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Steps taken to import 10 lakh MT rice: CA
Iftikhar, Pranab talk rice import

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said the government has taken steps to import 10 lakh tonnes of rice to stabilise the food prices.

Meanwhile, Foreign Adviser Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury and Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee spoke over telephone on Friday and discussed the planned purchase of rice by Bangladesh from India.

Speaking at the conference of the elected representatives of local government institutions in the city, the chief adviser said contract for the import of 4 lakh tonnes of rice has already been given under which the rice has started reaching the country.

He said a high-level government delegation will go to India this week to finalise the import of 5 lakh

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Rice price falls little, fails to soothe people

Govt's lax procurement bid comes under criticism

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

Economists say the ongoing crisis of rice is the result of government failure to ensure timely import needed to make good the production shortfall caused by recurring floods and cyclone last year.

They believe at least 18 lakh tonnes of rice should have been imported in the first seven months of the current fiscal year to meet the domestic demand.

Meanwhile, the price of rice in the city's retail markets started to fall yesterday. It marked a decrease of Tk 1-2 per kilogram.

Earlier on Friday, rice prices came down by up to Tk 50 a maund in the wholesale markets. But it did not reflect in the prices at the retailers'. The price of the staple was shooting up every day over the

week preceding Thursday.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, former finance adviser Akbar Ali Khan and Research Director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Zaid Bakht observed that the government should have responded immediately to the threatened food deficit.

Asked about the economists' observations, Food Secretary Aiyub Mian said the government has not been sitting idle. It has imported 3 lakh tonnes of food grains in the first seven months and another 1.20 lakh tonnes were in the pipeline.

He said tenders were invited for import of 25 lakh tonnes of food grains, but there was no response from the traders.

"Even those who got the work

orders to import 5.5 lakh tonnes did not enter into any final agreement with the government," he added.

About the Indian proposal for the government to buy five lakh tonnes of rice from it, Aiyub Mian said, "We didn't make any delay. We are examining some conditions set by the Indian government."

A team will visit the country on January 9-10 to finalise the deal. The Indian government communicated the agenda of the meeting only Thursday, he said.

The secretary claimed they wasted no time since India declared that it would allow Bangladesh to import 5 lakh tonnes of rice to tackle the food shortage in the aftermath of Cyclone Sidr. Prices of the rice to be imported

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RICE CRISIS Aziz blames lack of proper coordination

UNB, Dhaka

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam yesterday attributed the present rice crisis to lack of coordination between demand and supply and lack of confidence among the traders.

"Lack of coordination between supply and demand and lack of confidence among the traders are the main reasons for the present scenario of the rice crisis," he told reporters after addressing the launching ceremony of NBR Citizen Charter.

The adviser however added that supply of rice has increased and the retail price is now "stable".

He told a questioner that the government is trying its best both domestically and internationally to get rid of the economic crisis facing the country.

Earlier, addressing the NBR function, Aziz asked the officials to

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Global price surge heats up edible oil market

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Edible oil prices increased by Tk 2 per litre yesterday in local markets as crude soybean oil prices soared to \$ 1,200 a tonne in international markets the previous day.

On Friday, the international price of crude soybean oil exceeded \$ 1,200 per tonne against its previous price of \$ 950 to \$ 1,000 per tonne. Crude palm oil price also went beyond \$ 1,100 per tonne, said local edible oil traders.

Wholesalers at Karwan Bazar and Moulvibazar however alleged that importers and distributors usually create artificial crisis in the country whenever prices rise in the international market.

Market operators said there is no problem in the supply of edible oil as import of more of the commodity is in the pipeline.

According to the Bangladesh Bank (BB) data, \$532.95 million worth of

Letters of Credit was opened between July and December 20, 2007 to import crude and refined edible oil and payment of \$ 433.64 million has been settled so far.

Fakhru Alam, country chief of Malaysian Palm Oil Council, said presently 100,000 tonnes of edible oil is in stock and ships with 100,000 tonnes more are scheduled to arrive in Bangladesh by January 15.

"So, there is no problem in the supply of edible oil right now. The price of the item has been increasing keeping pace with the international market," he said.

MA Rouf Chowdhury, chairman of Bangladesh Vegetable Oil Refiners and Vanaspati Manufacturers Association, said, "There is no reason for the consumers to be panicked since both the government and the traders are trying to find ways and means to

rein in the price of edible oil."

Edible oil refiners and importers in a meeting yesterday discussed the issue of the recent jump of edible oil prices in the local markets, he said adding that they are scheduled to hold a meeting today with commerce secretary Feroz Ahmed and discuss future course of action in context of the current circumstances.

In today's meeting, the refiners and importers would urge the government take necessary measures for taming the prices of edible oil, said Chowdhury.

Local importers of edible oil are observing the situation and "... are yet to make any decision regarding putting the import of edible oil on hold," said the chairman of the association.

Mentioning how difficult it is to set the price of the item as the edible oil price fluctuates in the international markets, Chowdhury

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PHOTO: STAR

A CNG-run taxicab catches fire while refuelling at a Hemayetpur CNG station in Savar yesterday. It is alleged that the station is run by unskilled operators. Firefighters later doused the fire.

Strong local govt soon to serve the grassroots

CA tells conference of local govt representatives

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday hoped the government will soon be able to build a strong, transparent and accountable local government on the basis of the recommendations made by a committee to effectively provide desired services for the grassroots people.

He mentioned some of the recommendations like preventing unwanted interference in local government institutions by members of parliament and formation of a permanent and neutral local government commission.

The CA made the remarks while

inaugurating the "Elected Representatives of Local Government Institutions Conference 2008" organised by the Local Government Division of LGRD and cooperatives ministry at National Parade Square in the city.

The conference was organised to mainly disseminate the recommendations made by the committee for accelerating and strengthening the local government. A summary report of the committee was also delivered to the audience and participants.

Advisers to the present caretaker government, distinguished personalities and high civil and military officials were present at

the function.

On June 3, 2007, the government constituted a seven-member committee on "Accelerating and Strengthening Local Government", headed by former Secretary AMM Swakat Ali, and the committee has already submitted a report with recommendations to the government.

Member secretary of the committee and Joint Secretary of the Local Government Division Mizanur Rahman presented the summary of the report at the function chaired by LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser M Anwarul Iqbal.

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TRYING WAR CRIMINALS AI expects govt to initiate the process

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Global human rights watchdog Amnesty International (AI) yesterday asked the caretaker government to try war criminals.

"We want the present government to initiate some process. The future democratic government will have to take the issue forward. But some steps regarding that should be taken at this moment," Irene Khan, AI secretary general, told reporters after attending a seminar on 'Campaign for Human Dignity' in the capital.

Irene is leading a special AI delegation to Bangladesh to discuss human rights issues with the government, political parties and civil society on the eve of the first anniversary of declaration of the state of emergency.

AI and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) jointly organised the seminar at LGED Bhaban at the launching of a six-day AI mission which will focus on rule of



Irene Khan

law with special attention to institutional changes needed for protection and promotion of human rights.

In her speech at the seminar and statements before the media, the AI chief also touched upon different rights-related issues including the state of emergency.

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Price control govt's main challenge

Says army chief

UNB, Dhaka

Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed has said the main challenge for the caretaker government is to control the soaring prices of essentials and keep the market stable until the next Boro harvest.

"I consider this price-hike as a disaster. The responsibility of our government is to keep the prices under control until the next Boro

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Living on less

Pricey rice changes their food habit

PINAKI ROY

It was 2:00pm, already late for the first meal of the day. Sitting by the Karwan Bazar railway tracks, Marzina Begum was just making preparations to do the cooking for her family of six.

She put chopped cabbages, potatoes and some other vegetables into the pot and then hand-fuls of rice.

"It's sort of a vegetable khichuri, without lentils,"

Marzina, a slum dweller, replied when asked what she was preparing.

Pressed further how much rice she has added to the cooking, she said that there is only half kilogram of rice.

"Today I had only Tk 20 and I could not buy more than half kilogram rice with that," said a distressed Marzina. "So I am doing some tricks, cooking vegetables and rice together," she said

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PHOTO: STAR

A woman cooking 'vegetable khichuri' for her family in a half-filled pot by the railroad at Karwan Bazar in the capital yesterday.

3 of a family burned to death in fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Three of a family were burnt alive yesterday as a fire broke out at their house at Kashimnagar village of Paikgachha upazila in Khulna.

The dead are Kausar Gazi, 45, a security guard, his wife Shar Banu, 30, and their son Sirajul Islam, 3.

Police said the fire originating from a burning mosquito coil quickly engulfed their house while the three were asleep at about 3:30am. They got trapped inside

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