

Rice import shoots on poor aman

REAZ AHMAD

Rice import in the first eight months of the current fiscal year has surged five times the last financial year's.

Private importers brought in 5.97 lakh metric tons (MT) of rice till February, FY03. The import in last financial year was 1.18 lakh MT.

Shortfall in aman rice production, shrinking food aid and a favourable duty structure have resulted in the import surge, sources said.

"Private sector import this year is comparatively higher than last year's, which eased the supply position although the market prices

are high," said the latest issue of the Bangladesh Food Situation Report published by the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) of the food ministry.

The government also sold almost 4 lakh MT of rice from the silos under a subsidised 'Open Market Sale' (OMS) to control price late last year. The OMS target was 1 lakh MT.

Rice price marked 21 per cent increase in the beginning of the current fiscal compared to the corresponding period of last fiscal, according to official statistics.

But despite huge imports from India, rice prices continue to remain high.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8



Women demonstrate in Dhaka against violence on women and the looming US-led war on Iraq on the International Women's Day yesterday.

The endless wait

The doctors' council ignores complaints against wrong treatment

NAIMUL HAQ

For patients seeking redress to wrong treatment, the wait can be endless.

In the last five years, the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) disciplinary committee accepted 55 complaints out of more than 300.

But none of them has been resolved as the disciplinary committee has not functioned for five years, Dr Zahedul Haq Basunia, registrar of the BMDC, told The Daily Star last week.

Up to six complaints are lodged every month with the BMDC. They

include criminal negligence like injecting wrong drugs, prescribing wrong medicine, wrong blood transfusion and performing unnecessary surgery.

The BMDC registrar said a court stay order was issued on a general meeting of the council on October 7, 1997, preventing the council from holding any general meeting until the case is vacated.

Since then the lone disciplinary committee has not been able to meet and review the complaints.

Professor Abu Ahmed, BMDC president, whose three-year tenure expired long ago, challenged the age limit for membership to the

council and filed a writ petition. The council's constitution states that no member will be above the age of 65.

"We could not take action, as the five-member committee is not working since 1997," he said.

Contradicting the registrar's statement, Prof Ahmed said there is no constitutional bar to taking action and finds no reason why the committee should not meet.

"I don't see any problem. The stay order does not prevent the committee from holding a meeting

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

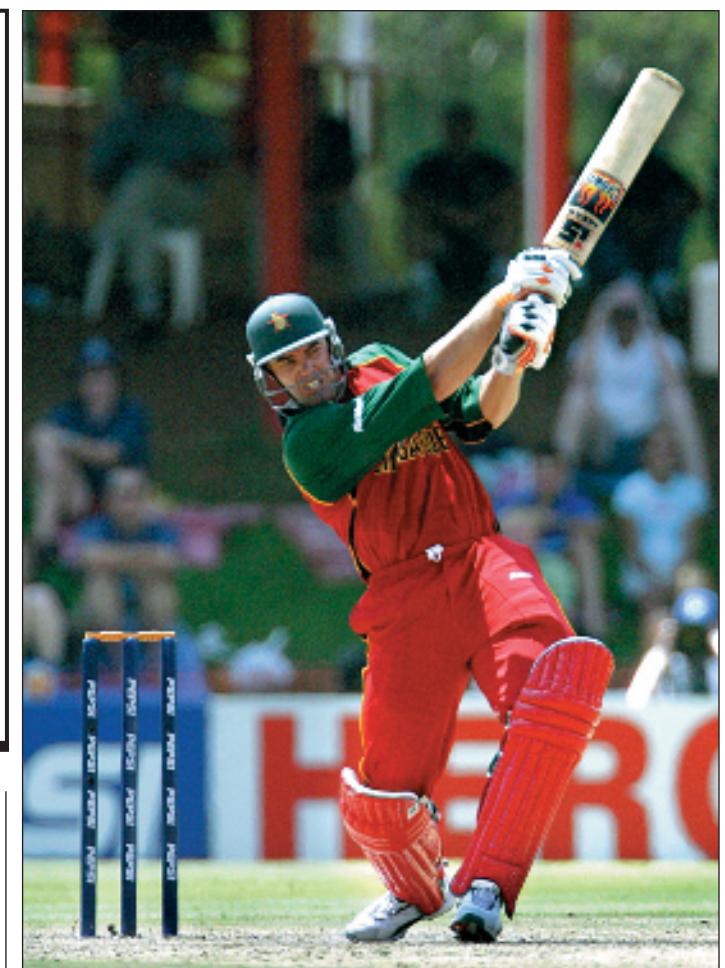


PHOTO: AFP
HOT STREAK: Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak hits a six off New Zealand's Andre Adams on his way to an unbeaten 72 in Bloemfontein yesterday.

PM opens road march

Unite to fight discrimination, repression on women

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurated the Dhaka Podojatra (road march) at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium yesterday as part of an ongoing countrywide road march to create awareness against cruelty on women and children.

The month-long road campaign styled "Jagoron (Awakening) Podojatra 2003" began on February 22 at Tentulia in Panchagarh on the northern tip of the country and would finish on March 22 at Teknaf in Cox's Bazaar on the southeastern tip.

The campaign has been organised by Awash Mohila Unnayan Sangstha (AMUS), an NGO, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and the Ministry of Information. Australian and US governments provided assistance for the road march.

Information Minister Tariqul Islam, Women and Children Affairs Minister Khurshid Jahan Huq, US Ambassador in Dhaka Mary Ann

Peters, Australian High Commissioner Lorraine Barker, acting secretary of the Women and Children Affairs Ministry Reza-e-Rabbi, AMUS president Nasrin Sayed and IOM country representative Shahidul Huq, among others, spoke at the function.

The cross-country campaign aims to foster a united effort to fight social evils like women and children trafficking, acid attack and dowry, and to help the victims.

Addressing the function, the prime minister said one-stop crisis centres would be set up in all divisional city hospitals for treatment and legal aid of repressed women.

She hoped the partnership between government, NGOs, development partners and the people to create public awareness about women rights would continue and further strengthen.

Referring to her government's various policies, steps, programmes

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Don't believe rumours, says CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed yesterday dismissed the possibility of his removal.

"Don't believe rumours," said the CEC in his reaction to reports on his possible removal without more details.

A meeting was held at the Election Commission (EC) yesterday to review law and order in Sylhet and Barisal cities that are going to polls on March 20.

The CEC told the meeting that the people of Sylhet and Barisal are going to vote in the city corporation polls for the first time and asked officials to take steps to make the election fair and peaceful.

The CEC is likely to ask the government in a couple of days to commit troops to the Barisal and Sylhet city corporation polls. The EC will hold a meeting today.

Law and order in both places is satisfactory and deployment of troops is not necessary, said representatives of the law-enforcement agencies at yesterday's meeting.

However, one of them said the army already on duty in the two cities might be called in for precautionary measures.

Election commissioners Shafiqur Rahman, AK Mohammed Ali, SM Munsef Ali, Home Secretary Omar Faruk, EC Secretary SM Zakaria and Inspector General of Police Modabir Hossain Chowdhury, among others, attended the meeting.

Astle zaps Zimbabwe

REUTERS, Bloemfontein

Nathan Astle and Chris Cairns combined forces to take New Zealand to an ultimately comfortable six-wicket victory over Zimbabwe in their World Cup Super Six match on Saturday.

Astle, New Zealand's leading scorer in one-day cricket, took his total past 5,500 with a patient unbeaten 102. Cairns, who took his first wickets of the tournament with two for 16 from four overs, was equally restrained with 54, including two huge sixes. The pair added 121 for the fourth wicket to set up victory for New Zealand with 16 balls to spare.

"It is nice to be getting the

rewards for a lot of hard work," Cairns said. "It was nice to be back at the bowling crease."

Cairns said the New Zealanders, who took only four points through from the first round, believed they needed two wins out of three to qualify for the semifinals.

"We have got a big game next against the Australians and they're playing very, very well," he said.

New Zealand were set a competitive target of 253 after Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak and Sean Ervine produced some of the most extraordinary late-hitting ever seen in a World Cup.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Train accidents mark steady rise

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD and JULHAS RIPON

Poor condition of rail tracks and mechanical flaws in coaches and goods wagons caused 3,427 accidents between July 1991 and June 2001, claiming 371 lives and injuring over 400 people.

Records with Bangladesh Railway (BR) show a steady rise in train accidents in the period -- 257 occurring in 1997-98, 358 in 1998-99, 456 in 1999-2000 and 552 in 2000-2001.

The accidents include 99 collisions, 3137 derailments and five

fire incidents.

Besides the poor condition of tracks and mechanical faults with coaches, there is mismanagement in the whole system due to lack of proper co-ordination among the three departments --- traffic, engineering and mechanical engineering, BR sources said.

Renovation of about 2900 kilometres of rail track and repair of engines can not be done due to fund shortage, they said.

The government asked the BR

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



The Dhaka-Narayanganj railroad is in a run-down condition. Faulty rail tracks and mechanical flaws in coaches and wagons cause accidents every year.