

## DOWN TO EARTH

### Controlling Price Hike in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

Lately prices of daily necessities have been on the rise in a competitive manner. It is not clear if it signals a general rise in the price level in the entire country. The only exceptions are in the cases of rice and paddy. In many places the sale price of one maund of rice is lower than its production cost. It is open to question whether this unnatural situation is good for the farmers, may the economy of the country. However, the fact remains that besides rice and paddy, the price of no other commodity is stable.

Baby food is leading the race. Than comes fish and then vegetables. Rickshaw and auto-rickshaw fares have also increased twenty to twenty-five per cent. The shopkeepers have their usual explanation for this: they blame the government budget. But this explanation has no basis as is clear to anyone having some information about the government budget. In fact, import duties on some varieties of milk powder was reduced from 37 to 30 per cent. In spite of this, there has been a substantial price rise of this commodity.

Normally price rise takes place when there is a dearth in supply. None can say that such a situation has arisen causing the price to rise. In fact, this development seems to be more due to the whims of the retailers than for any sound economic reason. The absence of any mechanism to control the retailers goes to the advantage of the retailers to manipulate the price at their will.

There are signs of economic recession world-wide, which bodes ill for our economic life.

There will be less incentive for investment in industries if a high price level of imports makes trade more profitable. This will consequently lead to restriction in the field of employment. In this situation of economic doldrums, inflationary trend becomes noticeable in the urban areas on account of the price hike. In this situation all our efforts need be directed towards an increase of manufacturing activity which alone can alleviate the widespread unemployment problem.

The economic situation has other ramifications. The surplus financial resources lying idle with our banks are simultaneously a cause and consequence of the low level of economic activity. Even our agriculture sector does not present a wholly satisfying picture. The production and transportation of vegetables which are important in this sector also appear to be suffering.

There are, however, some redeeming aspects. Thanks to a favourable weather and the commendable efforts of our farmers, the production of rice has been satisfactory in the last couple of years. This has contributed to the lowering of the price of rice, bringing welcome relief to the large majority of our population. However, as already indicated, some of our farmers suffered loss, the cost of production being higher than the sale price. This justifies a case for input subsidies to our impoverished farm population.

To counter the trend towards price hike, it is urgent that promotion of economic activities in both manufacturing and agriculture sectors be encouraged.

aged. There are other sectors where scope exists for increasing exports by augmenting production. Such sectors need be given all impetus in the interest of economic growth and alleviation of poverty and unemployment.

A number of passenger sheds have been erected at important bus stands to protect passengers from sun and rain. It has been observed that these sheds are not serving the purpose for which they were set up. Most of these sheds have been leased out to the owners of various shops. These have also become haunts of beggars, destitutes and stray cattle. This leaves very small space for passengers waiting for shelter from sun and rain. Some of the beggars and destitutes have set up impromptu family establishments at these places where they are seen cooking, bathing and lounging.

The passenger sheds were constructed for the convenience of the waiting passengers. Now these are being used for commercial purpose. The leasing out of the sheds has in many cases led to the growth of roadside shop-keepers on the nearby sidewalks. The crowding of the passenger sheds often force the waiting passengers to remain outside the protection of the sheds, thereby enhancing the possibilities of accidents from the main traffic flow.

The bus passengers, by and large, feel that for the sake of presenting a cleaner urban look and for meeting the needs of passengers, these waiting sheds should be cleared of shops and encroachments.



A milad mahfil was held yesterday at the Awami League Central Office in the city for early recovery of the party chief Sheikh Hasina. — Star photo

### Experts tell seminar Private sector fails to respond to govt measures

Speakers at a seminar here yesterday said the private sector had failed to respond favourably to the government measures toward industrialisation, reports UNB.

They observed that large-scale privatisation and liberal incentive provisions could not prop up the private sector.

The seminar on 'Industrialisation in Bangladesh: Looking for a breakthrough' was organised by the Carl Duisberg Society Bangladesh (CDS), an association of German-trained personnel, at the German Cultural Centre yesterday afternoon.

Presenting the key-note paper at the seminar, economist Debapriya Bhattacharya said the reform measures in the residual public manufacturing sector could not restore the economic and financial viability of its units. Generous incentives provided to the foreign investors did not result in any increase in foreign capital flow.

He pointed out that the drastic reduction in the level of protection and 'realistic' changes in foreign exchange regime did not lead to any efficient reallocation of resources, explosive industrial growth or significant diversification of manufactured export.

CDS President Prof Dr Anwarul Azim presided over the seminar while Director General of the IMED of the Planning Ministry Amir Ali Khan Majlish and Managing Director of ASTECH Limited Ali Ahmed participated in the discussion on the paper.

Painting a dismal picture of the industrial sector, Dr Bhattacharya, a research fellow of the BIDS, said employment estimates put industrial employment at around three million or 10 per cent of the total employment against agriculture's share of 57 per cent. The total manufacturing investment is to be around two per cent of the GDP.

He appreciated the role of non-traditional export industries, particularly the garments sub-sector which achieved a significant growth and fetched 1310 million US dollar in the last fiscal year.

The BIDS economist was critical of the labourers for their low productivity. 'With production becoming increasingly a more skill intensive, it is quality of labour which has become a

more decisive factor.' He laid emphasis on skill development.

Dr Bhattacharya observed that the non-economic factors were more important than economic factors in term of investment in the country. The main obstacles in industrialisation are uncertainty in industrial policies, labour unrest, corruption from top to bottom, lack of high technology and low productivity.

Speaking of the obstacles, Amir Ali Khan Majlish said these problems were leading the entrepreneurs to prefer trade to investment in industrialisation. 'When trading is more secure and profitable, then why people will go for investing in industries?' he asked.

### Oil exploration

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Round Table, here in this southern US city. The conference, organised by the World Bank, was attended by 82 executives and representatives from 37 international oil companies.

The conference that began Tuesday witnessed a threadbare and lively discussion on the prospects and possibilities of Bangladesh's energy and mineral resources focusing on its social, political, geological and environmental aspects.

The participants at the conference underlined the need for maintaining social peace and political stability to foster a favourable atmosphere for private investment.

Responding to the observations of the participants, the Energy Minister, who is also the leader of the Bangladesh delegation said, a healthy and most favourable atmosphere has been created by the government. 'It is the best time to avail the opportunity of this congenial atmosphere now prevailing in the country,' he urged.

The Energy Minister observed that because of some obstacles in the fiscal policy and absence of petroleum policy, investors did not feel encouraged to come to Bangladesh. They rather chose neighbouring countries, he said, with the correction of loopholes and updating of fiscal policy and the production sharing contract, the government has recently formulated a petroleum policy to encourage the private entrepreneurs.

### Tk 10 cr BARC project to boost agro output

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC) is planning to take up a scheme next year for gathering detailed geographic and socio-economic information of the country, official sources said.

Once implemented, the project will provide extensive information on the country's agriculture, soil, water and climate as well as on the socio-economic condition of the people, they said.

The Tk 10 crore project, styled as Geographic Information System (GIS) and to be completed by 1999, would help planners and researchers with its updated computer database.

Chief Scientific Officer of the Soil Research Division of the BARC Anwar Iqbal, talking to The Daily Star, said, 'With the installation of the system, we will be able to assess both the production and the loss of agriculture— even of a single village — a facility which is not available at present.'

Even the impact of flood and droughts on a particular village could be assessed with the system, he informed.

BARC officials said, the GIS would also be able to monitor the country's geographic and climatic changes, facilitating the planners to fix agricultural targets or make necessary amendments.

Funded by the United Nations Development Programme, the project will be a developed version of the Agro-Ecological Zone (AEZ) project of BARC—which had been providing the country's geographical information to the planners, researchers and projects like the Flood Action Plan (FAP) since its completion in 1986.

'With the GIS system, the BARC will also be able to tell the farmers of a particular village which crop would be the best for cultivation on the basis of data regarding soil fertility or humidity etc.'

### Restore UZ system to ensure uplift: Mizan

NARSINGDH, Sept 17: Acting Jatiya Party Chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury today called on the people to strengthen the movement for restoration of the upazila system to ensure development of the country, reports UNB.

Addressing a public meeting at Palash Adarsha Bidyaniketan premises, he said the development work initiated by the Ershad government through the upazila system suffered a jolt following the abolition of upazila.

The meeting was organised as part of the party's programme to press for restoration of the upazila system and release of former President and party chief H M Ershad.

He also condemned the government for failure to check growing terrorism on the campuses.

### Rohingya camp

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the telephone line and beat up the arbitrators at about 8 pm. Police later rescued the camp in-charge, chairman and members of Khuniapalong Union Parishad.

Witnesses and police said at least 15 persons including the UP Chairman were injured in the attack. Local government officials Zahir Ahmed and Md Ismail, and messenger of the camp office Sujit Barua were admitted to Rabeta Hospital in Ramu.

Hundreds of people of the thana assembled in front of the office early today and staged demonstrations there demanding withdrawal of the Ansar battalion.

During the half-day hartal that began at 6 am today, transports were off the road, shops were shuttered and business establishments closed. Tension was prevailing in the area.

## The Midnight File

### Ceasefire in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Sept 17: Muslim and Croat army chiefs agreed on a ceasefire in South and Central Bosnia today as their troops clashed in heavy fighting in the southern city of Mostar. News of the truce broke after battles between Muslims and Croats erupted in Mostar, where 55,000 Muslims are encircled by Croat troops. Muslim-controlled radio said there were heavy casualties, reports Reuter.

### 20 killed in Kashmir clashes

SRINAGAR, (India), Sept 17: Sporadic violence claimed 20 lives overnight in the northern Indian state of Kashmir as four Muslim separatists escaped from a Srinagar police hospital, police said here today. Officers said 17 rebels died in clashes with security troops and added that four wanted guerrillas escaped from the fortified police hospital, where they had been undergoing treatment early today, reports AFP.

### UNSC threatens to reimpose sanctions on Haiti

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 17: The UN Security Council threatened today to reimpose sanctions on Haiti if security forces did not halt the wave of violence sweeping the country. The United Nations last month suspended embargoes on oil and military sales after the Haitian military agreed to let ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide return to power in late October, reports AFP.

### Demonstration Day

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nepotism by the government are destroying administration, educational institutions and other organisations, she said.

The Awami League chief also accused the government of abusing the anti-terrorism law to stifle the voice of the people protesting government's misdeeds and misrule.

Another reports says: Deputy Opposition Leader Abdus Samad Azad demanded immediate and unconditional release of Mohammad Shamim, General Secretary of Jalmalganj thana Awami League under Sunanganj district.

In a statement, he denounced the arrest and alleged that leaders and activists of Awami League through out the country were being harassed and arrested under 'false cases' filed by the local BNP leaders.

He demanded immediate release of all Awami League men including Mohammad Shamim and halt of repression and harassment on opposition members.

Meanwhile, in separate statement Awami League Organising Secretary and opposition Whip Mohammad Nasim protested arrest of Chhatra League General Secretary Shahidul Islam Lal of Kaziipur Government Monsur Ali College unit.

In another statement, the opposition Whip also protested the 'illegal' lock-out of Ishwardi Textile Mills and demanded immediate withdrawal of the notice.

### Border talks

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between the two countries was held on September 12 at the Mongdaw township of Myanmar.

An eight-member Bangladesh team headed by the Sector Commander of Chittagong Col Kazi Asrafuddin Ahmed attended the flag meeting while the 12-member Myanmar side was led by its Director of Border Immigration Col Than Aye.

In the meeting, the Myanmar border guard officials apologised for the recent attack on Bangladesh fisherman and assured to stop recurrence of such untoward incidents, officials said.

The body of the Bangladeshi fisherman was, however, not returned on grounds that it was totally decomposed, officials added.

### 3 Pak soldiers killed in border clash

NEW DELHI, Sept 17: Indian and Pakistani troops clashed on the border Friday and three Pakistani soldiers were killed, a news agency reported, says AP.

The skirmish took place in the northern Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir where Muslim guerrillas are waging a war for independence from India.

### Pak army officers will sit in polling stations

ISLAMABAD, Sept 17: Pakistani army officers will sit in each of the 34,000 polling stations on election day on October 6 to prevent manipulation of the results, Election Commissioner Naimuddin said today, reports Reuter.

'The decision to this effect has been taken to provide greater confidence to the voters to exercise their right of franchise,' the official APP news agency quoted Naimuddin as saying.

### Errata

In our news item, 'Six govt Secretaries to retire by year end', appearing on September 17, the name of A Z M Shamsul Alam, Secretary of the Election Commission was inadvertently included among the retiring secretaries.

### CHT talks

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Indian officials and Chakma refugees in Khagrachhari on September 19.

The Indian team members will visit at least five thanas — namely Rangbarh, Mati Ranga, Mahalchhari, Rangamati and Dighal to see for themselves whether congenial atmosphere was prevailing in those areas for return of the tribal refugees from Tripura (India) camps.

The members of the Bangladesh team will also travel with the Indian team during their visit to the different thanas.

Meanwhile, nine tribals, seven women and two babies, returned to Khagrachhari from Tripura (India) refugee camps yesterday.

Kaipa Ranjan Chakma, MP, told BSS today that the tribals returned on their own accord to see if a peaceful and congenial atmosphere is prevailing in the hill tracts for return of the tribal refugees from India.

The seven tribal women belonged to the Marma community of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

### GF views on Zila Parishad Bill tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

Gano Forum will express its views on the Zila Parishad (Amendment) Bill at a press conference at 11 am tomorrow.

The standing committee of the party at its adjourned meeting yesterday decided to hold the news conference at the GF's central office at Segunbagicha.

Chaired by the acting President Begum Noorjahan Murshid, the meeting criticised the bill saying it had ignored the fundamental aspects of the Zila Parishad and concentrated only on the voting system.

There is ambiguity in the bill regarding the autonomy of the Zila Parishad, a resolution of the meeting said.

AMA Muhi, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Shahjahan Straj, MP, Shamsuddoha, MP, Nurul Islam Nahid, Enayetur Rahim, Syed Masharul Islam Iqbal and others addressed the meeting.

### Pranab Mukherjee

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The trade between the two closest neighbours began in 1972 with the conclusion of General Trade Agreement which was followed by several accords in last 20 years.

Bangladesh imported goods worth 177.24 million US dollars from India against exports of only 0.25 million US dollars in 1990-91.

In 1991-92, the country imported commodities valued at 40.83 million US dollars from India and exported goods of 4.53 million US dollars only to that country.

Bangladesh's export to India is confined to only a few items such as newspapers, hides and skins and jute.

The country imports 60 per cent of its required engineering materials from India. Besides, it purchases a lot of items from India, including textile yarn, dyeing, tanning and colouring materials, pharmaceuticals, minerals, fruits and spices.

### Urban development

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policies and act according to the council's guidelines.

Sources concerned said that there was a consensus at the workshop that the existing institutional set-up was inadequate to deal with the urban problems while there were lot of areas where overlapping and duplication occurred which caused inconvenience to urban dwellers.

'The proposed national-level council will help a lot to remove lack of coordination among agencies and will promote planned development of the urban areas,' said an expert who attended the workshop.

## Uganda to replicate

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Bangladesh." The Ugandan Deputy Prime Minister said that elitist education system acquired both in Bangladesh and Uganda from Britain and the West needs to be changed to cater to the masses.

Uganda was looking for increased trade ties with Bangladesh, Kategaya said and informed that he had fruitful discussions with a number of ministers, chamber leaders and members of the Bangladesh business community. There was a bright possibility of Bangladesh entrepreneurs to go into joint collaboration for setting up textile industries in Uganda. He also welcomed Bangladeshis to explore other markets in his country and said he was looking forward to visits by the chamber leaders. 'Let us link our Chambers of Commerce with yours.'

'I am very impressed with your garments products. I myself bought an excellent track suit in New York and found that it was made in Bangladesh. Your garments exporters are yet to explore the African market', Kategaya told.

Eriya Kategaya who is a lawyer by profession and opposed Idi Amin and had to remain in exile for several years felt that developing countries should avoid expensive western technology whenever possible. 'We should look for technology that we can afford and which we can handle ourselves.'

'We developing countries must come closer and become stronger through meaningful economic cooperation, otherwise we will always be dictated by the North', he said.

The First Deputy Prime Minister of Uganda felt that the World Bank and other major western financial institutions 'talk to us singularly and lay the same conditions although each of us have our unique problems.'

'The developing countries should face the World Bank in a group so that they have a strong bargaining position and resist imposition of any stringent conditions.'

Making his point, he said, 'Their prescription is same but patients are different.'

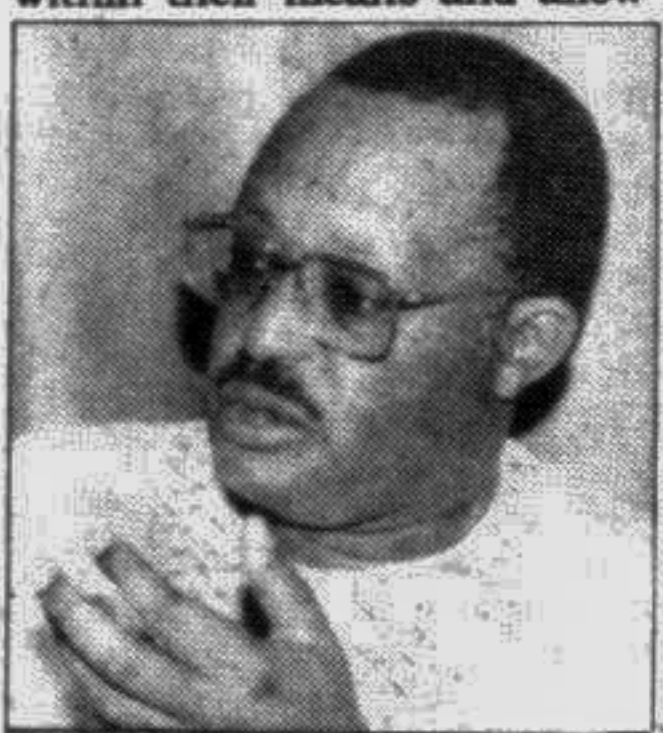
Eriya Kategaya who is also the National Political Commissioner of Uganda and entrusted with setting up of the first constituent assembly under President Museveni for restoring democracy in his country feels that the World Bank is not clear about the peculiarity of market forces operating in the developing countries.

Illustrating, he said, 'We have surplus agricultural produce in one area which cannot be moved to other areas because of lack of transportation or storage facilities.'

'The situation is unlike that

in developed countries. Although we believe in free market and support growing privatisation, there is still the need for state intervention', the Ugandan Deputy Prime Minister felt.

Kategaya, however, stated that the WB's loan wing IDA still provided the softest loans and said the international institutions are correct in their view that the developing countries should keep their expenditure within their means and allow



Eriya Kategaya

private enterprises to play its full role.

He said, his country was involved in trying to encourage African governments to come together for creating a common market. 'We intend to create a East African Community Market through the PTA (Preferential Trade Area) which has already been set up. The countries within the PTA are Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Uganda. Zaïre and Sudan have also applied,' he informed.

The PTA which has set up a common bank intends to promote free trade and movement of people in the region. Speaking about Somalia, Kategaya said the way the United States was proceeding was not correct. The US has earned a bad name in Somalia because it had overstepped its mandate to provide food and relief.

He thought the recent PLO-Israel accord was a beginning of a new move for the Palestinians to find a home. 'They have been refugees for years and Yitzhak Rabin although fatigued was realistic enough to sign the declaration with the valiant freedom fighter Yasser Arafat.'

Eriya Kategaya said both Idi Amin and Milton Obote were very unpopular in Uganda. 'The people of our country have now more security, stability and are concentrating on development.'

The Ugandan Deputy Prime Minister said he found the people of Bangladesh very warm and hospitable. He was particularly delighted in seeing the large number of rickshaws and the interesting art works displayed on their backs.

'Despite their clutter, you should be proud of a home grown technology that keeps moving.'

### Professionals begin token strike today

By Staff Correspondent

Engineers, doctors, agriculturists and BCS officials will observe today and tomorrow a two-hour token strike from 11.00 am to press home their 17-point demands.

The professionals under the leadership of the Prakriti and BCS Central Action Committee said the government in early May had accepted four of their major demands but did not implement them.

Earlier some 70 thousand professionals observed a strike for seven days from April 5.

The 17-point demands include appointment of professionals to the function-based cadres, separation of judiciary from the administration, transfer of executive power to elected public representatives and restructuring of the existing bureaucratic system.

Chairman of the Prakriti Dr M A Mazed at a press conference Thursday said professionals at emergency and security duties would however, discharge their duties as usual.

### Ajker Kagoj

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Security guard Hasan was wounded in the blasts, a staff of the newspaper said.

The newspaper staff and some local people brought out a procession in front of the office protesting the incident.

Some DUJ leaders visited the newspaper office after the bomb-attack and condemned the incident.

The staff of the Ajker Kagoj will hold a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club at 12 noon today to protest the attack.

### Fahd's decree

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Emir and a Wakil (deputy), each province will in turn be divided into smaller units run by appointed administrators.

The Emir would chair a regional council, which should meet every three months, according to the decrees.

Council members would be made up of heads of regional government offices, and at least 10 distinguished local men aged 30 or over, serving four-year terms.

King Fahd would choose members from a list of candidates nominated by the local Emir and approved by the Minister of Interior, the decree said.

The councils should 'determine the needs of the region' and suggest ways local needs could be met through the kingdom's national development plan.

They should also 'propose projects which would benefit local people and encourage the people to participate in them,' the decree said.

The new system 'aims to enhance the level of administrative and developmental work in the regions of the kingdom as well as preserve security and order and ensure rights of citizens and freedom in the framework of the Islamic Sharia (law),' the decree said.



Famous pop singer Michael Jackson smells a basket of apple and honey offered by an Israeli girl upon his arrival at the Lod Ben Gurion airport yesterday. — AFP photo

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