

High tax pushes milk powder prices up

Consumers bear bulk of the duties

TAWFIQUE ALI

Consumers have to bear about 64 percent of the taxes levied on imported bulk milk powder, a fact that belies the government's claim that imposition of high taxes on this source of nutrition is justified by public interests.

The taxation previously was even higher, which has come down to the present level with the temporary waiver of the 15-percent supplementary duty since March 15 last.

"High customs and supplementary duties are imposed on luxurious and socially undesirable goods as well as any other products or services imposition of supplementary tax on which is deemed befitting for public interests," an National Board of Revenue (NBR) official said on condition of anonymity, citing the definition of VAT Act 1991.

"We don't have any specific terminology to define commodities as luxurious or essential ones. We impose high tax only when it doesn't affect public interests," said NBR Chairman Khairuzzaman

Chowdhury. "The rate of tax on bulk milk powder is low," he claimed.

"The tax-rate on bulk milk powder is 56 percent at the port level," said a top NBR official, who also sought anonymity. "It goes even higher when VAT (value-added tax) on packaging and marketing is added to it."

"As far as my understanding goes, the restrictive measures [of high tax] are meant to protect and sustain the local agri sector and to encourage investment in local production," he said.

Whatever milk is produced locally gets a poor price of Tk 10 to Tk 15 per litre at the grassroots, he said. "So, we need to develop a supply channel of local produce and to draw investors in the milk processing industry, instead of giving subsidy to importers."

As on detergent, the highest rate of customs duty, 30 percent, is charged on milk powder. Whereas, the same duty on tobacco (not stripped/stemmed), tobacco refuse and beverage concentrate is only half of that, 15 percent, with no

supplementary duty, according to an NBR source.

"The high taxes make milk powder an expensive item for the end consumers," said SA Mallick, acting managing director of New Zealand Milk Bangladesh Limited, a leading milk powder importer and marketer.

"In view of public health and nutrition, milk powder should be treated as an essential commodity," he said, "and the duties and taxes should be levied accordingly, so that its price becomes affordable to the commoners."

Citing sources at the Department of Livestock Services, New Zealand Milk said the total domestic milk production at present could meet only 10 to 14 percent of the country's total demand, imported milk met 30 percent while the rest remained unmet.

The import tax levied on milk powder in Bangladesh is far too high compared to other Asian countries',

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DAILY LABOURER'S HARTAL DAY: With no work in hand, a street side tailor sleeps out the second day of Awami League's two-day hartal in front of Eden College yesterday.

MAY 8 HARTAL IN CHT Hills people, settlers set for a face-off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The peace process in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) risks getting off the track as the hills people spear-headed by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and Bangali settlers led by Somo Odhikar Andolan (SOA) are set for a showdown.

PCJSS will be enforcing a general strike in three hill districts of Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari on May 8 kicking off an anti-government movement as the government did not meet any of its four-point charter of demands including full implementation of the peace accord.

The other demands are removal of Wadud Bhuiyan, the plain-lander chairman of the CHT Development Board, withdrawal of troops from the hills region and appointment of an indigenous person as a full minister in charge of the CHT affairs.

PCJSS, which claims to represent 25 lakh hills people, plans to throw a series of programme later to realise its demands. It had put its programmes on hold due to the Baisabi festival and SSC examinations.

Andolan, the newly launched umbrella organisation for settlers,

has vowed to resist the PCJSS programmes.

"All the governments, past and present, have treated us in almost the same way. We never find them sincere in addressing our problems," PCJSS Vice-president Rupayan Dewan told The Daily Star yesterday.

"...They ask us either to become 'Bangali' or 'Bangladeshi' but none of them realises that we are hills people with different culture and tradition. So we have to launch an agitation programme in the greater interest of the hills people," he added.

"The Bangali settlers have vowed to resist the shutdown and all other PCJSS programmes in future," said Wadud Bhuiyan, who supports Andolan.

"I think Bangalis will resist them as they are the more deprived than the hills people. They are fighting for equal rights in the CHT."

The government recently at a meeting of Cabinet Committee on CHT Affairs decided to empower the CHT Regional Council with some more responsibility such as supervision of development work of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Gazipur BNP leader's killing not political

Suspect investigators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Primary police investigation found Gazipur BNP leader Kazi Mahmud Hossain Hashem was knifed to death Wednesday over a squabble.

"According to the first information report (FIR), locals' statement and information we have gathered so far, relatives of arrested Assistant Health Inspector Mollah Ismail Hossain got Hashem stabbed to death over an argument on Sunday," a top Gazipur police official said yesterday seeking anonymity.

"Some said Hashem's sons insulted Ismail that day and the latter's relatives took his life as a revenge," he said.

In the FIR, Hashem's brother Brig Gen (Retd) Kazi Mahmud Hassan, a presidium member of Jatiya Party (JP), said the quarrel began as the BNP leader came in aid of one Mujibor when Ismail, his three sons and eight others were manhandling the latter for not paying them toll.

Hassan alleged Ismail, his sons Apple, Jewel and Rubel, Jubo Dal and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists Ilias, Hiru, Zillur, Momen, Azad, Saidul, Humayun and Sagar murdered his brother following the row.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Trader seeks redress of JCD men's looting

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

A medicine shopkeeper in a letter to the president and general secretary of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) has sought redress of a looting of his shop by some JCD workers last week.

Mashiur Rahman Lytton, owner of Madina Pharmacy opposite the entrance of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) emergency ward, also sent copies of the letter to BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Student Affairs Secretary Fazlul Haque Milon, and Dhaka University Journalists Association (Dujia) last Monday.

He also accused some JCD leaders of threatening to blow up his shop if he didn't keep mum about the crime.

Lytton described how a group of JCD cadres from Shahidullah Hall of Dhaka University (DU) attacked and ransacked his pharmacy. The assault came when he asked two of them to pay for some medicine they had bought but were about to leave without paying.

He said JCD workers Sayeed, Roni, Roton, Dablu, Pappu and Razib were in the group that beat him up as well as DMCH Correspondent Shahin Mollah of The Daily Star and Baki Billah of the

BAR COUNCIL POLLS Rokan alleges government interference

UNB, Dhaka

The Sammilita Ainjibi Samannaya Parishad (SASP) yesterday alleged of government interference in the process of the May 13 election to Bangladesh Bar Council and expressed its doubts about a free and fair polling.

SASP panel leader Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud at a press conference yesterday said at least four barristers-turned-ministers were abusing government machinery in favour of the government-backed panel.

To back the allegations, Rokan presented a letter faxed from the law ministry to all district and sessions judges advising them to submit a list of lawyers including government pleader (GP), assistant GP, public prosecutor (PP), assistant PP and special PP to Advocate Joinul Abedin, leader of BNP-backed lawyers' forum, who is contesting the polls.

"This is unprecedented. We have never seen use of the district judges to influence the lawyers' election," he said.

Rokan said he has informed the attorney general and ex-officio

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Built for quick bucks

The Dhirasram area in Gazipur sees mushroom rise of makeshift houses to make the most of government compensation for landowners there. The government is scheduled to transfer the Inland Container Depot from Kamalapur to Dhirasram by 2006.

Resign now

Professional groups ask govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different professional bodies yesterday demanded immediate resignation of the BNP-led coalition government for its 'misrule and violation of the constitution'.

This government has no right to cling to power as it could not ensure security to citizens, leaders of the professionals said at a joint meeting of the bodies.

Several organisations of professionals including lawyers, engineers, doctors, teachers and journalists and cultural activists joined the meeting held at the Supreme Court (SC) Bar Association hall room.

The professionals' leaders stressed greater unity to intensify the movement for unseating the government, launched by the main opposition Awami League.

They said although people had given the BNP the mandate to govern the country for five years, there are lot of examples that governments stepped down in the face

of people's demand before expiry of their tenure.

The coalition government's autocratic activities and repression have led to a confrontational situation in politics, they noted.

Speakers included Prof Abdus Sabur of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Prof AK Azad Chowdhury and Hossain Mansur of Dhaka University, former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru, Dr Badiuzzaman Bhuiyan of Bangladesh Medical Association, Prof Iqbal Arslan and Dr Jamaluddin Chowdhury of Swadhinata Chikitshak Parishad, journalists Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Shafiqur Rahman, Kazi Farooq Ahmed of College Teachers Association, advocates Subrata Chowdhury and Bashir Ahmed and Mohammad Salahuddin of Muktiyoddha Sangsad. SC Bar Association Vice-president Sirajul Huq was in the chair.

The professionals later brought out a procession that marched up to the Jatiya Press Club.

IRAQ PRISONER ABUSE US general suspended

BBC ONLINE

A US general has been suspended in Iraq over the alleged abuse of prisoners by US troops in jails she ran.

Brigadier General Janis Karpinski is among seven officers being investigated following claims that soldiers under their command mistreated detainees.

The army confirmed the suspension after US television broadcast images of US soldiers allegedly abusing inmates at Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

'I's forced to give statement on camera'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A leader of a civil society platform yesterday alleged intelligence agents tortured and intimidated him into giving a statement on camera, which was aired on television channels on Tuesday.

The intelligence agents arrested Hasan Harun-ur-Rashid, Dhaka city unit president of Oikyabaddha Nagorik Andolon, at his house and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Prayer Timings		
April 30		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-20	4-55
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-29	6-34
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		