

Inflation spiralling

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was 7.95 percent. However, later the rate was declining and in February of the same fiscal, the rate declined to 5.72 percent.

Uttam Kumar Dev, senior research fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), identified three main reasons for the recent hike in rice prices. "First of all, we have short production of aas and aman rice, and import was also low," he said adding, "The other reason is that the prices of rice in the international market are high."

He, however, said the recent trend of inflation rate might change within a couple of weeks when boro rice will be available in markets.

According to the Bangladesh Bank (BB) statistics aas and aman rice production in the current fiscal was 1.24 crore metric tons while in the last fiscal it had been 1.25 metric tons.

Import volume of rice in the last nine months of the current fiscal was 17.08 lakh metric tons, which had been 19.41 lakh metric tons in the same period of the last fiscal.

The trend of rice prices in the international market show that in Thailand a metric ton of rice had been \$352 in the first quarter of the current fiscal which rose to \$372 in the second quarter.

BBS sources said rice consumption largely controls the changes in the inflation rate. One official said 50 to 60 percent of the inflation rate depends on rice consumption.

Rice prices increased in recent days. According to yesterday's Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) report, rice prices increased by 14 to 26 per-

cent in the last one year while the rate of increase was 8-14 percent in the last one month.

Economists predict more increase in the inflation rate in the current month as production cost of boro rice increased this year due to a fuel price hike.

Economic Research Group, an independent research organisation, in a recent study apprehended that inflation rate might reach double digits (10 percent) within a year.

Uttam Kumar Dev of CPD said the only possible way of lowering rice prices is to meet the target production of boro. He, however, is sceptic about meeting the target production saying that the government could not achieve the target production of aas and aman.

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In the forwarding reports placed before the court, Criminal Investigation Department Inspector Abu Hena Mohammad Yusuf, also investigation officer of the cases, mentioned that the two leaders gave important information about the bomb explosions.

Ten people died and several others were injured on April 14, 2001 when bombs went off at Ramna Batalum during the Bengali New Year's celebration.

Hannan made a confessional statement on November 19 last year.

On June 14, 2001, Akbar Hussain, one of the arrestees, made a confessional statement to a metropolitan magistrate disclosing involvements of Mufti Hannan and others with the blasts.

Hannan Shah

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procession wielding pistols, Molotov cocktails, machetes, and iron rods at Saisahree under Kapashia upazila in Gazipur at 4:00pm on October 28, the last day of BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government's rule.

In the attack, around 20 to 25 AL activists and leaders were injured, five of whom suffered bullet wounds, the FIR mentioned.

The FIR also said Hannan Shah opened fire on the procession wounding AL activists Kishore, Quayum and Mithun.

Around 50 people were made witnesses in the case.

First Class Magistrate Molika Khatun directed the officer-in-charge of Kapashia police station to investigate the case.

Hannan however alleged that the government filed the case through the AL leader.

He also claimed that he himself was a victim of an AL attack on him on that very day.

CA pledges

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wants to work together towards a common goal," Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munam quoted the CA to have said.

The editor's side said they have faith in the government and they also expect the same from the government side.

Regarding cut in import duty on newsprint, the CA said he would discuss the matter with the concerned ministries.

About the proposed Right to Information act, Fakhrudin said he would definitely look into the matter.

On talks show on TV channels, the CA suggested participation of all stakeholders in such programmes that would benefit all, not only the government.

The TV channels' editors requested the chief adviser to look so that any discrimination doesn't take place in providing terrestrial facility to private TV channels. They also said that private TV channels don't get government advertisements.

The CA assured them of looking into those matters.

Information Adviser Barrister Mainul Hosein and the cabinet secretary were present.

17 'JMB men'

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Mohammad Liton, 29, and following his information they arrested Mohammad Abu Solaiman, 45, a former imam of a mosque in Khagrachhari upazila, who left the upazila after the August 17 country-wide bomb blasts in 2005, police said.

U N B a d d s f r o m Chapainawabganj: Rail police arrested two Islamist militant suspects as they were moving suspiciously at the station at about 7:00am yesterday.

The arrested -- Mizanur Rahman, 18, and Sohel Rana, 19, both from Fulbari upazila of Dinajpur district -- are students of Devinagar Hafizia Madrasa of Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila.

Two toy guns, one tape recorder, electric bulb and circuit and five books were found after searching their bags.

One-way

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due to this," he admitted.

Meanwhile, the policemen deployed in the area for enforcing the one-way traffic system claimed that the plan has reduced traffic congestion.

"It will take a couple of days for people to get used to the one-way traffic system," Police Sergeant Solaiman told The Daily Star.

The DMP also banned honking horns on some roads in Dhamondi to curb noise pollution.

Some 150 members of riot police have been deployed to enforce the one-way traffic system, sources said.

Experts

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After receiving the expert committee's report, Power and Energy Adviser Tapan Chowdhury told reporters that he is yet to go through the report.

But the committee has briefed him that there was no major irregularities or corruption involved. "Only there might be a few minor flaws, which were insignificant," Chowdhury said quoting the committee's observation.

Replies to a question, Tapan Chowdhury said the proposed site for Siddhinganj 240 MW peaking plant has been handed over to Indian Company BHEL on Saturday and the company has already started its work to set up the power plant.

He also said no employees of the existing 50 MW Siddhinganj plant would be retrenched and they all will be absorbed in other projects of PDB.

Steps underway

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avert a blow out or damage to the gas field's structure.

Though this situation initially seemed unmanageable, the level of uncontrolled release of gas gradually reduced. Experts said mud pumped by Bapex ultimately found its way to the main leakage point and greatly reduced gas leakage.

Meanwhile, the government urgently invited GSM experts to Bangladesh to help resolve the problem.

GSM held a meeting with Petrobangla, Bapex and BGFL on April 22 to discuss the best measures for the troubled Titas.

At the meeting, GSM President Robert Dean Grace noted that the actions taken by Bapex prior to mid-April had helped kill the field to a great extent. As a result of Bapex's action, which was technically sound, the level of uncontrolled gas release had reduced significantly.

Grace made three proposals to resolve the problem. His first proposal -- to kill the well using coil tubing unit -- was put aside as the risk factor in such a step is high. "If the coil tubing breaks down inside the well, it would lead to a serious problem," one source explained.

His second proposal involves using a snubbing unit to kill the well. The government accepted this idea along with the third proposal -- to drill a relief well. Drilling of this well would come later as this is time consuming.

Experts from Bapex however made their own presentation at the meeting. They said it became clear from their earlier actions that the seven-inch casing (there are five casings of different sizes inside the well) still had a leak while another crack in the 13-3/8 inch casing had been sealed off by pumping mud before mid-April.

Bapex argued that using the snubbing unit bears the risk of a blow out at many steps.

"Since mud pumping had turned out to be effective, Bapex believes that the leakage in the seven-inch casing can be sealed off by applying barite, which does not appear a risky idea," the source said quoting the Bapex proposal.

But the government ultimately opted for GSM's solution because of its experience and expertise in the matter. GSM had been involved in both Magurjhara and Tengtrilat blowout remedial actions.

Spur gas leakage through various points of the ground in Brahmanbaria had been noticed for the last three to five years. But since the last dry season, this has become alarming. Local villagers and farmers had told The Daily Star in February that gas was leaking into the airport to welcome her back.

A senior leader said the supporters and leaders will rather use placards and festoons instead of chanting slogans. Those who wish to be at the airport, it will be their own responsibility.

Jalil said they have no plans for reception as the state of emergency is in force. He however dropped hints that an indoor reception might be arranged but that too after discussing the issue with the AL leader.

As of last night the AL leaders were busy trying to persuade the military-backed administration to allow more leaders, said a party insider.

Meanwhile, sources said the government has already communicated to the AL top brass some kind of unofficial prohibitions against mass gathering and chanting slogans, they added.

Though the party has no plans to give her a public reception, a good number of leaders and workers from across the country might flock to the airport to welcome her back.

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The election commissioner said the EC planned to hold talks with the editors of national dailies and senior journalists on May 17, but it postponed the schedule due to non-availability of a venue.

The EC held the first dialogue with the eminent persons on April 26.

"We will review the opinion together once we complete the process of discussion," Sahul said.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Bangladesh Economic Association, a meeting with the EC yesterday morning placed some proposals for electoral reforms.

Emerging from the meeting Kazi Khaliquzzaman, president of the association, told reporters that they suggested that the EC initiate necessary legal and administrative measures to control the influence of money and muscle power in the elections.

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Writ petition

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present address is 62, Bijoynagar, Dhaka.

A group of lawyers including BNP's Law Affairs Secretary Zainul Abedin assumed that Josnara might be the wife of former prime minister Khaleda Zia's political secretary Harris Chowdhury, but it could not be confirmed.

In the same petition, she also prayed to issue rule upon the Election Commission (EC) as to why it has been delaying in holding the general elections.

After filing of the petition in the morning a division bench of the HC partly heard the matter yesterday afternoon and fixed May 16 for the next hearing.

This is the first ever petition filed against the caretaker government challenging its legal base of its holding office.

While Abdus Salam Mandal is the filing advocate of the petition yesterday as counsel of the EC.

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