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Govt to buy Boro rice at Tk 28 a kg

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government yesterday fixed the procurement price for Boro rice at Tk 28 a kilogramme (kg) in an effort to maintain a safe level of grain reserve in the wake of globally skyrocketing prices of the country's staple.

A meeting of the food monitoring committee, held at the chief adviser's office and chaired by Food and Disaster Management Adviser AMM Shawkat Ali, also fixed the procurement price for boro paddy at Tk 18 a kg.

The government fixed a target of procuring 12 to 15 lakh metric tons of rice and paddy from the domestic market.

Food Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman told The Daily Star last night, "We will start procuring rice tomorrow."

Earlier, the government's target of procuring food grains was not met, as the prices were set at lower than market rates. The procurement target was set at a total of 13 lakh metric tons during the last Boro and Aman seasons, but the government could procure only a total of 2.19 lakh tonnes.

The government earlier set the

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Free Khaleda, hold polls by year-end

Demands Saifur-led BNP faction in talks with advisers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pro-Saifur faction of BNP yesterday called for immediate release of Chairperson Khaleda Zia at a meeting with advisers to the caretaker government at state guesthouse Meghna in the city.

During the discussions preparatory to the planned dialogue between the government and political parties, they also demanded a free and fair election by this year-end, and proposed devising a code of conduct for the politicians to ensure discipline in post-election politics.

Besides, the pro-reform BNP leaders called for steps to bring down the prices of essentials without delay.

Communications Adviser Maj Gen (retd) Ghulam Quader, Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman,

Law Adviser AF Hassan Ariff and LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal represented the government in the discussion.

Standing committee member Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman led the BNP delegation that included Major (retd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, acting secretary general appointed by the standing committee, vice-presidents Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf and Osman Faruk, chairperson's advisers Maj Gen (retd) ZA Khan and Mofazzal Karim, and former lawmaker Fazlul Azim.

Meanwhile, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general appointed by Khaleda Zia, yesterday said the government is not sincere in resolving the present crises through dialogue with political parties, or else it would not have met Saifur group instead of the 'mainstream BNP'.

Describing the pro-reform faction as 'BNP manufactured in

the government factory', he alleged that the caretaker administration government is staging a drama in the name of dialogue.

Delwar was talking to reporters after an emergency meeting with his party colleagues.

He, however, did not rule out the possibility of accepting the government's invitation for unofficial talks. "We may join the talks with consent from the chairperson," he observed.

Earlier in the day, the preparatory talks between the seven-member pro-Saifur delegation and the advisers lasted for about two hours, beginning at 12:30pm.

Coming out of the meeting, Maj (retd) Hafiz told reporters that they have demanded release of Chairperson Khaleda Zia since charges against her are 'unsubstantiated'.

At the meeting they said the

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EC won't invite both factions of BNP to talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said he sees no positive signal this moment for unification of BNP and ruled out any possibility of inviting both factions of the party to EC's electoral reforms talks.

"If the Election Commission invites both factions of BNP [to electoral reform talks], many people may say it is splitting political parties," Huda told reporters when asked if the EC would sit with both factions of BNP as the caretaker government reportedly plans to do so.

When his attention was drawn to the government's informal talks with Saifur-led BNP faction, the CEC said he does not know the government criteria for talks with political parties.

Five advisers to the caretaker government held informal talks with Saifur-led faction yesterday and are learnt to have communicated also with leaders of the other faction of BNP led by Khandaker Delwar Hossain for informal talks with them.

Asked when the EC would hold electoral reform talks with the BNP, Huda said the EC was waiting for

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14 grenades found in 2 days

Recovery also includes arms, ammo

STAR REPORT

Law enforcers during the last two days recovered 14 grenades, four bombs, four firearms including a sub-machine carbine (SMC), two SMC magazines and 83 bullets abandoned at Brahmanbaria and Shariatpur.

The nine grenades recovered at Brahmanbaria were locally made while the rest five recovered at Shariatpur were of Arges brand, a brand of grenades recovered several times before from activists of the banned Islamist militant group Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (Hujji).

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports: Law enforcers recovered the grenades and firearms from a spot very close to which a bomb went off two days ago.

Witnesses and police sources said Sadequul Islam, 35, a farmer, went to his paddy field near Bhadughar Bhuiyan scrap metal shop yesterday and saw a taped bag abandoned on the aisle. Knowing that a bomb went off on April 13 at a shoe shop nearby, he informed locals about the bag around

10:00am.

Later, when the news got around, Brahmanbaria Police Station Officer-in-charge Kamal Uddin, Rapid Action Battalion-9 (Rab) camp commander of Bhairab Majharul Islam and Rab Assistant Superintendent of Police Ali Ashraf rushed to the spot.

A bomb squad headed by Captain Manjur was called in. They opened the bag and found nine grenades, one 9mm pistol, two locally-made guns and 15 bullets. They were trying to deactivate the grenades last night, police sources said.

On April 13, police recovered four bombs and a large quantity of bomb-making materials and a leaflet at Bhadughar Bus Stop in Brahmanbaria town.

Police arrested Sirajul Islam and Muhammad Ali in this connection. They were placed on a five-day remand for interrogation Monday.

Police are also looking for Samsul Islam, a muajjin of a local mosque, for his alleged involvement in the matter.

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BAIL UNDER EPR Hearing on govt appeal ends, SC judgment soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday completed hearing on a government appeal challenging a year-old High Court (HC) verdict declaring it has jurisdiction to dispose of petitions by persons seeking bail in criminal cases under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) 2007.

On completion of hearing by the full bench of Appellate Division of the SC, Chief Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin said they would deliver the judgment soon.

Attorney General Fida M Kamal appeared before the SC for the government.

Later, he told reporters that there were many flaws in the HC verdict.

An HC bench comprising Justice Nazrul Islam Chowdhury and Justice SM Emdadul Huq in its verdict on April 22 last year said it has jurisdiction to dispose of petitions by any persons seeking bail in criminal cases filed under the EPR 2007.

The HC verdict came following a petition by an oil trader of Khulna, Majiuddin Sikder, on March 29 last year seeking bail in a case, filed

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Rice prices down slightly

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The retail prices of different varieties of coarse rice fell only by Tk 1 a kg at different markets in the capital yesterday despite the falling wholesale prices over the past ten days.

The fresh arrival of the much-anticipated Boro rice at wholesale markets yesterday helped the wholesale prices to decline further at city markets. However, its arrival failed to have any notable impact on retail markets.

A kg of coarse rice -- Swarna, Guri, Parjati and BR-28 -- was selling for Tk 34 to Tk 38 yesterday, as opposed to Tk 35 to Tk 40 a couple of days back.

The price of fine rice also came down to between Tk 40 and Tk 46 per kg, from Tk 41 to Tk 47 two days ago.

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Man found dead in Banani flat along with maid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladesh-born US citizen and his domestic help were found killed inside his apartment at Banani in the capital early morning Monday.

Police had to break open the apartment door to recover the bodies of the victims -- Faruq Ahmed Bhuiyan, 45, the US citizen, and Sumi Begum, 28, his domestic help.

Hands and legs of both the victims were found tied up, with Faruq lying on his bedroom floor with two stab wounds in his chest and forehead. Sumi, found in the kitchen, had signs of strangulation.

Police on Monday arrested Faruq's wife Minara Begum Mili, 33, and a youth named Amir Faisal

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

People from all walks of life participate in the Mongol Shobhajatra, a procession brought out on Monday by the students of the Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University, to celebrate Pahela Baishakh.

A day fused with gaiety

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation welcomed Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla year 1415, on Monday amid fanfare and colourful festivity, leaving behind the gloom of the past year and expressing determination to move forward with its cultural heritage.

People from all strata of the society dressed in traditional costumes thronged Ramna Batamul, the main venue of the celebration, and Baishakhi fairs in the capital and elsewhere in the country that featured handicrafts symbolising Bangalee culture.

Bangla speaking people across the world also celebrated Pahela Baishakh with great enthusiasm and festivity.

Tight security measures were taken in and around Ramna

Batamul to avert any untoward incident.

Over 12,000 members of law enforcement agencies in uniforms and plain clothes kept close watch on the movement of carnival-goers at the venue and around Dhaka University campus. Check posts, metal detectors and closed-circuit cameras were installed at festival venues and different other places in the city.

The day was a public holiday. Mughal Emperor Akbar introduced the tradition of celebrating Bangla New Year marking the closure of yearly tax collection. Traders and shopkeepers would open 'halkata' -- fresh accounts -- on this day and serve sweets to their clients on that occasion.

In the course of time, it evolved into a day of celebration and an

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MAITREE'S MAIDEN SALLY A journey down memory lane

SHAMIM ASHRAF, from Kolkata

The tracks on which the Maitree Express ran on Monday are new, but the hopes it carried were vintage.

To many across the border, it was like "memory express," not just a train transporting people to a land divided by an international border. And it took the next-door neighbours 43 years to see it possible, so strong was the legacy of a bitter war.

There were love and flower petals on both sides of the border and also blinking away of teardrops by many who experienced fond flashbacks to the days before 1965

when a passenger train service was there to bridge the two Bengals.

Pahela Baishakh this year was not merely the transition to a new year, but also an occasion to put behind the bitterness of war and strife and to strive together on the same track for better days.

It was 1:47 pm when the first passenger train from Bangladesh touched the Indian territory through a metal fencing heavily fortified by members drawn from Indian security and law enforcement agencies, to make the stopover at Gede Station after some moments.

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HEARING ADJOURNED AGAIN Hasina falls sick

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The arraignment hearing of detained former premier Sheikh Hasina in a graft case against her and seven others, in connection with setting up a barge-mount power plant, was adjourned for the third time yesterday till April 17, as she became ill inside the courtroom again.

Hasina and her counsels once again made their apprehensions over getting justice known to the

court. They complained that Judge Firoz Alam of Special Court 1 is trying to railroad the defendants while being too impatient to listen to the defence's submissions in the name of meeting the deadline for a verdict.

Meanwhile, journalists yesterday walked out of the courtroom for half an hour putting their pens down in protest at rude behaviour of Additional Commissioner of Police (Prosecution) Mokbul

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Job project okayed for rural women

10-20 to get job in each union

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved a project of Tk 943 crore to create employment for 10-20 women in rural areas, sources said.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, Planning Secretary Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury said he hopes that rural economy will get a boost through the project.

He said each woman will get Tk 70,000 in five years of the project and it has been made mandatory for each woman to deposit 35 percent of the payments in banks.

Woman day labourers will get Tk 90 each daily while the coordinators will get Tk 180 each.

Asked about the types of work, Jafar said woman labourers will be responsible for the maintenance of roads in rural areas, planting trees on both sides of the roads and maintaining those.

Of the 14 approved projects, 10

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From left, Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury, Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty and LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal pose for a photo before the Maitree Express departs Dhaka for Kolkata on April 14.

MAITREE EXPRESS

Tagore to be remembered on board

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, Kolkata

The Maitree Express service, connecting Dhaka to Kolkata, can now be the venue to celebrate the birth anniversary of one of the greatest Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore.

India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said he had accepted a proposal put forward by his cabinet colleague and Information Minister Priyaranjan Dasmuni to celebrate Tagore's birth anniversary on board the train every year.

Mukherjee was addressing a function shortly before flagging off the Maitree Express for Dhaka on Monday.

Dasmuni, who was also present at the programme, said earlier it was only befitting that birth anniversary of Gurudev, who has written the national anthem of India and Bangladesh, should be marked by a function on board the train that has brought the peoples of the two countries closer.

Mukherjee said resumption of

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