

Sales shoot up

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soya bean and palm oil -- witnessed a rise.

The price of chickpea fell marginally followed by an increase in supply.

The price of unpacked soya bean oil soared to Tk 80-82 from Tk 78-80 a kilogram a week ago, while palm oil price edged up to Tk 73-75 from Tk 72-74 a kg, according to the daily retail price data of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

A sudden increase in demand sent the prices of branded and canned soybean oil up by Tk 4-5 a litre.

Retailers sold a five-litre can of soya bean between Tk 424 and 445 depending on the brand, said Abu Taher, owner of Mukta Enterprise, a grocery shop, at New Market.

"Except for some commodities such as edible oil, prices of other essentials remain almost stable," said Shahadat Hossain, a shopkeeper at Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

Vegetables such as cucum-

ber, carrot, tomato, aubergine and green chilli became dearer because of their high demand as ingredients of iftar items.

"Sales will be good even today and tomorrow," said Suman Khan, a grocery retailer at Wari. He grossed Tk 8,000 in sales on Wednesday, the day before the start of Ramadan.

He counted Tk 6,500 in sales on Tuesday.

Abdul Latif, outlet operation manager of ACI Logistics' chain retail store Shwapno, hoped that the consumer sentiment would remain upbeat in the first 10 days of Ramadan.

Shaheen Khan, chief operating officer of Meena Bazar, said prices of commodities remained stable in superstores despite a rise in consumer demand.

"Customer response is much higher this year than the last two years because the consumers are gaining confidence in superstores," Shaheen said.

Textile mill in Ctg shut after worker's death in accident

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A factory worker died after sustaining a serious injury to his throat at Tareq-Azim Textile Mills in Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) yesterday.

A piece of glass pierced through Badal's throat when he tumbled on a glass door at about 10:00am. Badal was coming out of the production manager's room, sources said.

The fellow workers rushed him to Chittagong Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead at about 10:30am.

Following the incident, the factory was declared closed only for yesterday fearing a labour unrest.

Sergeant Md Hasan of the CEPZ police outpost (in-charge) said, "We are investigating the incident."

However, primary investigations revealed that it was an accident, he said.

The body was kept in the hospital morgue for autopsy.

Illegal brick kiln knocked down in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Department of Environment (DoE) in a drive yesterday demolished a brick kiln and fined it Tk 5 lakh for causing massive environmental pollution at Sitakunda coast in the district.

Messrs KML Bricks was built illegally just beside the coastal green forest developed by the forest department at Latifpur.

It has been causing environmental pollution and degradation since 2000, said DoE sources.

A group comprised of officials of DoE Chittagong division and police demolished the chimney and other equipment of the kiln.

Two trucks, two excavators and five lakh pieces of brick were also seized during the drive led by DoE Director (Enforcement and Monitoring) Munir Chowdhury.

CNG stations

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top official of energy ministry said.

The energy ministry made the decision last week based on a proposal from Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd.

The country's total gas requirement a day is around 2,000 million cubic feet but there is a shortfall of around 400 million cubic feet. This is causing a severe gas crisis across the country affecting not only the power plants and industries but the households too.

Meanwhile, the energy ministry has also decided to cut the duration of each power outage down to half an hour. However, this does not mean that the total hours of daily load shedding would reduce.

"Each area would still have the same amount of load shedding, but this time the cuts will be for half an hour, said a spokesman of Power Development Board.

The country is reeling under the constant power crisis. Due to lack of new power plants and uninterrupted gas supply to the existing gas-fired power plants, the PDB is struggling with a supply shortfall of up to 2,000MW.

Purchase body

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crore has been proposed for capital dredging and maintenance dredging of the river Gori and the work has been awarded to China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd -- the lowest bidder.

A proposal of the water resources ministry said, environment in the south western region including the Sundarbans had suffered adverse effects as the river Gori had not been dredged for long. Sundari trees in the Sundarbans came down to 12 cubic metre from 43 cubic metre per hectare.

The committee also approved a proposal for purchase of 33,000 metric tonnes (MT) of rice at a cost of Tk 96 crore and 50,000 MT of wheat for Tk 92 crore.

Besides, a proposal for purchase of 30,000 MT of Urea fertiliser at Tk 58 crore was also approved.

The committee also gave the nod to the proposal for appointment of Design, Supervision and Monitoring Consultancy services for Dhaka City Corporation's transport infrastructure component under Clean Air and Sustainable Environment at a cost of Tk 15.77 crore.

Later, the alumni leaders handed over the lifelong membership identity card of the association, a crest and two books on Dhaka University to the premier.

Ambassador-at-Large M Ziauddin, Press Secretary to the PM Abul Kalam Azad and Secretary General of DUAA Raquib Uddin, among others, were present.

WB projects

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for different projects during FY 2011-14. It gave \$2.96 billion assistance during FY 2006-09.

The CAS report says the WB will invest more in diagnosing corruption through political economy and operational risk assessment in key sectors before preparing a project, and to define the extent and nature of risks in different sectors.

The bank will integrate right to information and other transparency measures such as third party monitoring of procurement and execution of projects, and good governance in projects.

The report says, "The bank will be decisive in addressing corruption as it arises, by developing systems to reduce opportunities for re-emergence of the problem, or-- if problems cannot be properly addressed--disengaging from operations."

The WB has identified four types of problems in implementing projects. These include lack of sincerity to

comply with the Public Procurement Law/Rules; political interference, or collusion of bidders as well as coercive practices in the large bidding process; delayed production of audited financial statement and slow pace of the implementing agencies in settling financial management irregularities.

Citing its investigation, the bank said, in FY09, 35 contracts in six projects involving about \$1 million were declared misprocurement.

Other problems identified by the WB are long delay in appointing project directors and staff, and hiring consultants. Also the civil service capacity has depleted over the years manifesting itself in the weak capacity for implementing projects timely and in a systematic manner, the bank said.

Insufficient senior level attention leads to decision-making delays, poor monitoring of implementation and slow follow-up of committed actions, the CAS report noted.

Dubai fire

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one is Pakistani," Nasreen Jahan, Bangladesh's labour councillor in Dubai, told The Daily Star over telephone.

The four Bangladeshis are Abdul Kadir, son of Idris Ali of Sylhet, passport no - X 0759825; Sumam Uddin, son of Riazuddin of Moulvibazar, passport no - B 1433901; Sumon, son of Alauddin Sardar of Shariatpur, passport no - A 0295098; and Rahim, son of Adam Ali of Chandpur, passport no - E 1155427.

Earlier on Wednesday, acting police chief in Dubai, Major General Khamis al-Mazeina, told AFP that nine of the dead are Bangladeshis.

They were burned while asleep in the warehouse of Afnan Perfumes factory where they used to work.

Their bodies have been kept in the police mortuary in Dubai, Nasreen said, adding that they were burnt beyond identification. Dubai police suggested that they be buried in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with

approval from their relatives.

"We are trying to find out if the deceased have any close relatives in Dubai. If the relatives want the bodies to get back home, we shall have to arrange DNA test to identify them," she said.

The reason behind the blaze has yet to be known for sure. Dubai Municipality is investigating the incident. The municipality officers were at the spot but they said it was too early to say what caused the fire.

Meanwhile, police arrested the company's Emirati owner and its Indian managing director for using the factory's premises to accommodate the workers and thus causing their death, the acting police chief in Dubai said.

The Bangladesh mission in Dubai is working with the local authorities to secure compensation for the deceased, said Saida Muna Tasneem, director general of the external publicity wing of the foreign ministry in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, India

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of the 13-km Agartala-Akhaura rail track to connect railway networks of the two countries.

Of the proposed rail track, 5.4 km falls in Indian territory and 7.6 km in Bangladesh.

During Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's January 10-13 visit to India, New Delhi agreed to provide grant for construction of Akhaura-Agartala rail line.

India will provide \$1 billion credit for a range of projects including railway infrastructure, supply of locomotives and passenger coaches, rehabilitation of Saidpur railway workshop and procurement of buses, and for dredging projects.

Bangladesh will procure 10 locomotives for its railway at a cost of \$35.5 million. It will also purchase 125 broad gauge passenger coaches for the railway costing \$53.6 million.

Moreover, Bangladesh will buy 60 tank wagons worth \$8.85 million and 50 flat wagons worth \$4.55 million for the railway with the Indian credit.

Besides, a railway bridge will be constructed on the Titas river that will cost \$120

million.

Officials mentioned that a survey was conducted in 1999 for connecting Agartala-Akhaura railway stations.

Bangladesh and India resumed regular train service in April 2008, after 43 years, through Darshana in Bangladesh and Gede in Nadia District of West Bengal. The service was suspended after the 1965 war between India and Pakistan.

India's Northeast Frontier Railway additional general manager Vipin Jha recently told the media at Agartala that the ongoing work for railway network up to Sabroom would be completed by March 2014. And the proposed railway station would be just 75 km from Chittagong port in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, officials in Dhaka said India has agreed to give Bangladesh transit to Nepal through Rohanpur Singabhad broad gauge railway link. Bangladesh wanted to convert Radhikapur-Birol rail line into broad gauge one and requested for railway transit to Bhutan as well.

War crimes trial

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Quader said the anti-liberation forces are financially strong. It is suspected that they have a huge stockpile of arms and ammunition which they might use to foil the war crimes trials.

Besides, huge funds are coming from abroad to help the war criminals, he told The Daily Star adding that the government will deal with the matter strictly.

Meanwhile, the home ministry directed all deputy commissioners and superintendents of police to collect information about Jamaat and other anti-liberation forces across the country, and to send a comprehensive list of them to the ministry immediately.

They were also asked to prepare a list of militants who might work for Jamaat and launch attacks in the country, said government sources.

Against such a backdrop, both the government and AL will also launch motivational campaigns across the country after the Ramadan to drum up public support for the much-

demanded trials, said AL and government sources.

"We think the anti-liberation forces might try to foil the war crimes trials through resorting to militant attacks, but the government will foil any such attempt," said Mahubul Alam Hanif, a special assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He said Jamaat's main strength is militant organisations, about which the government remains alert.

AL will hold grand rallies in all divisional headquarters to garner public support for the trials while the government will carry out awareness raising campaigns in all educational institutions about the negative impacts of militant activities, and the negative role of Jamaat during the country's war of liberation.

Hanif, also a joint general secretary of AL, said the party will also hold rallies, seminars, and discussions, and publish booklets, posters and magazines to mobilise the public for the government's move to try war criminals.

Teen jumps to her death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A teenaged girl jumped to her death from a bridge on the Buriganga in Kamrangirchar last night.

The identity of the girl, aged around 18 in a salwar kamiz, could not be known as of filing of this report at 1:00am today.

Eyewitnesses said the girl and a young man was walking on the Kamrangirchar Lohar Bridge around 9:30pm. They were talking and suddenly the girl jumped off the bridge and the man ran away.

Officials of Fire Brigade and Civil Defence said their divers recovered the body from the river around 10:45pm and handed it over to police.

Kamrangirchar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shafiqul Islam said they were looking for the relatives of the girl.

US braces for Kandahar fight

REUTERS, Washington

Targeted strikes by US special forces against insurgents around Kandahar are yielding results, but war planners expect tough fighting ahead and more casualties, a US military official said on Wednesday.

The campaign to secure the Taliban's birthplace of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan is a central objective of President Barack Obama's revised war effort and will factor prominently in a White House strategy review in December.

But US officials are playing down expectations of any quick turnaround, despite Obama's July 2011 deadline to start withdrawing forces from Afghanistan, conditions permitting.

Heavy fighting is not expected in Kandahar city itself, where efforts are focused on bolstering security and improving performance of a local government often criticized as ineffective and corrupt, the US official said.

But some surrounding districts, including Panjwai, will require the kind of clearing operations by NATO and Afghan forces that mean confrontation with a Taliban enemy, at its strongest since the nine-year-old war began.

"It's going to be some pretty tough fighting," the US official, speaking on condition that he not be named, told a small group of reporters at the Pentagon.

"In mid-fall, and I'd say you're probably going to see an increase in kinetic activity as we clear these areas."

Special operations forces have been paving the way for traditional clearing operations, targeting Taliban leaders, their supplies and bomb-making factories, the official said. He did not offer a number of how many Taliban have been killed so far by special forces, but said: "It's important."

JS body slates

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at a meeting at the Jatiya Sangaad Bhavan brought the allegation saying that the minister's relatives including his daughter and son-in-law were behind the manipulation of the tender process.

Briefing journalists after the meeting Mayeen Uddin Khan Badal, a committee member, said the Australia-based aircraft leasing organisation in its tender demanded \$10,600 per block hour (per hour between take-off and landing) but after opening of the tender box, the amount was rubbed out and changed to \$9,600 to make it the lowest bid as another company, Thai Airlines, offered \$9,800.

The minister is accountable for the action, he said.

The committee called upon journalists to dig up information about the wrongdoing.

The House watchdog also criticised the minister, the chairman of Biman Board of Directors, its managing director and the chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh for not showing up in the meeting.

The meeting decided to send letters to them seeking explanation for their absence and asking them to attend the committee's meetings.

It also decided to raise the issue before the prime minister and the speaker of parliament.

However, defending his absence GM Quader told The Daily Star over the telephone that he had requested the parliamentary body chief to defer the meeting as his ministry was busy with managing flights for hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

"The fact is that the committee deliberately wanted to humiliate me as I stood against their interests," Quader said.

He however did not explain what he meant by interests.

Twenty insurgents killed in Afghanistan battle: Nato

REUTERS, Kabul

At least 20 insurgents were killed in Afghanistan's southeast in an operation against the Haqqani network, whose leader Washington wants designated a terrorist, the Nato-led alliance said yesterday.

Air strikes were called in after Afghan and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops found dozens of insurgents in "entrenched fighting positions" in a mountainous area of Dzadran district in Paktia, not far from the Pakistan border, ISAF said in a statement.

Washington is pressuring Pakistan to take action against the Haqqani network, a group allied with the Taliban and believed to have close links with al Qaeda.

"This area is a known Haqqani network safe haven and used to stage attacks into Kabul and the Khost-Gardez pass," ISAF said.

"An air weapons team suppressed the enemy, resulting in more than 20 insurgents killed so far."

The Haqqani network, headed by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a hero of the 1980s guerrilla war against the Soviet Union, and his son, is based mainly in Pakistan's North Waziristan and adjoining provinces in Afghanistan.

It has staged several high-profile attacks, including an assassination attempt on Afghan President Hamid Karzai in 2008.

General James Mattis, confirmed on August 6 as the new head of the U.S. military com-

mand overseeing operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere, said last month he wanted leaders of the group designated as terrorists, a move seen as raising pressure on Pakistan to go after the group.

Pakistan sees Haqqani - who had long-standing link with its military spy agency - as likely to be a valuable asset in Afghanistan if U.S. troops leave before the country is stabilized.

Man shot dead

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The injured, Nur Mohammad Nuru, 27, of the same neighbourhood was in line of fire as he went to buy cigarettes. He suffered wound to his lower back.

Locals rushed Swapan and Nuru to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared Swapan dead around midnight.

Nuru could identify three locals -- Sentu, Ali and Zakir -- among the gunmen.

Deceased's uncle Abdul Kader said, last week some extortionists demanded Tk 50,000 from Swapan. They might have shot Swapan as he refused to pay the money, said Kader.

Officer-in-Charge Shiblee Noman of Ramna Police Station told The Daily Star that some assailants had shot Swapan a few months back. A few of them were arrested but released on bail, he said.

"Swapan himself is involved in crimes. His rivals might have shot him dead," Noman said.

Govt hurries

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"Traffic congestion is also a reason. But closing educational institutions nationwide is not the only solution for easing traffic congestion and we made the decision not only for this reason," he claimed.

The home ministry sent a proposal on Wednesday requesting to close the educational institutions from the 10th of Ramadan and as per the ministry's calendar the educational institutions were supposed to be closed on 12th Ramadan, he said.

"We will only lose five to six working days for the early vacation, but we can make that up after the vacation."

He said the schools and colleges would be able to finish their ongoing tests during the vacation. The schools and colleges open on September 16. However, madrasas will open on September 20.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner (Traffic) AKM Awlad Hossain told The Daily Star that office and school times start and end pretty much together which deteriorates the traffic situation. He said he believes with schools and colleges closed the traffic situation would improve.

He said the DMP last week asked the home ministry to close the schools from the 10th of Ramadan but the government closed them from the third.

The home ministry on Wednesday suggested that all educational institutions in the capital be closed from the 10th of Ramadan to help reduce traffic congestion.

Huge tailback was seen in the city's Shahbagh, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Mohakhali, Malibagh, Gulistan, Moghbazar, Mirpur, Bijoy Sarani, Shyamoli, Khilkhet, Uttara and Airport to Abdullapur areas.

The congestion took a turn for worse between 4:00pm and 6:00pm when people were rushing home from work. People were also seen in long queues to catch buses. The huge tailback started to ease a bit just before iftar around 6:30pm.

Around 20 people were seen fighting at Shahbagh intersection trying to get into a BRTC bus heading for Mirpur, which already had people inside packed like sardines. Similar pictures were also seen at Farmgate, Mohakhali and other major streets in the city.

A passenger of a three-wheeler said, "I hired the CNG [three-wheeler running on CNG] from UN Road in Baridhara and it took more than two hours to get to Karwan Bazar."

The suffering of city dwellers doubled with intermittent downpour throughout the day that created waterlogging in several city streets. The educational institutions and business institutions were open and many were seen heading towards shopping arcades.

Most of the school authorities said the government did not discuss with them before making the decision. They said they came to know through newspapers that institutions might close from the 10th of Ramadan.

Shahan Ara, principal of Motijheel Ideal School and College, said, "The government can decide about holidays and we will follow it but if it had made the decision a little earlier we at least could give some advice to students regarding their studies at home during the long vacation."

It is a longstanding practice in the country that schools give some homework and guidelines to the students ahead of long vacations. But this time when the education ministry announced the vacation most of the city schools and colleges were caught off guard. They were not officially informed and the schools and colleges could not even issue holiday notices to their students.

"The students of the morning shift left for home when we came to know about the decision from our day-shift teachers who got the news from the media. So we did not say anything to our day shift students since we did not have the chance to let the morning-shift students know about the vacation," Shahan Ara told The Daily Star yesterday.

She said they had a plan to close their institution on August 25 as per their academic calendar but they had to close it instantly to follow government's decision.

"We have to shift our schedule," said GM Nizamuddin, principal of Oxford International School.

The new session began from August 1 and the school was supposed to close on September 7 for Ramadan and Eid vacation, he said, adding, "We could have chalked out our plan for this year had the government made the decision earlier."

There seems to be a lack of coordination between the ministry of education and the ministry of primary and mass education regarding when schools will go on vacation.

The education ministry yesterday around 11.30am announced the vacation for schools and colleges but the primary and mass education ministry was not informed the decision.

Around 80,000 government and non-government primary schools are under the primary and mass education ministry. Learning about the education ministry's decision, the officials at primary and mass education ministry sat in a hurriedly called meeting and decided to close the government, registered non-government and community primary schools from August 16 until September 16.

They told newsmen about their decision in a press conference around 1:30pm yesterday.

City all abuzz

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have their own traditional tastes, some of which trace their origins back to the Mughal era.

The iftar items available on the market include--giant beef and chicken roasts, shuti kabab (marinated minced meat), shahi doi bora (fried and spiced lentil balls dipped in yoghurt), mutton and chicken cutlet, kima roll (a roll of chopped meat), different types of kabab, korma parata, hilsha eggs, borhani, matha, bundia, different sweets including jilapi.

Besides, various types of seasonal fruit and local drinks were available on the lanes.

The most popular delicacy in the market is Boro baper polay khai (a mixture of chickpeas, brains, minced meat, potatoes, chira, eggs, chicken, 13 spices and ghee). The item was available in most of the shops and witnessed a brisk sale.

Shopkeepers said they witnessed a huge sale on the first day of Ramadan. The rush of people in the area caused traffic jams on the roads and lanes surrounding the market.

Mosle Uddin, a resident of old Dhaka's Nazira Bazar area, was selling matha (yoghurt) in a corner of the market. He said, "I usually sell matha in my area but during Ramadan I come here for huge sale."

Nasir Uddin, a businessman of capital's Lalbagh area, was buying shuti kabab in the market. He said, "I often come in the market during Ramadan as some special iftar items are available here."

Businessmen in other parts of the city also prepared varieties of iftar items and displayed them in their stalls yesterday.

Hundreds of makeshift iftar shops sprung up at places opposite to markets and mosques, at intersections and lanes.

City residents started thronging the iftar shops from

noon, with the rush culminating in the afternoon.

The common iftar items in the capital markets were chhola boot (fried and spiced chickpeas), puffed rice (muri), beguni (a popular item prepared with aubergine), alore chop (prepared with potato), piyaju (made with finely chopped onion with lentil paste), fried items and Sarbet (a drink prepared with fruit or sugar or molasses and water).

The iftar markets and shops will continue serving special food items to devotees throughout the month.

Population

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ministry, if necessary, and make enough budgetary allocations, identifying overpopulation as an extreme concern.