



Consumers gasp with worry as Ramadan nears

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City dwellers have already started experiencing the sizzle of the market with prices of Ramadan items and other essentials going up only a week ahead of the holy month.

The prices of Ramadan essentials started galloping since Shab-e-Barat, adding extra burden on kitchen costs. Consumers, especially belonging to the low-income group, suffer heavily because of the hike as a never-ending vicious cycle of price escalation has pushed a large number of items beyond the purchasing capacity of the common man.

Prices of the most common iftar items like gram, peas, puffed rice (Muri), flattened rice (Chira) and dates have already gone up.

Chickpeas vastly consumed during Ramadan cost Tk 80 a kg, which was only Tk 65 a week ago while soybean oil costs Tk 85 a litre, which was Tk 65 a month back. Lentil now sells at Tk 68 a kg, onion Tk 30, garlic Tk 60 and ginger Tk 48.

Other necessary items such as *beshan* (powdered pulses) sells at Tk 45 per kg. A jar of 750gm Tang orange drink costs Tk 210, which was Tk 160 a year ago.

One kilogram of chilli powder costs Tk 200, which was Tk 160 only 2 to 3 week ago while cumin seeds price went up by 25 to 30 percent and

now sells at Tk 300.

The price of ordinary dates marked a sharp rise to reach Tk 100 per kg. Potato is now selling at Tk 250 to Tk 305. The price of the most popular brand of milk powder is around Tk 400 to Tk 415 per kg.

For a can of 450gm ghee and butter oil one must spend around Tk 250 to Tk 305. The price of the most popular brand of milk powder is around Tk 400 to Tk 415 per kg.

Broiler chicken is now selling at Tk 105 and local breed Tk 180 per kg. However, eggplant is still affordable this

price hike of essentials are synonymous in Bangladesh," said a retired banker from Mirpur.

"Every year me and my wife discuss whether we will survive this Ramadan. But never in my lifetime I have experienced anything quite like this," he added.

"Price of everything keeps going up all through the year. Only the Almighty knows how high it will go up during this Ramadan," he said.

A salesman from Elephant

arrangement works for me as I save money".

"However this time prices are going up all through the year. It will be worse during Ramadan. Other than expenses for iftar essentials, there are regular expenditures and Eid shopping for children. What will middle class people like us do?" she added.

Housewife Ayesha Khatun at Moghbazar said she can no longer cope with the price hike and feared that she might

the soaring market price. Recently the government withdrew 5 percent import duty on edible oil and issued instructions about reducing bank interest rate to 12 percent on import loans.

On September 3, in a meeting with the meat sellers of Dhaka, Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka fixed the price of various types of meat and asked them to display a price chart at the store.

The price of beef has been fixed at Tk 170, mutton Tk 200 and buffalo meat Tk 150. Butchers however, violate the order and sell meat at higher prices. Currently the price of one kg beef is Tk 180 to Tk 200, mutton Tk 220 and buffalo meat Tk 180.

In a bid to arrest price hike of essentials ahead of Ramadan, BDR opened more fair price outlets in the city. There are around 100 fair price shops now operating under the banner of 'Operation Daal Bhaat 2007' launched by BDR.

Ansar and VDP also launched around 50 retail outlets in August while a number of private firms will operate another 12 to 14 such shops during the month of Ramadan.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in a meeting with business leaders on Wednesday tried to boost their confidence, assuring them of all-out help and allaying fear of any undue harassment in running their affairs.

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year. It costs Tk 25 a kg. Cucumber is now selling at Tk 30.

Fruits became luxury for the poor a long time ago. Now they cannot even dream about it. Banana used to be the cheapest source of nutrition. A good size banana now sells at Tk 4. Price of one kg apple is Tk 120 to Tk 140 while grapes cost Tk 210. Poor man's apple guava is also out of their reach. A moderate piece of this fruit now cost Tk 5.

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Road said, "When two years ago price of eggplant increased up to Tk 80, *beguni* became the costliest iftar item. Street side iftar sellers even used papaya as replacement of eggplant. That year we did not eat *beguni* during iftar. The way everything is going on this year, probably all the items will become costlier."

Shaila Khandker, a homemaker from Mirpur, said, "I usually make a plan early and purchase all the essentials beforehand because the price usually rise during and right before Ramadan. This

have to curtail her iftar menu this year.

Meanwhile, restaurant owners who sell iftar every year indicate that the price of iftar items will rise too because of the continuous price hike. An iftar seller at Shahbagh said, "Last year I sold a piece of *piazzo* at Tk 3, *beguni* Tk 5, *chhola* Tk 10 per 50gram, *jilepi* Tk 60 per kg. I may have to raise the prices this year due to price hike of almost every item."

While the city dwellers feel the heat, the government has taken several steps to control

RE-REGISTRATION OF CELLPHONES

Mandatory for all, hassle for many

DURDANA GHIAS

Fugitive ward commissioners, lack of connection with first class gazetted officers, flood and impending Ramadan are some of the elements mobile phone users are going to deal with in the next few weeks as the authorities asked them to get their subscription re-registered by October 16.

The recent instruction has created a rush among the millions of subscribers who got cellphone connection before February last year as very little time is left to renew their subscription.

SIM card, two copies of passport size photo, passport or any photo ID card (like the office ID card or driving licence) and the forms and documents given during subscription are needed for the re-registration.

Re-registration can be a real problem for those who do not have any kind of photo ID card. In case one does not have a photo ID card, he/she will have to fill in the BTRC form and get it attested by a first class gazetted officer or by the local ward commis-

sioner. But many ward commissioners became fugitive after the state of emergency was declared. So it will be hard to get a signature from them.

Most first class gazetted officers do not want to attest for those who they do not know personally. So it will be a hassle for many uneducated and village people to find a government officer.

People are now rushing to the customer care centres of the cellphone companies to get things done before the last date. They have voiced mixed reaction at this sudden move from the authorities. They said getting the subscription registered again will be a hassle for many.

Sonali, a young professional, said: "I am a working person. I will have to manage at least one day for doing this job. If they could provide us with web-based forms, it would have been easier for working people. We could have filled in the form while in office or at home."

"The main problem will be that many people have lost their documents they were given when they bought the SIM

card. Besides, there are some people who are using SIM cards bought in their relative's names or were given as a gift. I'm using my father's SIM," she said.

It is very difficult for village people to get a renewed subscription by taking photos because many villages do not

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have photo studios. It will be hard for them to collect required documents too. "If we can have national ID card first then may be we will not have to face such problems," she added.

Many mobile users are confused about why they will have to re-register and what

will happen if they fail to do it.

"First of all it is an extra hassle for us. We do not know why we will have to do it. There are many people who are maintaining several SIM cards. It will be very difficult for them to get all those re-registered within two months. It is not a matter of joke," said a private university student, seeking anonymity.

"It is not clear to us what measures we are going to face in case we fail to re-register as the newspaper advertisement says 'steps will be taken according to government rules' if anyone fails to re-register. Reading this it seemed to me as if it is a crime to keep mobile phones and this kind of approach is creating panic among mobile phone users," he said.

Officials of mobile phone companies said they too do not know what steps will be taken in case someone has lost his documents.

Syed Yamin Bakht, general manager (information) Grameen Phone, said that if the time could have been extended it would have been better for all because of flood

and Ramadan.

About those who have lost their documents he said, "If anyone have lost their documents then he can come to our sales centres. They can work out what can be done with those cases."

Shehzad Hossain, assistant manager, public relations and communication, Banglalink, said they were not notified by the government specifically what steps are to be taken against those who are not able to renew the connection.

"We are assuming that cellphones of those who are not able to show papers will be disconnected as this is a logical solution to the problem. But we were not told anything by the government exactly what will be done," he said.

"We have asked the customers to bring the SIM card if they have lost the subscription documents because simply we do not want them to get scared. We are hoping that those who have lost documents can be found in our computer database. But we cannot say for sure that we have composed all the subscription documents," he said.



Re-registration is going on in full swing at a Teletalk centre at Purana Paltan.