



Delicious and nutritious, a watermelon now sells at Tk 200 to 300 as the fruit is out of season while the Ramadan is imminent.

# Prices of essentials shoot up ahead of Ramadan

Moon-sighting body meets today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prices of essentials shot up further on the eve of Ramadan, causing much trouble to the low and middle-income people.

Incessant rain for the last three days that disrupted supply has acted as a factor behind the price rise.

Depending on the visibility of the moon, devotees will start fasting after tonight or tomorrow night while Moon-Sighting Committee sits today with State

Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharef Hossain Shajahan in the chair.

For the last two days, prices of chickpea, green chilli, onion, muri (puffed rice), and lentil have been rising rapidly.

The price of green chilli yesterday jumped to Tk 50 per kg from Tk 20-25 in the capital's retail market and in the wholesale market it was sold at Tk 30 while the rate was Tk 15 just two days ago.

The incessant rain has disrupted the supply, leading to the

price rise. Moreover, some goods have rotten due to heavy down-pour, wholesalers at Karwan Bazar said.

The price of aubergine was Tk 15 to 20 a kg in retail market even before two or three days, traders said. It is now sold at Tk 30-35 due to huge demand on the eve of the Ramadan.

Price of puffed rice (muri) has jumped to Tk 32-35 per kg in retail market. It was sold at Tk 28-29 three days back, said retailers.

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## Jhalakathi trial judge signs death warrants of 7 JMB men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The trial judge of Jhalakathi judges killing case Thursday signed and sent to the authorities concerned the death warrants of seven Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) men including its top leaders Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai for immediate execution of the sentences that were confirmed by the High Court.

After receiving the High Court (HC) documents of death warrants against the seven convicted JMB leaders and killers, Md Reza Tarek Ahmed, judge of the trial court, sent it to the authorities concerned including ministry officials, deputy commissioners and jail superintendents.

An HC division bench confirmed the death sentences of the seven accused on August 31, 2006.

Judges of the HC bench signed the office copy of the judgment on

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## Ties with Thai govt to remain unchanged

Foreign secy says

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's relations with Thailand will remain unchanged despite army take over, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin said here yesterday.

"The developments that have taken place in Thailand for whatever reasons are of course Thailand's matter...but we're examining the situation," he told reporters at Zia International Airport on his return from Nam Summit in Havana.

Hemayet said the pledge made by the present Thai authorities of quick return to democracy is quite reassuring and "we are confident that the existing relations will continue."

The Thai military took over the state power on Tuesday ousting the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra who is now staying in London.

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## Hamas defies Abbas on Israel recognition

REUTERS, Gaza

Hamas said yesterday it would not join any Palestinian unity government that recognised Israel, rebuffing President Mahmoud Abbas who told the United Nations any future coalition would do so and also renounce violence.

Speaking at the 192-nation General Assembly in New York on Thursday, the moderate Abbas said "any future Palestinian government" would honour all agreements the umbrella Palestine Liberation Organisation has committed to with Israel.

But Ahmed Youssef, political adviser to Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of the ruling Islamist militant movement, told Reuters that an agreement between Hamas and Abbas to form a unity coalition did not include recognition of Israel.

"I rule that out. The political thinking of Hamas prevents the idea that Hamas can be part of a government which puts the recognition of Israel on its political agenda," Youssef said.

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## DEATHS IN 'CROSSFIRE, ENCOUNTER' Babar wants probes finished before govt's tenure ends

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The government yesterday instructed all superintendents of police (SPs) to complete all executive inquiries into the incidents of 'encounter' between alleged criminals and law enforcers before the tenure of the current government ends.

Sources said State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday gave the instruction at a meeting in the Police Headquarters with top police officials with ranks of SPs and above.

The instruction came as Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and the police were frequently criticised by the human rights activists have been criticising since those began a couple of years ago, meeting sources said. More than 700 people have already been killed in so called 'crossfire' and 'encounters'.

The sources also said Rab and police personnel want the present government to save them from prosecutions in connection with all incidents of 'crossfire' and 'encounters' since some legal mistakes were detected in the process of investigation of the incidents.

According to the law, inquests into 'crossfire' and 'encounter' deaths must be carried out by a magistrate, but in many cases the police had carried out the inquests.

"I request the SPs to complete the investigations of encounters under section 176 of Criminal Procedure Code within a month," a source attending the meeting quoted Babar as saying. "If any guideline is needed, you can call the inspector general of police and even can make phone calls to me," Babar told the meeting.

Asked about the investigations of the incidents, Babar, however, told journalists, "An investigation is a continuous process and those are going on."

Carried out in connection with most of the 'crossfire' and 'encounter' incidents to justify the killings by proving that situations were created

which compelled the law enforcers to open fire and during the shootout the so-called criminals were killed.

When an incident of 'crossfire' takes place under the command of a sub-inspector or an inspector or any official below the rank of a magistrate, then a magistrate is empowered to carry out the inquest. In many cases the rule was followed.

But many incidents of 'crossfire' and 'encounter' involving Rab, were either led by additional SPs or company commanders, whose ranks are equivalent to an army major's. Although only a divisional commissioner level official can carry out an executive investigation of such cases, the process was not followed in many of those.

Home Secretary Safarraj Hossain, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Anwarul Iqbal, the director general of rab, commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police and all top police officials

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## Concern over security during Durga Puja

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hindu leaders yesterday expressed their concern over security during the Durga Puja as incidents of vandalising the images of goddess Durga have been continuing across the country even after alerting the home ministry.

Meanwhile, the government has identified 8,209 puja mandaps as high-risk centres.

The leaders of Bangladesh Puja Uddjapan Parishad, Mohanagar Sarbojaneen Puja Committee, Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, and Bangladesh Hindu Youth Welfare Foundation alleged that local law enforcers did not take any action against the perpetrators who damaged the idols of Durga at 11 places.

The incidents took place at Barait of Badda and Ashulia of Savar in Dhaka, Taraghat of Bagapara upazila in Jessore, Jashkhula union of Marua upazila in Pirojpur, Kushtia sadar, Kalia upazila of Narail, Roopganj in Narayanganj, Sunamganj, Natore and Sirajganj.

"We do not want to celebrate

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## RELOCATION OF HAZARIBAGH TANNERIES

# 'Several more years' needed to get rid of toxic onslaught

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Relocation of the tanneries of Hazaribagh will take 'several more years' to be completed since the authorities are facing various complications regarding land acquisition, setting up an Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP), and 'reluctant' tannery owners, sources in Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) said.

With the delay of 'at least four years' in implementing the Tk 175 crore Dhaka Tannery Estate Project (DTEP), the Buriganga river and millions of residents in the western part of the capital are set to face renewed onslaught of toxic emissions in the coming years.

Over 273 tanneries and hundreds of related industries are directly responsible for dumping 7.7 million litres of highly toxic liquid wastes into the river Buriganga every day. Moreover, every day 88 tons of solid wastes, generated by the tanneries, are dumped into the Buriganga, the lifeline of the city.

Leaders of two bargaining associations, 151-member Bangladesh Tanners' Association (BTA) and 122-member Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters Association (BFLLEA) are now demanding Tk 800 crore for the relocation. They are also asking the government for a waiver of loan repayment worth Tk 1,200 crore, which they had borrowed for hide procurement during successive Eid festivals.



PHOTO: STAR

Heaps of waste from Hazaribagh tanneries dumped on the bank of Buriganga without following standards of waste management.

DTEP was launched in 2003 and it took the authorities three years to acquire and partially develop 200 acres of land in Savar for the project. The prime minister is pledged to relocate the tanneries which have been causing colossal environmental damage in the vast western part of the city and polluting the Buriganga.

With a hyped up publicity, the prime minister inaugurated the project in 2005. The project period was then extended up to December 2006.

Officials of DTEP have now asked the government to extend the time period from December 2006 to December 2010. They have also asked for an additional

amount of Tk 187 crore, which will bring the project cost to Tk 362 crore. The revised project proposal is now lying with the industries ministry.

"We have to acquire another 200 acres of land and also have to re-float an international tender for the

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Breach in Wapda embankment along Chuna river at Panikhal in Shyamnagar upazila of Satkhira flooded some 24 villages, left, pedestrians waded through a submerged road at Centre Para in Patuakhali town.



PHOTO: STAR