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# Potato made pricey

Traders keep 7-month's stock in cold storage to get higher profit

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur and FARHANA MIRZA, Munshiganj

Despite having sufficient stocks, the price of potato increased by 15 percent to Tk 28 per kg from Tk 24 a month ago, as traders are reluctant to release potato from stocks to get more profits.

According to Bangladesh Cold Storage Association, a total of 14 lakh tonnes of potato remains stored in 293 cold storages across the country and the stock is enough to meet the monthly demand of two lakh tonnes.

The next potato season will start from November this year. Of the total potato stock, only 30 percent has been marketed so far. So there is no justifiable reason for price hike of potato in the market.

Talking to The Daily Star, potato growers and sellers said the only reason behind the price hike of potato is 'hoarding'.

Industry insiders said some big traders and cold storage owners are controlling the stocks of potato. The big potato traders are now selling potato at Tk 23.60 at wholesale level, which was only Tk 12 a year ago.

But the traders are not willing now to release potato from stocks in both Munshiganj and Rangpur districts, the hub of potato cultivation.

According to the statistics of Agriculture Extension Department of Munshiganj, the district witnessed a record production of 10.50 lakh tonnes last season. Of this, only 30 percent has so far been released to the market.

Traditionally, potato growers sell potato from their field. The whole potato business then goes to the hands of some businessmen and cold storage owners who use the stocks to their advantage.

The potato was sold at Tk 9.50 to Tk 11 per kg at field level until March this year. The market price was between Tk 16 to Tk 18 until June with sufficient supply of potato by growers or traders. After June, the market went beyond control.

Mir Siraj, a farmer of Munshiganj, said it requires only Tk 17 for per kg potato covering all costs, including that of production and storage. "I don't know why the price goes up at retail level," he added.

He however said it is true that at the end of the season traders become eager to get more profits by hiking the price at cold

storage level.

The traders are hopeful about getting more benefit this year by selling their potato stock in the coming days due to lower production of potato in the district last season, said Mostafa Azad Chowdhury, director of Motahar Group of Industries Ltd which owns 13 cold storages in Rangpur and Bogra. He said the traders are interested to release potato from their stocks to the market for this reason.

Mostafa Azad said there were 73,000 bags of potato in one of their cold storages. Until August 19, 18,000 bags of potato--5,000 bags belonged to businessmen and 13,000 to farmers--were marketed from the storage, he added.

He said if businessmen and potato growers do not want to take delivery of their stocks before the scheduled time, cold storage owners have nothing to do as per the agreement.

Khandoker Tafakkharul Islam, a big potato grower of Mahiganj under Sadar Upazila in Rangpur, said the growers tend to sell potato from their stock at home from March to June. But this year growers

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Sacks of potatoes await storage space in front of Shahadat Cold Store in Rangpur; picture inset shows a close-up shot of the edible root.

## AUG 21 ATTACK Govt seeks scrapping of 2 Huji men's bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The government submitted two petitions for cancellation of the bails of two Harkatul Jihad (Huji) members in the August 21 grenade attack cases yesterday.

The grisly grenade attack was on an Awami League rally at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004 that left 23 people including AL leader Ivy Rahman dead and 300 others injured.

Judge Masdar Hossain of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka granted bails to Munshi Mohibullah, brother of Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, and one of his accomplices

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## Kidnappers local goons

Hrshikesh Das Lane victims say criminals change political identity with change of government

MUKHLESUR RAHMAN

Those who kidnapped nine members of a joint family from their house at Hrshikesh Das Lane in the capital on Saturday were local goons, victims and locals said.

These gangsters are involved in criminal activities including land grab in the area by using political clout of the ruling party, they said, adding that they change their political identities with the change of the government.

The victims said the criminals have a nexus with those who are involved in forging land documents.

One and a half months back, they received a paper from the local land office that says that their land was sold to one Idris Mia of Joydevpur in Gazipur on June 28 in 1974.

One of the victims Nitai Chandra Das, 70, said "Abductors are out to dislodge us from our ancestral house with forged documents and involve us in cases. My ancestors were born and brought up in this building and we have been

living here for over hundred years."

If the land was sold in 1974, why the owner has not claimed the land for all these years, he asked, adding that the local goons are trying to grab the land through forged document.

Another elderly local seeking anonymity alleged that the same gangsters were also trying to grab his press with fake document.

Four criminals inside the workshop were posted but when police raided the place they caught them but later they got off scot-free, he said.

When asked BM Forman Ali, investigation officer (IO) of the case lodged against detained four kidnappers along with 10-12 unidentified persons, said they detained four kidnappers from the street near the spot but no kidnapper was found in the garage.

Officer-in-charge (OC) Tofazzal Hossain of Sutrapur Police station said they produced the detainees before a Dhaka Court, which put them on a five-day remand.

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## CANTT HOUSE Khaleda allowed to stay for 4 more months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday extended for four months its earlier order staying the government's third notice that asked BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to vacate her cantonment house by June 30.

The HC bench comprising Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed and Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury passed the order following an extension prayer submitted by Khaleda's lawyer barrister Mahbub Uddin Khokon yesterday.

The prayer was allowed as the government has not submitted its reply to a HC rule issued on May 27 asking the government to explain within three weeks why this notice

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## Biman struggles to maintain flight schedule

RASHIDUL HASAN

The authorities of Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday cancelled two of its international flights and changed timetable of all its flights even three or four times in last two days.

Biman officials said the flight schedule of the airlines almost collapsed in the recent days due to technical glitches and scarcity of aircraft, causing untold sufferings to its passengers.

"Despite cancelling flights on several routes, the airlines is frequently failing to maintain its flight schedule as two or three planes of its five aircraft can be kept operative a day," a Biman official said.

The passengers waiting for departure suffered terribly during the long stay at the airport.

The alarming thing is that Biman aircrafts are flying without ensuring proper security measures and without giving the planes proper rest due to its shortage.

"You will be astonished to know that the one of the two bleed air systems of my aircraft is not working now but I will have to fly

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## Call for fresh probe into DU violence 2007

DU CORRESPONDENT

Teachers and students of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday observed University Black Day on the campus with demands for a fresh investigation into the August 20-21 campus unrest in 2007.

In protest at the atrocities committed on teachers and students by law enforcement agencies, DU teachers and students attended classes sporting black badges.

They also held several meetings and a procession. Classes remained suspended for two hours from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm for these programmes.

Teachers and students from the meetings urged the government to take necessary steps to identify the "main

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## 15 pirates hurt in gunfight

Coast guards rescue  
4 abducted fishermen  
OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Barisal

At least 15 pirates were injured in a gunfight between the pirates and coastguards at Kochikhali of the Sundarbans yesterday morning.

Coastguards also rescued four fishermen -- Zafar Hossain, Sanjoy Talukder, Oli Ahmed and Dulal Howlader. They were abducted by two gangs of pirates, one led by Zulfikar and the other by Sawkat, in the bay on August 11.

Lieutenant Mushfiq Ahmed, commander of the West Zone Coastguard, said, at least 15 of the 35-member gang were bullet-hit in the gunfight.

He said, coastguards

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## Housewife murdered

Husband accused  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man allegedly strangled his wife to death following a quarrel in the city's Lalbagh area early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Rubina Begum, 21, wife of Abdul Hannan.

Rubina and Hannan were residing as tenants on the ground floor of a three-story building in the area for the last one and a half months.

Quoting locals, Sub-Inspector Anwar Hossain of Lalbagh Police Station said the couple started a bitter quarrel on Saturday night and at one stage, the neighbours heard groaning in their room and informed police over phone.

Police rushed to the spot around 3:00am and found

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City dwellers wait in long queues for transport in the late afternoon yesterday, on the first day of Ramadan. The large demand for transport with all heading home to break their fast at dusk left a shortage of vehicles on the roads.

PHOTO: STAR

## Rajuk asked to list all plot recipients in 7yrs

JS body also asks for details of graft since 1973

RASHIDUL HASAN

A parliamentary committee yesterday asked Rajuk authorities to prepare a list of persons who got allocation of plots and flats in the city during 2002 to 2008 through political influence canceling previous allotments to others.

The parliamentary standing committee on public undertakings also asked Rajuk to submit details about the government's tenure-wise irregularities took place since 1973 to till date.

The committee found that former housing adviser Mainul Hossain took plots and flats in the capital by giving false information in affidavit and asked the concerned authorities to cancel those.

The committee blasted Rajuk for its finan-

cial anomalies including not keeping its audit reports.

It also directed Rajuk authorities to take actions against those who have built houses and structures violating Rajuk's building code.

The committee also asked Rajuk to return installment of plot applicants along with bank interest, as they did not get plots.

"Many ministers, lawmakers, politicians of the past BNP-led four-party alliance government, army men and civilians made influence in getting plots through political influence," Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, chairman of the committee, told reporters after its meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"We have asked Rajuk to identify those

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## Summary of Bangabandhu murder case placed to SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The summary of long pending Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assassination case was submitted to the Supreme Court (SC) yesterday for hearing of appeals filed by the five convicts in the case.

Chief state counsel for the case advocate Anisul Huq submitted five concise statements against the appeals as the summary of the case.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed, meanwhile, expressed hope that the Supreme Court would deliver the final verdict of Bangabandhu assassination case after the hearing on the appeals, and the verdict would

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## AFGHAN ELECTION

# Fraud charges could sway final results

AP, Kabul

Charges of fraud in Afghanistan's presidential election are extensive enough that they could sway the final result, the commission investigating the complaints said yesterday.

The independent Electoral Complaints Commission has received 225 complaints since polls opened Thursday, including 35 allegations that are "material to the election results," said Grant Kippen, the head of the UN-backed body. The figures include complaints about both the presidential balloting and provincial council polls.

Millions of Afghans voted in the country's second-ever direct presidential election, although Taliban threats and attacks appeared to hold down the turnout, especially in the south.

President Hamid Karzai's top challenger, former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, accused the president of rigging

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## Hanif acting GS of AL

Ashraf on 15-day  
vacation  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahbubul Alam Hanif, who was not much known to the party leaders even a month ago, is now the acting general secretary of Awami League as Syed Ashrafur Islam left for UK on Saturday for a 15-day vacation.

Ashraf, also the LGRD and

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## OnlinePoll

Do you agree with BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain that the government has failed to create congenial atmosphere for the opposition to return to parliament?

☐ Yes (53.5%)  
☐ No (44.6%)  
☐ No Comments (1.8%)

Total votes: 1356

TODAY'S POLL

Do you think it is possible to control price hike of essentials without curbing extortion during transportation of goods?

Please cast your vote at  
www.thedailystar.net

## Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Aug	Sehri	Iftar
2	24		7-28
3	25	5-15	7-27
4	26	5-15	7-26

## Prayer Timing

August 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-14	5-24
Zohr	1-45	2-15
Asr	5-45	6-00
Maghrib	7-28	7-38
Esha	9-00	9-30

Source: Islamic Foundation