to depend largely on growth of the agri-sector and services of over one lakh agriculture graduates and diploma holders would be

required in near future.

When contacted, top officials of the agriculture ministry were tight-lipped about the government's abrupt decision.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture Ministry has however taken the issue "seriously".

Expressing deep concern at the government decision,

Chairman of the Committee T. M. Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday that the committee would meet soon to take a "strong position" against hand-over of agricultural colleges to the education ministry.

"If agricultural colleges are converted to science and technology universities, that would be the death of agricultural education in this country. This should not be done", he said.

Md Yasin Ali, a former gen-

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Two agri colleges

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eral secretary of Bangladesh Krishibid Institution, viewed that all three agricultural colleges should be upgraded to agricultural universities in view of the agri-sector's importance in Bangladesh economy now and in the future. "In addition, there should be two more agricultural universities in the country - one in Khulna and another in Chittagong-Sylhet region," said Ali, a former principal of Haji Danesh Agriculture College.

Some imminent persons from Dinajpur also expressed their surprise and frustration at the government decision. Talking to this correspondent, Faruq Danesh, son late Haji Danesh, said it has dashed the hopes and aspirations of the people of northern districts who have long been demanding that the college be upgraded to an agricultural university.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told a public meeting at Dinajpur early last year that there would be a science and technology university in the district and the Haji Danesh College would also be upgraded.

There are only three agricultural colleges in the country. These are Haji Danesh Agriculture College at Dinajpur, Patuakhali Agriculture College and the Bangladesh Agricultural Institute in the city.

The government last year

converted the Institute for Post-graduate Studies on Agriculture (IPSA) into Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agriculture University and put it under the education ministry from the agriculture ministry.

The Bangladesh Agriculture University in Mymensingh was handed over to the education ministry during Ershad government.

Experts say, conversion of agricultural colleges into science and technology universities and their hand-over to the education ministry would squeeze agricultural education in the country.

The Executive Committee for National Economic Council (ECNEC) decided late last year that all new science and technology universities would be set up by acquiring fresh lands in regions where there is no university now.