

Govt finally wakes up

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has increased recently, BDR officials said. "Usually, we sold 150 tonnes of rice a day from 40 outlets, but in the last couple of days we have sold over 200 tonnes of rice a day," said a BDR official.

After a meeting of the Food, Planning and Monitoring Committee, Food Adviser Tapan Chowdhury yesterday said OMS outlets will be introduced soon to contend with the increasing prices of rice.

He said the BDR will be supplied with 15,000 tonnes of rice for selling at subsidised prices while another 5,000 tonnes of rice will be supplied for workers in the closed mills areas in Khulna.

Meeting sources said the price of rice at the OMS outlets will be around Tk 25 per kilogram.

The government will also write to all donors, asking for food grains as post-Sidra aid instead of money, the sources said.

Mirza Azizul Islam and Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Adviser Anwarul Iqbal were also present at the meeting.

Food ministry officials said there was steady increase of rice prices as domestic production was less because of frequent floods, the recent cyclone and high prices on international market. "But we are confused about the skyrocketing rice prices in recent days, the season for Aman harvest," said a senior official of the ministry.

"Even we have the same stock of food grains as last year," he said, adding that the ministry is investigating the reasons for this unexpected price hike.

Rice traders at the Karwan Bazar wholesale market, meanwhile, blamed the increased price of rice imported from India for the increase in the prices of local rice.

"The quality of local rice is better than that of Indian rice and comparing the quality traders have increased the prices of local rice," a trader at Karwan Bazar said.

Aman paddy was sold at Tk 550 per maund when the harvest started a month ago but following the price increase of imported Indian rice, the price of the same paddy has jumped to Tk 750-800.

Sources meanwhile said a two-member delegation of the food ministry will visit India soon to discuss import of five lakh tonnes of rice, pledged by the Indian government as aid for the cyclone-hit people. The delegation will finalise the prices of rice as well as time and ports of the delivery.

"If five lakh tonnes of rice is imported from India soon, it will increase the supply in the market and thus reduce the prices," said a ministry official.

Besides, donors have pledged to provide another five lakh tonnes of food grains as aid instead of money. Food ministry officials, however, said donors said they are facing a lot of complexities in providing food instead of money.

Talking to reporters, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam blamed the price hike in local markets on the price increase in the global market. "It is a must that the domestic market price will find its parity with the global market in an import-dependant country," he said.

"We are continuing to import rice... We were unaware that India would raise the price of rice to \$500 from \$425," he said, adding

that China has also imposed export tax on food grain.

The finance adviser said import of rice by the private sector has stood at 21 lakh tonnes as of December of this fiscal year while their total import during the whole year was 24 lakh tonnes.

RICE PRICES TO COME DOWN SOON, SAYS COMMERCE SECRETARY

Commerce secretary Feroz Ahmed yesterday said the prices of rice are expected to come down in a few days as the government has decided to release a huge quantity of rice to reach buyers through different distribution channels, says BSS.

He expressed the optimism while talking to journalists after a meeting with leaders of the city rice traders and importers at his secretariat office.

"The price of rice increased from market shocks following the Indian government announcement of its rice export price at \$ 500 per tonne," he said, adding the government has already taken measures to neutralise the Indian monopoly.

"Buyers have no reasons to be panicked," he said explaining government efforts to reign in the market. He said the government current food stock is quite comfortable at 6.04 lakh tonnes compared to 6.28 lakh tonnes at the same time last year.

The commerce secretary said the government is moving fast to face the situation. The food ministry has already invited tender to import one lakh tonnes of rice from Thailand while preparation is underway to invite tender for another one lakh tonnes Thai rice.

The government is also working on a plan to import rice from Vietnam and Myanmar to ease the situation created by recurrent floods and cyclone.

"Look at the onion market or sugar market, the distortion did not last long," he said pointing to a stiff decline in onion prices from around Tk 60 to Tk 20/25 before the Eid.

Outlining the government steps to address the market situation, the commerce secretary said a meeting at the food ministry yesterday decided to release 20,000 tonnes of rice through BDR shopping outlets at lower price.

The operation will begin in one or two days. The government-run open market sale (OMS) operation of rice at low price will start to pull down the soaring prices.

Under the Test Relief (TR) programme, the authorities have, moreover, decided to put 75,000 tonnes to support the poor.

Another 85,000 tonnes will be distributed under the Food for Work Programme (FFW). The Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Programme will add another 38,000 tonnes to the supply chain in addition to 10,000 tonnes under the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Programme.

Replying to a question on sudden rise in export price of rice to \$500 per tonne by the Indian government, he said New Delhi has allowed earlier import shipment booked at \$ 425 per tonne from yesterday through Benapole and other border points.

It will have dumping effect on market. Moreover, the Indian government has indicated that permission for importing 5 lakh tonnes of rice has given to Bangladesh earlier will not be subject to the latest price ceiling.

He said a government team will be leaving for New Delhi in a few days to sort out the import issue including the price confusion. He said the government is relentlessly trying to control the situation.

Quarishi

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capital, Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) yesterday held a meeting in Siddhirganj upazila of the district.

PDP President Ferdous Ahmad Quarishi attended the meeting held at the house of local party leader Rafiqul Islam Dewan at Talola. About 200 leaders, workers and supporters of the party joined the meeting.

Party leaders Nur Mohammad Khan, Maj Gen (ret'd) Rafiqul Islam Hiru and Ashraf Uddin Chhunu, among others, spoke at the meeting chaired by Abdul Aziz Pathan.

Quarishi said corrupt politicians are responsible for the current situation in the country as they did everything only to serve their own interests. They looted public property and smuggled money out of the country, he alleged.

Khaleda, Hasina

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detained and under trial, the law adviser said, "There are many options including bail and release on parole."

Hasina's personal physicians, pro-Awami League doctors, lawyers and cultural activists already demanded that the caretaker government sends Hasina abroad for better treatment.

Asked if the Awami League would send the proposal to the caretaker government, the party's acting President Zillur Rahman said they would not send any formal proposal as the government earlier said there is no rule to send detainees abroad for treatment.

He, however, said, "It is the party chief's decision whether she wants to go abroad for treatment. If she wants to go then we will support it." Zillur told reporters at his Gulshan home, adding that they would talk to Hasina in this regard soon.

The BNP, however, termed the law adviser's comments "a reflection of the government's previous plan to send the two leaders on exile."

"We have not heard that Khaleda Zia is seriously ill," said Rizvi Ahmed, acting office secretary of BNP. He said if such situation arises, her physicians and family members would decide whether to send her abroad.

Awami League insiders, however, termed the issue of sending Hasina abroad "a political matter". "There certainly is a government move to send her [Hasina] abroad using 'better treatment' as an excuse," a senior Awami League leader told The Daily Star preferring not to be named.

Jail authorities yesterday told journalists that the Awami League chief expressed her wish to go abroad for better treatment and under the jail code there is no way she could be sent.

Another source said if the government actually sends her abroad, it could be part of its own plan.

Asked about the government's stance on Awami League's call to initiate dialogues between the government and political parties, except Jamaat-e-Islami, to resolve the current political situation, Mainul said, "It is the chief adviser who can answer this."

Awami League's presidium members will sit today to discuss sending Hasina abroad for better treatment and dialogue with the government.

Flower-shop staff

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assistant, and tea vendor Shah Alam of Shahbagh area.

They, however, did not say anything against the defendants who were accused of violating the emergency rules and vandalising public and private property.

Sabuj and Alam told the court that Shahbagh police seized several fragments of broken glass from in front of fine arts institute in their presence on August 22 last year. They said they later signed the seizure list.

After their statements, defence lawyers of the four teachers and one student, who are now in jail custody, cross-examined the two witnesses.

The five defendants were brought to the court, and the magistrate allowed them to sit down on a bench during the hearing.

The four teachers are Dhaka University Teachers' Association President Prof Sadrul Amin, General Secretary Prof Anwar Hossain, Prof Harun-ar-Rashid, dean of science faculty, and Prof Neem Chandra Bhowmik, chairman of applied physics department.

The case was filed on August 22 against 5,000 to 6,000 unnamed students and teachers of Dhaka University and outsiders for violating the emergency rules, vandalising public and private property, obstructing police duty and assaulting law enforcers at the university and in the vicinity.

Police, however, pressed charges against four teachers and 15 students September 9 for instigating the violence on the campus and at Shahbagh on August 21 and 22.

Another court will today hear the other case against the same accused.

Tapan antics

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Leaders of political parties also bitterly criticised and protested the his comment, and termed it 'irresponsible and ridiculous'.

Several advisers, government policymakers and high officials criticised the comment, terming it 'irresponsible and foolish'.

An adviser holding important portfolios like food, disaster management and energy should not have made such comment, they said.

A highly placed source at the Chief Adviser's Office on condition of anonymity told The Daily Star that Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed expressed utter dissatisfaction over Tapan Chowdhury's remarks. He also advised Tapan to refrain from making such comments in future.

The remarks came up for serious discussions among the advisers as well as high officials, and they also talked about that informally.

Some advisers contacted Tapan Chowdhury and wanted to know what prompted him to make such remarks that simply went against the government.

They said the government must not express its inability to handle any matters. It has many things to do and is trying its best to bring down rice price within the buying capacity of general people and keep it stable, they mentioned.

REACTION OF POLITICAL LEADERS
Different political parties yesterday severely criticised the government for the continued price spiral of essentials, especially rice, and remarks of the food adviser.

Coming down heavily on the government for the spiralling prices, Awami League Acting President Zillur Rahman feared that many people might die due to lack of food if the current trend of prices continues.

The government has completely failed to control the price hike of essentials, he said while talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence in the capital. He demanded urgent steps to bring down the prices to ease people's sufferings.

Asked if the Awami League would send the proposal to the caretaker government, the party's acting President Zillur Rahman said they would not send any formal proposal as the government earlier said there is no rule to send detainees abroad for treatment.

He, however, said, "It is the party chief's decision whether she wants to go abroad for treatment. If she wants to go then we will support it." Zillur told reporters at his Gulshan home, adding that they would talk to Hasina in this regard soon.

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Awami League's presidium members will sit today to discuss sending Hasina abroad for better treatment and dialogue with the government.

Zillur also urged the government to initiate dialogue with political parties to resolve the prevailing 'political deadlock' and the price spiral issue.

Asked whether they demand resignation of the adviser concerned for his failure to control the price hike, he said the government should decide what to do about it.

In his reaction to the remarks of Tapan Chowdhury, BNP Acting Secretary General Hafiz Uddin Ahmed (appointed by the party standing committee) said it is the responsibility of the government to ensure food security.

"So, the government should take the initiative. It should import food, if necessary, through spot tenders, and also continue diplomatic efforts in this regard," he told journalists.

Considering the food situation and price hike of essentials, different political parties also demanded that the government introduce rationing. And it should also hold discussion with the parties to frame strategies to ensure supply of essentials at affordable prices, they said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Manjural Hossain Khan and General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim in a joint statement said Tapan Chowdhury's comment sounded a fun with the people who are now in distress due to the price hike.

They asked the government to go for immediate import of rice, and supply of it at subsidised price.

Workers Party of Bangladesh in a press statement said the food adviser's comment has contributed to deterioration of the market situation, and he has to take responsibility for this.

The other parties which came up with similar reaction to Tapan's remarks included Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD-Khalequzzaman), Bam Gonotantrik Front, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal (ML), Gonotantrik Bam Morcha, Gonotantrik Andolon, Bangladesh Jubo Motiree, Jatiya Mukti Council and Bangladesh National Awami Part.

Ex-additional secy commits suicide in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A former additional secretary and ex-member of National Board of Revenue (NBR) committed suicide at his Shyamoli residence in the city yesterday.

Family members found Anwar Hossain, 67, hanging with a rope tied around his neck from the staircase railing of his four-storey building around 6:00pm.

Quoting family members, Officer-in-Charge of Mohammadpur Police Station Shibli Noman told The Daily Star that the security guard of the building informed Anwar's wife, a Supreme Court advocate, over phone that they are not getting any trace of Anwar since lunch.

Later, Anwar's wife and other family members rushed to home and found him dead.

ACC files case

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information about their wealth in their wealth statements submitted to the ACC.

In the first information report filed with Joydevpur Police Station, ACC official Jafar Ahmed, the complainant, said Prof MA Mannan, his wife Sajeda Begum and son Manzurul Karim amassed wealth worth over Tk 9.79 crore illegally between 1998 and 2007.

They mentioned their wealth valued at Tk 4.95 crore in the wealth statements submitted to the ACC and concealed information about wealth worth over Tk 5.78 crore, the complainant said.

The case also mentioned that after checking with the balance sheet of Gazipur Fashion Pvt Ltd, it was found that the company's wealth is worth over Tk 5.51 crore but the accused concealed this information about their company in the statements.

The complainant also said Sajeda Begum in her wealth statement said her wealth was worth Tk 8.5 lakh but it was later discovered she owns wealth valued at Tk 55.24 lakh. Manzurul Karim mentioned his wealth to be Tk 2.65 lakh but the ACC found out he has wealth worth Tk 35.30 lakh.

Meanwhile, the ACC yesterday approved filing of a case against former state minister and Jubo Dal President Barkat Ullah Bulu, his wife and son in connection with amassing wealth illegally.

The commission decided to file the case as investigation found that Bulu accumulated wealth worth Tk 4.89 crore beyond his known sources of income and he also concealed information about wealth worth Tk 3.37 crore in his wealth statement submitted to the commission.

Bulu submitted his wealth statement on July 30 showing he owns properties worth Tk 1.2 crore while his wife Shamima Akter said her wealth was worth Tk 1.23 crore and his son Omar Sharif Mohammad Imran mentioned his wealth to be Tk 49.41 lakh.

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Humayun

FROM PAGE 1
station in Nilphamari.

The officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station said they raided Noman's Lalmita residence on Dhanmondi Road-27 around 10:00am soon after receiving an arrest warrant issued by a Nilphamari court.

The police produced Noman before the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Hemayet Uddin around 7:00pm.

The court later ordered for sending Noman to Dhaka Central Jail.

IO asked

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though the complainant filed it more than two weeks ago. The case was recorded under sections 447 (criminal trespass), 448 (house trespass), 436 (torching), 302 (murder) and 109 (abatement) of Bangladesh Penal Code.

Freedom fighter Mozaffar Ahmad Khan, who is now Dhaka district unit Muktiyoddha commander, filed the murder case on December 17 last year, stating that the Jamaat men killed his nephew Osman Gani and allow freedom fighter Gani Mostafa alias Tukub Ali on November 25 in 1971 in Keraniganj.

After recording Mozaffar's statement, the judicial magistrate directed officer-in-charge at Keraniganj Police Station to register the double murder as a first information report and take action against the accused following investigation into the matter.

Other accused are two assistant secretary generals of the Jamaat -- Abdul Quader Molla and Muhammad Kamaruzzaman -- Keraniganj upazila unit Amir Haji Nazim Uddin, Islami Chhatra Sangha leader KG Karim Babla, and Abul Kashem, Foyzur Rahman Foyaz and Yasin. The last three were al-Badr, Razakar and al-Shams activists during the war.

Complainant Mozaffar said 60 to 70 other unknown activists of the three militias took part in killing, torching and looting valuables in Keraniganj on the day.

Jamaat in a press release yesterday condemned the recording of the case by Keraniganj Police Station.

The party said the allegations of killing and arson against Jamaat leaders are false and filing of such false and fictitious case is unfortunate and unexpected.

Election in Pakistan

FROM PAGE 1
I assure all political parties that the elections will be fair, free and transparent. I appeal to them to accept this decision in the supreme national interest and participate fully," he said.

The election is seen as a crucial next step in the transition to civilian-led democratic rule in Pakistan under Musharraf, a close ally in the US-led "war on terror" who stepped down from his other post as army chief just weeks ago.

Senior officials had privately confirmed since Monday that the vote would be delayed, but the public announcement was delayed by talks with main political parties amid an uproar over the delay and the government response to Benazir's death.

The party of slain Pakistan opposition leader Benazir Bhutto will stand in general elections which have been delayed until February 18, a senior party official told AFP yesterday.

"We are taking part in the elections," Nabil Gabol, a member of the Pakistan People's Party central executive committee, said after a meeting here following the postponement of the vote from January 8.

A spokesman for former Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif said yesterday that the opposition leader's party would take part in elections after they were delayed until February 18.

"Yes, we will certainly participate," Sharif's spokesman Zaeem Qadri told AFP after election officials announced that unrest caused by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto had forced the postponement of the January 8 vote.

However the chairman of Sharif's party, Raja Zafar ul-Haq, said that the delay was "unfair and not reasonable".

"We believe that it was the responsibility of the election commission to hold the election on time. The election commission has failed to fulfil its responsibility," Haq told AFP.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's foreign office said yesterday that the government was open to international help in the investigation into the killing of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto.

"The government is committed to a thorough and transparent investigation and is open to receiving assistance from outside," foreign office spokesman Mohammed Sadiq told reporters.

He said visiting French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner had offered help with the probe yesterday, while the United States and Britain had already told Pakistan that they could assist in the investigation.

"France is an important country of the European community. He did offer French help in the investigations. We assured we will contact them if such assistance is needed," Sadiq said.

Government officials have previously rejected an international inquiry.

MUSHARRAF'S SPEECH
In his first speech to the nation since Benazir's assassination, which set off widespread unrest, Musharraf said a Scotland Yard team would "immediately" come to help resolve doubts surrounding the circumstances of her death.

"This is a very significant investigation. All the confusion that has been created in the nation must be resolved," the stony-faced Musharraf said in a pre-recorded address broadcast on state television.

He said Bhutto, a two-time former premier, had been killed by the same "terrorists" who have been behind an unprecedented wave of violence in Pakistan in the past year.

Militant groups have vowed to disrupt the vote, which the president said now had to be delayed.

"The postponement was unavoidable and the decision by the government is correct," Musharraf said.

The committee members are Matiur Rahman, Rezauddin Ahmed, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Golam Sarwar, Nayeemul Islam Khan, Abul Asad and Chairman and MD of channel 1 Faridur Reza Sagor.

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Election Commission is correct," Musharraf said.

Benazir's party and others condemned the vote's postponement from January 8 but grudgingly said they would still take part.

Musharraf appealed for national unity, which he said was essential in fighting terrorism.

The parliamentary vote is seen as Pakistan's crucial next step in the transition to civilian-led democratic rule under Musharraf, a close ally in the US-led "war on terror" who stepped down from his other post as army chief just weeks ago.

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