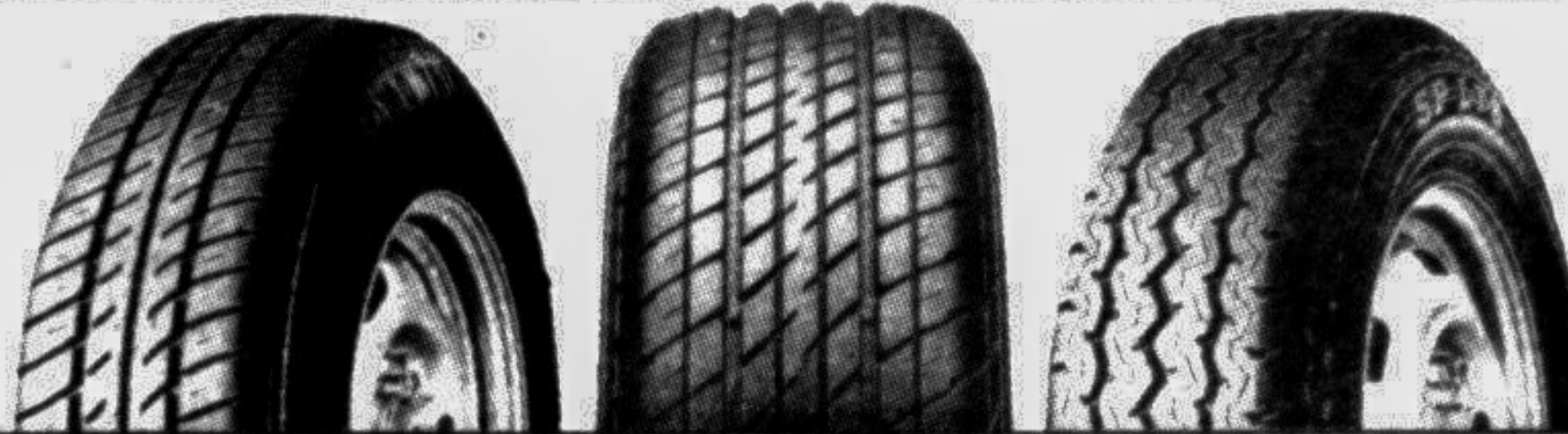




DUNLOP Tested for the Unexpected



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DOWN TO EARTH

Tackling Price Hike and System Loss

By A S M Nurunnabi

According to a recent survey conducted by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) on some wholesale and retail markets, the retail prices of essential commodities were reported to be about 24.44 per cent more on an average than the wholesale prices.

According to observers, nowhere in the world is such wide margin of profit permitted between wholesale and retail prices. Profiteering at its worst was particularly noticeable in the case of vegetables, where the price difference had been found to be averaging 62 per cent.

We felt concerned at the latest price discipline because on many occasions in the past, we had seen similar examples of sellers' market going wild. As in the past, the traders again took advantage of comparatively less stringent consumer protection measures in our country.

Normally price rise takes place when there is dearth in supply of any commodity. In the recent situation, no such contingency seemed to have occurred. Apparently, the fundamental principles of good business ethics have been given a go-by. According to observers, this was an example of how middlemen exploit both the primary producers and the end users.

According to observers, it was hard to reasonably explain the rising trend of prices of consumables. Take for example, the case of onion. Though it is harvested in the months of November and December, its

abnormal price hike confounded reason. The ready pretext for its rise was its being an imported item from neighbouring India.

Similarly the refixing of price at a higher level for vegetable oil was inexplicable. For according to knowledgeable sources, there was no demand in the international market for higher price for these imported items nor had the value of taka gone down in terms of any hard currency in recent months. Apart from this, the price rise of these consumables which are grown in the country has particularly thrown our consumers into unrelieved anxiety, because it is apprehended that the raised price level may well continue into Ramadan.

According to some observers, the reasons for the upward trend of prices might have been inherent in the demand and supply position of one or any other item. If that be the case, some sort of supervisory measure by the policymakers in unison with the relevant trading community is needed to contain the adverse effects of such trends in the country. It is felt that just as important as the government's control to check unbridled profiteering is the need for further development of consumer protection bodies like the CAB, which with their enhanced research and market survey abilities may help reduce exploitation of consumers.

Lapses on the part of any agency need be dealt with properly with preventive and palliative measures so as to ensure the balancing of demand and supply if the availability of goods and services for the increasing number of consumers is not to suffer.

Lately we hear a lot about the expression "system loss" of public utilities. This expression generally means the wastage and loss that take place on account of technical and distribu-

tion faults from the stage of origin to that of reaching the consumers in the cases of water, gas, electricity, etc.

In the case of WASA the system loss has been estimated at 47 per cent on account of which the water rate has recently been enhanced by 10 per cent by passing Parliament. With other public utility agencies, the rate of system loss is said to be 40 per cent in the case of electricity and the rates vary between 30 to 50 per cent in the cases of gas and telephone.

In all countries of the world, system loss in public utilities takes place but mostly there is a tolerable limit there. It is understood that there is loss normally ranges between 8 to 14 per cent taking into account both the technical reasons and distribution causes. Knowledgeable sources are of the view that the existing high rates of system loss in our country cannot be due to technical reasons alone. If the loss exceeds 10 per cent it may be presumed that non-technical factors are behind it. And the non-technical factor can be no other than plain pilferage, which is believed to be carried on by some dishonest consumers in collaboration with some corrupt employees of the concerned agencies.

The important question is whether the high-ups in the public utility agencies will continue to fail to curb substantially the system loss arising from non-technical factors and throw its consequences upon the consumers by way of periodic increase of rates. There is a limit to the consumers bearing such relentless burden, ultimately, the viable alternative may be to consider the question of privatisation of these utility services. Private management of such agencies is a well-tryed principle operating satisfactorily in many developed countries.

Hasina distributes prizes tomorrow

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina has been invited to distribute awards among the winners of SAF Games on December 26 at Mirpur Indoor Stadium, reports UNB.

The Opposition leader's office sources said Hasina accepted the invitation. She is expected to give awards to the winners of the volleyball event.

Earlier, Hasina was invited to distribute awards on December 22 but she could not accept the invitation as she was on a tour to the northern districts.

Fastest man

From Page 1 Col 5 hosts' gold tally to eight.

With a couple of silver and bronze medals coming their way, Bangladesh took their collection to 37 at the end of the day.

Pakistan added one more to their solitary gold gong. They had a haul of 25 medals.

Nepal, who are one of the three countries, apart from Bhutan and the Maldives, to be without the golden touch, had 13 medals. Bhutan and the Maldives are yet to open their accounts.

Christmas

From Page 1 Col 8 churches to attend the midnight Mass.

In the capital, Holy Masses were held at the St Mary's Cathedral at Kakrail, Holy Cross Church at Luxmibazar, Holy Rosary Church at Tejgaon, National Major Seminary at Banani, St Christian's Church at Asad Gate, and Kafur Catholic Church.

Day Masses will be held at these churches between 6:30 and nine in the morning. The day is a national holiday. Radio and Television will put out special programmes on this occasion.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina in separate messages expressed their hearty felicitations to the members of the Christian Community and wished them happiness, peace and prosperity.

AP from Vatican City adds: Pope John Paul II proclaimed the joyful news of the birth of Christ in a Christmas Eve midnight Mass, declaring, 'let humanity rejoice.'

Gathered in this holy place, at the tomb of the Apostle, we are in communion with all those who, in every corner of the world, are taking part in this same liturgy, he said in a homily in St. Peter's Basilica.

The Pope's message was broadcast to millions of people in more than 40 countries.

John Paul said he was present 'in spirit' in Christ's birth place of Bethlehem.

A 30-meter Christmas tree from Austria and a nativity scene with life-size figures decorated the vast St. Peter's Square in a tradition begun by the Polish-born Pope.

And as he has done each Christmas during his 15-year pontificate, John Paul earlier in the day received members of the Polish community in Rome to exchange holiday greetings.

Another report adds: Begum Zia last night laid emphasis on mobilising mass resistance against smuggling to curb it for the survival of the local industries and increase employment opportunities.

'Stern actions and tough measures will be taken against the smugglers. We have to stop smuggling for the healthy growth of the industries and national economy. We have to create public awareness against smuggling,' Begum Zia said.

The Prime Minister was addressing the leaders of the Jatiyatabadi Samik Dal Chittagong division here at her Sugandha office.

She said the government has announced the Wage Commission and instructed the concerned authorities of the mills and factories to implement it immediately.

The labour leaders of the Samik Dal urged the Prime Minister to take steps for stopping smuggling saying the smuggled cotton and textiles were now hindering the growth of the local industries.

The Prime Minister sought their cooperation to stop smuggling.

BNP has divided the professionals: Hasina

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday blasted the BNP for politicising the administration and taking recourse to divide and rule policy to 'eject' to power, reports UNB.

'The BNP government has adopted the divide and rule policy to gain its self-interest,' she told the first national convention of the 'Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (SCP)', a newly floated organisation of the proliferation doctors, at the Engineers' Institute.

The Awami League President alleged that the BNP government, as part of its evil design, has divided the professionals by creating counter organisations like the Doctor's Association of Bangladesh (DAB).

It (BNP) is also guilty of creating division among the journalist community, she said adding that such division among professionals will not bring any welfare to the nation.

Hasina blamed the Prime Minister and the Health Minister for directing the Chittagong Medical College authorities to readmit an 'identified terrorist' who was expelled from the college about 10 years ago.

Depicting a gloomy picture of the country's health sector, she said, 'Health for All by the year 2000' is merely a slogan of the government. No positive steps were taken to make it successful.

The Awami League chief said there is no medicine and proper treatment facilities in the thana health complexes. The picture in the medical college hospitals and other government hospitals are no better. It is unfortunate that there are only 26,000 hospital beds in the country for about 12 crore people, she added.

The Awami League leader mentioned that some 6,000 medical graduates remained unemployed in the country when rural people were deprived of medicare facilities for lack of doctors.

Hasina said that her party had formed a sub-committee for health, which is working to hold a seminar for formulating a pragmatic health policy.

Hasina, paying rich tributes

to the memory of the doctors who embraced martyrdom during the Liberation War and the anti-autocracy agitation, called upon the doctors to fulfill the dream of the martyrs.

Chairman Prof MA Kaderi, the inaugural session of the convention was addressed, among others, by Dr Kazi Yusuf MP, Prof Syeda Feroza Begum, Prof Syed Modasser Ali, Prof Sarwar Alam, Dr Sarwar Ali, SA Malek and Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin.

The speakers said the Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (SCP) was floated to materialise the ideals of the liberation struggle. It is not an alternative to Bangladesh Medical Association, rather it will cooperate with the BMA, they said.

BNP misrule

From Page 1 Col 8 in the Dhaka City Corporation, presided over the meeting held at Mizan Chowdhury's residence.

JP presidium member Kazi Zafar Ahmed and Secretary General Khaleedur Rahman Tito also spoke at the meeting that discussed party's election strategy in the January 30 DCC election.

The Election Commission should ensure that election rules are not violated by ministers by way of granting funds or making any financial commitments that might influence the voters before election, Mizan said.

Referring to the resignation of Mayors, he said part of their demands had been fulfilled but the authorities should take steps allowing voters to cast their votes without intimidation or temptation.

Mayor candidate Col (Rtd) Malek said the government was forced to give city corporation election following the High Court verdict after running the four corporations by the appointed Mayors for last three years.

He said the appointed Mayors have failed to provide civic amenities to the city dwellers during their tenure. They even failed to complete various construction works which we could not finish.

Press Club AGM held

The extra annual general meeting (AGM) of the Jatiya Press Club was held at the club auditorium yesterday with its president Hasan Shahrear in the chair, reports BSS.

General Secretary of the club Shaukat Mahmud and treasurer Moazzem Hossain Bulu presented their respective reports at the meeting.

In his report, the general secretary gave a brief resume of the activities of the club managing committee during the last one year and said they were committed to their determination.

A number of club members took part in the discussion on the report of general secretary.

Indian minister

From Page 1 Col 7 Parliament.

The report said the Finance Ministry failed to anticipate the swindle, react to it purposefully when it was uncovered, nor did it move to punish the guilty or swiftly take corrective measures.

'It is good to have a finance minister who does not lose sleep easily, but one would wish that when such cataclysmic changes take place all around him some alarm would ring to disturb his slumber,' said the report.

Singh, 61, was brought to the Finance Ministry in 1991 to reform India's tightly regulated, centrally planned economy. The reforms helped restore India's international credit and rescued it from impending bankruptcy.

Singh also helped attract foreign investment into India and reduce inflation from 7 per cent to 17 per cent annually in his two years in office.

When the stock swindle was uncovered in April 1992, the booming Bombay stock market crashed, wiping out the savings of thousands of middle class Indians.

The news came after stock markets closed for Christmas.

The report by the Joint Parliamentary Committee prompted demands by opposition legislators for Singh's resignation. The report also accused multinational banks of initiating the swindle and recommended that the licenses of four banks be suspended. About a dozen Indian banks also conducted illegal activities, the report said.

The foreign banks were Citibank of New York, Bank of America of San Francisco, Standard Chartered Bank of England, and ANZ Grindlays, based in Australia.

Plot to kill Bush

Judgement of 11 Iraqis today

KUWAIT, Dec 24: A Kuwaiti court tomorrow is due to deliver judgment of 11 Iraqis and three Kuwaitis accused of involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate former US President George Bush, reports Reuter.

The state security court prosecutor has demanded the death penalty for 11 Iraqis and one Kuwaiti charged with planning to blow up Bush during his April 14-16 visit to Kuwait.

The prosecutor has also demanded 10-year jail terms for two Kuwaitis accused of complicity in the plot.

ASHGABAT, Dec 24: Russian President Boris Yeltsin was elected Friday to head the Commonwealth of Independent States at a summit here marking the alliance's second anniversary, but the CIS leaders failed to iron out details of an economic union, reports AFP.

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THE SMILE SAYS IT ALL: Ace swimmer Mukhlisur Rahman of Bangladesh is all smiles after receiving his gold medal for the 100m breaststroke at the Mirpur swimming pool yesterday.

Communal harmony at any cost: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia last night called upon the Christian community to help the government develop the country and maintain communal harmony, reports BSS.

She was addressing a delegation of the Bangladesh Christians' Association here at her Sugandha office while they called on her on the eve of the Christmas Day. Bangladesh Christians' Association president Lewis A. Costa led the delegation.

Conveying her Christmas greetings, Begum Zia said Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony and all her citizens irrespective of their religion were now enjoying equal rights and privileges.

'The government has ensured equal opportunities for all and no one is suffering from any discrimination. We have to maintain the communal harmony in the country at any cost', Begum Zia said and added 'We all have to build the country unitedly.'

Another report adds: Begum Zia last night laid emphasis on mobilising mass resistance against smuggling to curb it for the survival of the local industries and increase employment opportunities.

'Stern actions and tough measures will be taken against the smugglers. We have to stop smuggling for the healthy growth of the industries and national economy. We have to create public awareness against smuggling,' Begum Zia said.

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The Midnight File

New Russian constitution comes into force

MOSCOW, Dec 24: The new Russian constitution adopted by a referendum on December 12 came into force today, the agency Itar-Tass announced. The new constitution, which formed part of reforms drawn up by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, replaces the Soviet-era basic law which had been in force since 1978, reports AFP.

Move for new election in Italy delayed

ROME, Dec 24: The push toward new elections to replace a Parliament discredited by scandal was delayed Friday when politicians agreed to discuss a no-confidence measure against Premier Carlo Ciampi. When Parliament had given final approval to the 1994 budget earlier this week, the vote was initially seen as its last major act before President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro announced a date for early elections, reports AP.

Four killed in city road mishaps

Three women and a teenage girl were killed in separate road accidents in the capital yesterday. Two women died on the spot and four others were seriously injured when a staff bus of Bhatme Nabuwat

man Bangladesh Airlines collided with an auto-tempoo on the Airport Road near the Mohakhali Kazi office in the afternoon.

The auto-tempoo was going to Gulshan from Farmgate area while the bus was coming from the opposite direction.

The dead women could not be identified immediately. The seriously injured people were admitted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) while the bodies were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue.

In another accident, an unidentified woman aged between 25 to 30 died instantly when she was run over by a speeding train near Mohakhali.

A 14-year-old girl Moyna, who was run over by a minibus at Madhya Badda Thursday morning, died in the DMCH early Friday. Her body was sent to the hospital morgue.

Left leaders from India, Nepal to address seminar

Top ranking left wing leaders of India and Nepal will address a seminar on 'Socialism and Contemporary World Situation' in the city Monday morning.

The Workers Party of Bangladesh has organised the seminar to celebrate the birth centenary of the Chinese leader Mao-Tse-Tung.

A three-member delegation of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the largest opposition party in Nepalese parliament, arrived in Dhaka last evening. Headed by the party's Polit Bureau member Mohon Chandra Adhikari, the two other members of the Nepalese delegation are Juboraj Doali and Trilochan Dhakal.

The Indian delegation, headed by the secretary of the West Bengal State unit of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Shailen Das Gupta, is due to arrive in the city tonight.

The other members of the Indian delegation are the secretary of the West Bengal unit of the CPIM and Daily Gonoshakti editor Anil Biswas and central committee member of the party Biplob Das Gupta.

The left wing leaders of the country will also address the seminar scheduled to be held at the auditorium of the Institution of Engineers in the city.

Reforms

From Page 1 Col 7 telecom law is under consideration. The telecom law will be required once the government telecom policy is finalised.

These measures, however, are yet to open the door to discussion of our actual credit from the World Bank to BTB. Sources say that the World Bank will want to see concrete actions like full announcement of telecom policy before discussing aid for the sector. In a communication to the government the World Bank has said that it will field a mission to discuss financing only after a plan and time-table for specific reform steps is put on the table by the government.

From Page 1 Col 7 health officials say, it is not possible to get all the food samples tested from the laboratory in Dhaka.

Moreover, if any contamination in food items is detected after testing, the seller, manufacturer or owner of the restaurant could be awarded a very nominal punishment — something like a fine of Taka 200/= or jail for five days only under the existing food rules and ordinances formulated in 1959 and 1967, the officials said. These punishments were not sufficient, they said.

Even most of the food items sold in attractive packings do not bear any mention of the dates of manufacturing and expiry, they said.

The recommendations of the City Corporations are now under the active consideration of the Food Ministry.

From Page 1 Col 4 pected to be completed in 1996," he said. Similar action programmes have been taken up in some villages in Comilla and Bogra.

Commenting on CIRDAP's achievements during the last 14 years, Dr Sompong said that the organisation was able to create impact on rural development. Yet, we have a lot to do in the coming days," he concluded.

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