

Rising rice price fuels spiralling inflation

Poor feel the pinch most; sales dip, industry fears backlash

REJAUL KARIM BYRON



Food prices keep climbing steadily and alarmingly, triggering off a continued rise in general inflation and hitting especially the country's poor hard.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in October recorded a recent new high of 10.46 percent point-to-point food price inflation that has significantly pushed down the sales of other consumer items. The city shopkeepers say their daily sales have dipped by at least one third.

Alarmed by poor sales of their products in the last few months, industrialists say if the trend continues the industrial sector will suffer a major setback.

Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) President Kutubuddin Ahmed

says, "If the inflation continues at this level, the cost of production will go up."

BBS sources and economists explain the inflation mainly by the increase in rice price following a poor Aman harvest due to this year's twin flooding. The hike in global rice prices leading to import shortfalls is also a major factor behind it.

The country's target for rice and wheat imports this year was set at 30.54 lakh metric tons. In July to October, the country imported 10.01 lakh mts, more than 4 lakh mts short from what was imported in the corresponding period last year, 14.28 lakh mts.

The BBS in September recorded a 9.48 percent food price inflation compared to the price level in September last year. Back in June 2001-02 this

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Prices of different kinds of rice in the wholesale market have risen by Tk 60 to Tk 100 a maund (37 KGs) over the past two months, said both the wholesalers and retailers at different markets in the city.

At the retail market, prices of rice increased by Tk 1 to Tk 4 a kilogram.

The sale of most of the consumer items including cosmetics, on the other hand, has fallen significantly over the same period, said the grocery retailers at the Krishnagar, Karwan Bazar and Hatirpool markets.

"Our daily sale now is miserable after it has dropped by half of what it was before Eid," said a retailer at the city's Karwan Bazar, "I used to have a sales volume worth around Tk 7,000 a day, whereas now it comes between Tk 3,000 and Tk 4,000."

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The order follows reluctance of the officials to comply with verbal orders for divulging the names during three consecutive hearings.

The court also ordered the nine officials to divulge through an affidavit the name of the person who ordered the November 1 inter-ministerial meeting at the establishment ministry, where the draft rules for execution of the court directives

DISTORTION OF DRAFT JUDICIAL RULES

SC orders 9 officials in writing for names

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday in writing ordered nine government officials facing contempt charges to name by January 17 the persons who instructed insertion of opinions in the draft rules on separation of the judiciary.

The court passed the order after

TH Khan, the counsel for the respondents, told it during yesterday's hearing that he had received no order in black and white for

submissions of names of the persons.

The nine bureaucrats were

charged with contempt for distorting

the court directives after the attorney general sought time for

20th time since December 1999 for

implementation of the Supreme

Court judgement on separation of

judiciary.

Barrister Amir-Ul Islam, counsel for Masud Hossain and others who filed a writ petition for separation of the judiciary from the executive way back in 1995, meanwhile, filed a petition yesterday for a court review of three sets of proposed draft rules on the judicial independence.

The law ministry prepared a set of draft rules, the establishment ministry made another through insertion of its comments, while the court earlier modified and endorsed the other set.

The petition also suggested the court refer all the draft rules to an independent and neutral body such as the Law Commission for necessary recommendations and proposals

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Tk 200cr anomalies found in Jiban Bima Corporation

JS body asks for legal action against corrupt officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary probe body has revealed financial irregularities involving around Tk 200 crore in the state-run Jiban Bima Corporation.

The parliamentary standing committee on commerce ministry yesterday discussed the probe report submitted by a sub-committee and asked the ministry

concerned to initiate legal action against officials involved in the financial anomalies, committee Chairman Redwan Ahmed told The Daily Star.

Customer service of the life insurance corporation is not satisfactory due to lack of transparency in its activities, the sub-committee observed.

It made a set of recommenda-

tions to make the organisation dynamic, sources said quoting the probe report.

Giving details, the report said inconsistency in routine expenditure caused losses of Tk 35.74 crore in four years from 1999 to 2002 and Tk 10.69 crore due to 68,378 fake policies. Officials embezzled over Tk 3 crore by making fake vouchers and

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Nation pays homage to martyred intellectuals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation yesterday observed the Martyred Intellectuals Day paying homage to those illustrious sons of the soil who were brutally killed at the fagend of the Liberation War.

The pro-liberation social and political organisations have expressed deep anger and resentment on the day as some of those who played key role in the massacre of intellectuals are now in power, 33 years into the macabre event.

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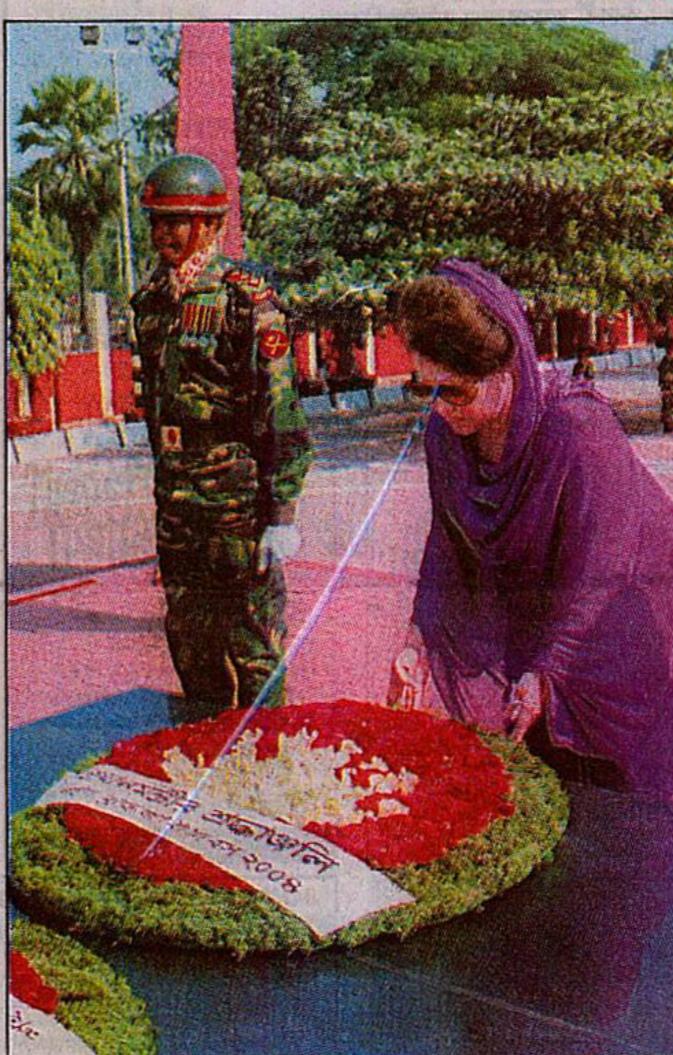
Berlin-based TI refutes Saifur's claim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International has no plan to change the methodology of its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) that ranks countries in terms of experts' perception of corruption.

Director of Policy and Research of the Berlin-based graft watchdog, Dr Robin Hodess wrote a letter on December 12 to the Chief Editor of news agency UNB refuting its November 28 report that said TI

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia places a wreath at the Martyred Intellectuals Mausoleum at Mirpur in Dhaka yesterday in homage to the intellectuals martyred days before Bangladesh's liberation.

Invest more in infrastructure

Saifur asks private sector at contract signing of satellite earth station

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday called upon the private sector to invest more in infrastructure to bolster local and foreign investment in the country.

"I don't see much private sector investment in infrastructure," Saifur

regretted. He was speaking at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel as the chief guest of the contract signing ceremony to finance DNS SatComm Satellite Earth Station.

Expected to go into operation from May next year, DNS SatComm

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Trains collide in India: 38 killed

AFP, Mukheriyan

At least 38 people died Tuesday when two trains collided in northern India, officials said, revising downwards a previous death toll of 50.

After visiting the crash site, Punjab's Chief Minister Amarinder Singh told reporters that the number of dead was 34.

Speaking at the hospital in Mukheriyan, the nearest large town to the scene of the accident, Singh

said figures of 50 dead and 150 injured that he had announced to the state assembly were "unconfirmed."

Later, hospital officials in Mukheriyan said another four people had died and 17 people were in serious condition.

At least four carriages were badly damaged in the collision of the two passenger trains near the village of Mansar 150 km east of Amritsar in

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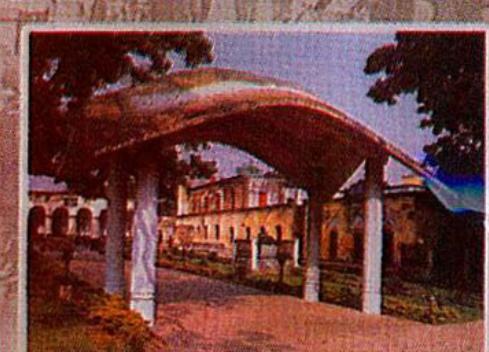


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