

Govt justifies price upswing on rains

Tk 47cr embezzlement unearthed at Jiban Bima Corp

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The commerce ministry yesterday justified the unusual price spiral of essentials citing the recent floods and heavy rainfall and claimed the prices will come down on the back of the government initiatives.

The parliamentary standing committee on commerce ministry yesterday at a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban echoed the ministry view and recommended necessary steps to curb the rising prices of essentials, meeting sources said.

It asked the ministry to give discounts on tax and VAT on some consumer products, if necessary.

A parliamentary sub-committee, meanwhile, submitted a probe report yesterday revealing embezzlement of Tk 47 crore at the state-run Jiban Bima Corporation. The parliamentary body will discuss the issue at its next meeting.

On the overshooting of the rice prices, the commerce secretary

told the meeting that he had already talked with the food ministry that sought to launch open market sale of rice in a couple of days to keep them affordable.

The commerce ministry officials, during the discussion on the price hikes of essentials, blamed the price hike on huge damage to crops and vegetables because of the recent floods and torrential rainfall, the sources said.

"The price spiral of essentials is not abnormal. And the government has initiated different steps to reduce people's sufferings," committee Chairman and ruling BNP lawmaker Redwan Ahmed told The Daily Star after the meeting. "We hope the prices will be normal in a few days."

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury and his officials told the committee that steps have been taken to control the price upswing. The ruling BNP lawmakers, who dominate the parliamentary body, appreciated the com-

merce ministry steps.

The committee asked the ministry to consult with the finance ministry for initiating necessary steps to reduce tax and VAT on certain consumer products, should need be.

"The aim of the government is to reduce people's sufferings, not to collect revenue," the committee chairman claimed.

Senior ministry officials told the meeting that 33 ships loaded with consumer products will reach the ports in a couple of days, which will greatly help meet the demand.

The parliamentary body asked the government to use Rapid Action Battalion alongside other agencies to contain the spiralling prices of essentials ahead of the Ramadan.

"We asked the ministry to mount market watch so that no vested quarters can create an artificial crisis of essentials," Redwan said.



Hundreds of tornado victims at Ashulia still pass their days under open sky without any government aid to help them put bits together. This family says it has been in this situation for the last four days.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Afghan polls fair despite ink fiasco

Observe monitors

REUTERS, Kabul

Independent observers described Afghanistan's historic presidential election as mostly fair yesterday despite turmoil over possible multiple voting that led most of the candidates to call for a general boycott.

From the southern plains to the Hindu Kush mountains and northern steppes of the impoverished Islamic nation, millions of Afghans turned out Saturday to choose a leader for the first time, despite threats by Taliban rebels to sabotage the election.

The largest group of independent poll observers, the Free and Fair Election Foundations of Afghanistan (FEEA) which is made up of 13 local non-governmental organizations, said the vote was fair despite the complaints.

"The large participation of Afghans is an encouraging sign of people's participation in the democratic process," it said.

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Rebels hit Baghdad as Rumsfeld visits

18 Iraqis, 2 GIs killed in attacks

REUTERS, AFP, Baghdad

Two blasts killed up to 18 people, including an American soldier, in Baghdad yesterday hours before Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld arrived to gauge efforts to calm violence ahead of January elections.

The United States and its allies in Iraq are engaged in a battle of wills with insurgents, Rumsfeld told US marines during an earlier stop at a desert airbase northwest of Baghdad.

"They are hoping to cause mem

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Mahi refused entry to airforce community centre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) legislator and spokesman Mahi B Chowdhury was not allowed to attend a wedding ceremony at Falcon Community Centre near Airforce Officers' Mess in the capital yesterday.

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Crashed F28 to remain at site until insurers complete check

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet/Dhaka

State minister for civil aviation and tourism, probe committee members and insurance company officials yesterday visited the crash site of Biman's F28 aircraft beside Sylhet Osmani International Airport run-

way.

The aircraft, under armed police guard, still remains in the crash site. A Biman official said the plane cannot be removed until the insurance company concerned allows as the aircraft, after the accident, has now become a property of the com

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5 lawyers sued in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Five lawyers including the general secretary of Kushtia Bar Association have been sued for abusing a judge, ransacking a courtroom and threatening its staff with death yesterday.

The accused lawyers are Advocate Zahurul Islam, general secretary of the bar, Saiful Islam Bappi, Wazedul Islam Chand, Subrata Kumar and Tarun Kumar Biswas.

Mehidi Hasan Siddique, bench assistant of the court, filed a case against the accused with Kushtia Police Station. He said in the case that some advocates led by Zahurul appealed to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal for bail of Siddiqur Rahman, an accused of rape.

As Judge Abul Hossain rejected the bail and left the courtroom, the lawyers reportedly having links with the ruling BNP abused him, ransacked furniture and beat up staff who tried to calm them. The lawyers also threatened to kill the staff, the complainant said.

The judicial functions of the court were disrupted after the incident.

3 killed in Pak mosque blast

AFP, Lahore

At least three people including a suicide bomber were killed when a powerful bomb ripped through a Shia mosque in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore yesterday, police said.

Local police officer Zahir Uddin Babar said a man carrying the explosives tried to enter the Kashmiryan Mosque where worshippers had gathered for evening prayers.

"When security guards stopped him he opened fire and blew himself up, killing two security guards," Babar said.

The bomber also died in the blast and four people were injured.

The mosque is located in the Mochi Gate area of the walled city.

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Prayer Timing		
October 11		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-45	5-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-45	5-50
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		