

Foods still expensive in many developing countries: FAO

AFP, Rome

Staple foods such as rice and wheat remain expensive in many developing countries despite a fall in international prices, making life tough for millions of people, a UN agency warned Thursday.

Cereal prices in many African, Asian and Latin American countries are 25 percent higher than before the start of the food crisis two years ago, the Food and Agriculture Organisation said.

"In several countries, prices exceed the already high levels of a year ago or are still at record levels, creating hardship for millions of people," the Rome-based agency said.

The organisation expressed concern for "vulnerable populations" who spend much of their income on food.

Prices of cereals have fallen and good harvests have returned in many areas following the crisis, which started in 2007 and saw riots in many countries as a result of skyrocketing food costs.

But this was not the case in many poorer countries, the FAO said in its latest Crop Prospects and Food Situation report, with reduced harvests and civil conflict among factors keeping prices higher.

It warned that 30 countries were "in crisis and require assistance as a result of natural disasters, conflict or insecurity and economic problems".

The outlook for global cereal supplies was positive,

JCD convening

FROM PAGE 16
That most of the members of the convening committee are not regular student, married and businessman by profession.

Earlier on July 1, BNP declared its new central committee and on July 6, JCD dissolved its DU unit committee.

Other members of the convening committee are Obaidul Huq Nasim, Ainul Huq, Mahidul Islam Hiru, Masud Parvez Khan, Abdul Wahab, Alamgir Hasan, Asaduzzaman Asad, Shahinur Nargis, Abdur Rahim Setu, Maniruzzaman Rezim, Kazi Mokher Hossain, Giasuddin Pias, Bayezid Arefin, K M Nazim Mahmud, Mahfuzur Rahman, Golam Mostofa, Abul Hasan, Nasiruddin Ruman and Ahmed Saimoom.

Internal strife

FROM PAGE 16
Whom there are allegations of misguiding the chairperson while BNP was in power, are behind all the problems. Those alleged 'manipulators' are now the most powerful in the party, although some of them were arrested and even convicted of corruption charges in the aftermath of the 1991 regime change in 2007.

Two other groups also exist, said the disgruntled party workers.

One of those groups consists of leaders who had been vociferous for democracy in the party during the caretaker emergency regime, but later returned to the mainstream. They are remaining rather silent right now, waiting for 'a better time' to seek 'dignified treatment'.

"We want to work for the party, but it's not possible now due to a lack of congenial atmosphere," a former lawmaker of the party who became a 'reformer', recently told The Daily Star.

The third group, although known as Khaleida loyalists, wants to bring ousted 'reformer' leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and his followers back into the party.

This group feels the party needs to be reformed for its existence, and leaders with 'clean reputation' should get more prominence in the organisational hierarchy.

There are some other leaders who do not necessarily clearly fall into any of the groups and are known as honest, dedicated, and loyal to the chairperson. They have become passive observers of the situation, hoping that reason will prevail.

"In bad days we worked for the chairperson and the party without any expectation, and now we hope the chairperson will choose right persons to run the party, who are able to face any situation courageously," said a senior leader.

Swine flu

FROM PAGE 16
But it warned: "This time around, such a sharp rebound is unlikely."

Swine flu threatens to keep millions of workers at home, while consumption and travel will be hit due to public health fears.

"GDP loss during the six months of the pandemic would amount to around five percent in the UK," it said, adding that calculation was based on a 30 percent infection rate and 0.4 percent death rate.

England's chief medical officer Liam Donaldson said Thursday that in a worst case scenario, around a third of Britain's population could be infected and 65,000 killed.

"There is a risk that swine flu tips the UK and the world economy into deflation. This is because the pandemic would hit at a time when businesses and banks are still reeling from the economic crisis," the report authors said.

The warning came a day after Britain reported a sharp increase in its swine flu death toll, from 16 to 29 victims, saying that some 55,000 people were believed to have contracted the virus last week.

Concerns are also being expressed about when vaccines will be available to counter the virus, as forecasts of the global death toll rise, even if the World Health Organisation (WHO) has so far reported about 430 deaths worldwide.

The Oxford study concluded that Britain "should in principle be able to cope with a swine flu pandemic," but warned of a "significant risk that the pandemic triggers... unfavourable behavioural changes that tip it into deflation."

"A flu outbreak in the autumn would hit just as the economy starts to recover from the credit crunch. It would threaten already fragile businesses and put further strains on financial markets and fiscal balances."

"This could generate a vicious cycle that postpones the recovery for another couple of years," it said.

Malaysia

FROM PAGE 1
Visas were cancelled by Malaysia early this year on grounds of global economic recession.

The Malaysian daily did not elaborate on the matter, but sources in Malaysia told The Daily Star that such a decision was taken as the Malaysian authorities and some employers were irritated by the presence of too many unauthorised Bangladeshi brokers in that country.

Meanwhile, the cabinet committee chaired by Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin decided not to allow foreign workers, except for domestic helpers, to stay in that country for more than five years continuously.

"They can re-apply for an extension to their work permits, but they will have to go home first," he said.

There are around 5 lakh Bangladeshi workers in the southeast Asian country, but many of them were facing problems because of irregularities in their recruitment process.

Muhyiddin said the electronics and textile industries were allowed to recruit foreign workers but "no foreign workers will be allowed in the services sector or frontline jobs, except for cooks, cleaners and resort island staff".

The cabinet also agreed with a proposal for a better salary structure and higher allowances to attract locals into taking up jobs currently occupied mostly by foreign workers and to reduce its dependence on foreign workers.

"Strategies to reduce dependence on foreign workers will be carried out in stages according to the economic situation to avoid any negative impact," Muhyiddin told journalists after the meeting.

PM returns

FROM PAGE 1
14-member media team went to Egypt to attend the two-day summit.

The Summit concluded Thursday with the adoption of final documents and a summit declaration calling for forging a stronger solidarity among the member states to promote peace and development by facing the global threats and challenges with a synergy.

Heads of state or government from over 100 Nam countries from across the world highlighted their debate on the summit theme 'International Solidarity for Peace and Development' and on current burning issues on global and regional planes.

At the summit, Hasina was elected Nam vice-chair for the next three years.

Time extension

FROM PAGE 16
Sramik Jote at the city's Institute of Engineers.

About amendments to the AL charter at the July 24 national council, she said, "We will discuss the matters once Sheikh Hasina returns home."

Replying to a query, she said, "We have got old. How long you think we can continue in leadership positions? Isn't it natural for fresh faces to be in the next central committee?"

Asked why AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil was left out of the council preparation committee, she said perhaps because of his frail physical condition.

Earlier in her address to the Sramik Jote gathering, she said those who had executed freedom fighters without trial should be brought to justice.

"It's apity that Colonel Taher, a freedom fighter who lost a leg in the Liberation War, was awarded death penalty by Ziaur Rahman. We must get those involved in such evil deeds to stand trial," Sajeda said.

She said the government will complete trial proceedings in the cases filed for the murders of Bangabandhu and his family and four national leaders.

Turning to the recent spate of violence in garment industries, she said some quarters are out to cause unrest in the garment sector for mere political gains.

"The government will identify and bring the culprits to justice."

Speaking as 'special guest, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu called on the government to introduce rationing of daily essentials for the labourers and allow trade unions to organise workers for their rights.

Presiding over the meeting, Sramik Jote President Shirin Akhter urged the government to improve the living standards of the workers.

She also demanded full implementation of the labour laws, declaration of a labour policy and minimum wages, resumption of the closed mills and factories, and elimination of gender discrimination in the workplace.

Shahjahan Khan MP, Jatiya Sramik League President Abdul Matin Master and Jatiya

Clarification

FROM PAGE 16
About their identities another constable Iqbal Hossain struck at the back of Cap Arif with his baton triggering an exchange of heated words between them.

Meantime, Sub-inspector Sanjib came to the scene and hurled aggressive words at the army officers but they restrained themselves, it reads.

Informed, senior police officers and army rushed to the spot and sat at a meeting for an amicable settlement. Initially the police denied the allegation but later they acknowledged the fact as a witness clarified everything.

Deputy Commissioner Ahsan Habib Polish, Assistant Commissioner Mahbub Hasan and Lt Col Mirza Harun-or-Rashid, among others, were present at the meeting.

The clarification said it is reported that the matter was settled and necessary measures will be taken against the policeman involved in the incident.

Laskar-e-Taiyeba

FROM PAGE 1
Another detained Indian national Daud Merchant, a close aide to Daud Ibrahim and one of the main accused in the killing of music baron Gulshan Kumer.

Daud Merchant and his associate Zahid Sheikh, who is also an Indian, were arrested in Bangladesh a month and a half ago.

According to the sources, Mufti Obaidullah has a PhD degree on fatwa from Deobandh Madrasa in India, and he was a teacher at Jamiatul Sunnah Madrasa of Shibchar upazila in Madaripur since 2003.

In June 1995 he came to Bangladesh, took up a fake name, Abu Zafar, and started teaching in different madrasas in Monirampur of Jessore, in Shrimangal of Moulvibazar, and at Tikirpur Jamia Mahmudia Madrasa in Nawabganj of Dhaka.

He took part in the previous Afghan war in 1988 while he was a student. In 1990, he took part in the ensuing Afghan conflict for the second time, when he was trained in operating a wide range of light and heavy weapons like machinegun, anti-aircraft gun, BM-50 canon, rocket launcher, and mortar.

Mohila Jote President Afroza Haque Rina, among others, spoke on the occasion.

AL council

The source close to the AL chief however said there's no possibility of having two general secretaries.

He said if new posts are created through amendments to the charter, Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana may be given a special position.

"She [Rehana] might be made executive president or a member of the presidium," he added.

Meanwhile, several leaders on Thursday demanded that those who attempted to have an "AL minus Hasina in the name of reforms" after 1/11 be identified and left out of the new committee altogether.

Kamal Ahmed Mazumder MP, Awami Swachchasebak League President AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Khizir Hayat Lizu, Anwar Hossain, Iqbal Hossain Apu and Akhtar Hossain are among those who spoke against the "reformists" at a meeting preparatory to the council.

Talking to The Daily Star, some other AL leaders said this sort of call would divide the rank and file ahead of the council.

The high command must not take decisions that could lead to even deeper divisions amongst the ranks, said a leader preferring not to be quoted.

He said the government will have to see off challenges like rooting out militancy. Divisions would only make matters complicated.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere at the AL president's political office in Dhanmondi is getting festive with leaders from across the country joining in the preparations for the long-awaited council.

Many have been lobbying the central leaders close to Hasina for a berth in the next committee.

Sub-committees formed for the council are meeting every day at the Dhanmondi office.

Over 5,000 councillors are expected to attend the convention on July 24 to elect a new leadership for a three-year term.

Manmohan

FROM PAGE 16
headline "PM Sells Out to Pak".

The main opposition, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), said it remained "surprised" and "disappointed" by the apparent policy shift contained in the joint statement.

"We have conceded," said opposition leader LK Advani, before leading the BJP walkout from the chamber.

The peace process between the two nuclear-armed South Asian neighbours was put on hold following the November 2008 attacks on India's financial and entertainment capital, in which 166 people died.

New Delhi has blamed the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) and said it has "overwhelming evidence" that "official agencies" in Pakistan were involved in plotting and carrying out the 60-hour siege.

Singh told members of parliament that Gilani had assured him that Pakistan would "do everything in its power" to prosecute those responsible.

Minister assures RHD engrs of reconsidering graft charges

BSS, Dhaka

Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain yesterday assured all engineers of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) of reconsidering the graft charges brought against them after 1/11.

"We will see the matter from human ground as many graft charges brought against them were unjustified," he said.

"However, we will not tolerate any malpractice, irregularity or corruption in implementing the projects of the department," he added.

The minister said this in response to a demand of the diploma engineers at the 12th National Conference of the Roads and Highway Diploma Engineers Association at Sarak Bhaban here yesterday.

Hossain lamented that the department has made no progress in improving the road communications infrastructure in the country during last seven years due to lack of vision and action.

He urged the officials to make their everyday work meaningful saying, "Please complete your work today, do not leave it for tomorrow as tomorrow is another day."

"The foundation laying plaque of the Padma Bridge remained as well that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had installed on July 4, 2001. Five years of BNP alliance government and two years of the caretaker government went without any progress of the project," Hossain said.

Lack of vision and action of the post 2001 governments caused delay in implementing many major development projects initiated by Awami League, he added.

He also urged the engineers to work in the interest of the nation, help implementing the government development plans and brightening the image of the department.

The association put up an 11-point demand before the minister which includes giving financial benefit and selection grade like graduate engineers, regularisation of service of 7313 casual employees, training and housing facilities.

ASM Ali Kabir, secretary of the ministry of communications, Additional Secretary Shafiq Alam Mehedi, Chief Engineer of RHD Munshi Mostafizur Rahman and president of Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh MR Khairul Omam, addressed, among others, on the occasion while president of the association Abdus Salam was in the chair.

Solar eclipse

FROM PAGE 16
Bangladesh Astronomical Society, cautioned everyone to follow proper instructions while observing the eclipse: "Direct viewing of the solar eclipse will have adverse effects on the eyes, so use proper and safe methods."

Bangladesh Astronomical Society has issued guidelines in this regard. FR Sarker said they would distribute 200 special glasses among enthusiasts.

Observing a total solar eclipse with naked eyes can cause irreparable retinal blindness because the sun is 1,00,000 times brighter at the time of total eclipse than normal daylight.

Khulna

FROM PAGE 16
Meanwhile, preferring anonymity, three upazila parishad chairmen belonging to both AL and BNP said they received death threats from extremists for failing to meet their demand for money.

Dumuria upazila chairman Gazi Abdul Hadi, also acting general secretary of Khulna district AL, applied to the superintendent of police in Khulna seeking police protection.

KCC Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque said if police fail to arrest the mastermind and the killers of Bithar, the situation might go beyond control.

Any move to divert the murder to a different direction would be resisted strongly, the city mayor told a rally organised by Jubo League on the AL office compound as part of nine-day programme to protest Bithar's killing.

"We do not rule out intra-party disputes as one of the possible reasons for the murder," he added.

Tata Nano hits street

FROM PAGE 16
concerns about its ability to meet demand on time.

"I think it's very significant," the associate editor of trade magazine Autocar Professional, Darius Lam, told AFP.

"They have been talking about delivering this car since last year and subsequently due to the problems they have had with moving the factory they have had to delay it by at least one year."

"It really shows that now they are getting their production in hand and are able to start delivering."

Some 100,000 people were selected from a ballot to be the first recipients of the Nano, which reviewers have compared to the European Smart car and the classic "People's Car", the Volkswagen Beetle.

They include a roadside cobbler from Mumbai, who had been saving for seven years to buy a two-wheeler, but decided to wait and upgrade to four wheels on hearing that the vehicle would sell for just 100,000 rupees (2,055 dollars).

Others among the 203,000

people who placed orders included an 82-year-old former assistant commissioner of Mumbai police who used to ride a scooter and a market trader looking for an investment for his 12-year-old son.

India's first female photo-journalist, Homi Vyarawalla, who is now in her mid-90s, has also bid for a car.

Ratan Tata launched the Nano in March, predicting the no-frills vehicle would revolutionise travel for millions of Indians, getting the growing middle-class, urban population off motorcycles and into safer, affordable cars.

Three versions of the sporty, jellybean-shaped Nano went on sale in April: the basic model and more expensive CX and LX versions, which have extra features like air-conditioning, automatic windows and central locking.

The standard model sells for 140,000 rupees including tax in the showroom. The deluxe models cost up to 185,000 rupees.

Tata Motors' Pantnagar factory in northern India can produce up to 50,000 Nanos every year.

Court clears Sharif

FROM PAGE 16
prime minister Nawaz Sharif has said he is grateful to the 'Almighty Allah' for the decision.

"Allah has determined the truth and now I would work day night for serving the people of Pakistan," Sharif said minutes after the apex court declared the Sindh High Court's (SHC) earlier verdict as null and void.

Friday's ruling was the third in the past two months to lift a ban on Sharif's participating in elections.

The army ousted Sharif's government in a bloodless coup on Oct. 12, 1999, the day Sharif removed Musharraf from his post as army chief and refused to allow the general's plane to land at a Karachi airport while returning from a foreign trip. The army revolted.

After assuming power, the military government charged Sharif with ordering the hijacking of Musharraf's plane. Sharif argued that his actions only aimed to avert a coup that was already under way.

After his government's ouster, Sharif went into exile

in Saudi Arabia. He returned home in 2007 and filed an appeal against his conviction in the hijacking case.

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court ruled Sharif was not eligible for office because of the criminal conviction on hijacking charges. That prompted him to lead nationwide protests against the shaky government of President Asif Ali Zardari.

Political analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi said Friday's court ruling could lead to better ties between Sharif and Zardari and "will contribute to the stabilization of the political scene because it removes a major irritant" in the parties' relations.

Sharif and Zardari were expected to meet later Friday in Lahore, Farooq said.

Bikash held

FROM PAGE 1
brother Prokash Biswas, who is one of the 23 listed top criminals, is believed to have been 'staying in India'.

Sources said Bikash and Prokash started their criminal activities from Mirpur area during H.M. Ershad's regime.

Blasts in Jakarta

FROM PAGE 1
At least one foreigner, a New Zealand businessman, was confirmed dead and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said he had "grave concerns" for three missing Australians including an embassy official.

Rudd condemned the "barbaric" attacks, saying they made him "sick to the stomach".

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, condemning the "senseless" attacks as she headed to Asia for a trip starting in India, said the State Department was working to help an unspecified number of Americans hurt in the blasts.

"The attacks reflect the viciousness of violent extremists, and remind us that the threat of terrorism remains very real," she said.

Manchester United were due to stay at the Ritz-Carlton next week as part of an Asian tour but they cancelled the trip, denying a sell-out crowd of 100,000 the chance to see the English football giants play an Indonesia XI on Monday.

The Marriott was hit in 2003 by a blast that killed 12 people, and Friday's violence bore the hallmark of past attacks blamed on the al-Qaeda-linked JI both in Jakarta and the tourism hotspot of Bali.

National police spokesman Nanan Soekarna con-

firmed at least nine people were killed and 41 were injured, including 18 foreigners, when the blasts struck around 8:00 am (0100 GMT).

Despite security measures in place at Jakarta's top hotels, including vehicle searches and metal detectors, police said one blast hit the basement of the Marriott and a second struck the restaurant of the Ritz-Carlton.

An unexploded bomb was later found and defused by police in room 1808 of the Marriott, presidential advisor Djali Yusuf said.

The room was a "control centre" for the attacks, he said, with police discovering explosive chemicals and bomb-making materials in a potential treasure trove of evidence as investigators piece together the attacks.

Officials said seven people were killed at the Marriott and two others at the Ritz-Carlton.

40 injured in Kolkata violence

AFP, Kolkata

More than 40 people were injured in sporadic violence in India's West Bengal state Friday during a day-long strike to protest alleged police brutality in the communist-ruled region.

Protesters in the state capital Kolkata set fire to railway tracks and stormed government offices, while police fought with demonstrators who pelted vehicles and shouted "Communists must go."

"Over 40 people suffered minor injuries in clashes. Police arrested over 150 protesters all over the state," police inspector general Raj Kanojia told AFP.

The unrest is the latest in a series of challenges to the state's ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which performed dismally in national elections in May.

The strike was called by the Congress Party after nine of its state legislators were allegedly assaulted by police.

Eyewitnesses said roads were deserted as local transportation stayed off roads and businesses, schools and government offices remained shut.