

Sugar

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the market seeking the government to allow them increase prices due to a rise in import costs.

Price of a litre of loose soya bean rose by 6.34 percent to Tk 108-110 yesterday from Tk 101-104 a month ago, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Depending on brands, a five-litre can of soybean oil was traded between Tk 580 and 585 from last month's Tk 560 and 570, retailers said. However, prices of palm oil remained steady.

"Companies have maintained a short supply in the market. They are delivering lower than the quantity we require," said Abu Taher, owner of Mukta Enterprise at New Market, yesterday. "It appears the companies will increase the price," he added.

Some refiners and wholesalers admitted reduction in supply of both the items. They claimed they are selling the edible oil at a price lower than their import and processing costs because of price hike on the international market.

Refiners also blamed a rise in the exchange rate of US dollar due to depreciation of taka. A hike in the bank interest rate also caused a rise in the import costs, they added.

Sugar prices climbed amid fall in supply as production stopped at some private refineries in recent days.

On Saturday, wholesale prices of unpacked soybean oil rose to Tk 4,250-4,260 per maund (37 kg) from last week's Tk 4,140-4,150.

Wholesale prices of sugar also went up, said Abul Hashem, owner of Hasan Enterprise, an edible oil and sugar wholesaler at Maulavibazar in Old Dhaka.

Taher, who buys sugar from Maulavibazar, said wholesale prices of sugar advanced overnight. He added he bought a 50-kg sack of sugar at Tk 2,835 on Thursday. On Saturday, he bought the same quantity at Tk 2,990.

Abul Hashem, also vice-president of Bangladesh Wholesale Sugar Merchants' Association, blamed poor supply of soybean oil and sugar by refiners for the spike. "Supply remains fixed for both the items. We are not getting supply in line with the demand," said Hashem, also former general secretary of Bangladesh Wholesale Edible Oil Merchants' Association.

Mostafa Kamal, chairman and managing director of Meghna Group of Industries, said his company had to keep sugar refining shut for two days because of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Meghna's industrial complex.

He also blamed delayed shipment of raw sugar from the exporting countries due to long queue of vessels from other Muslim countries.

On soybean oil, Kamal said the production cost of local refiners increased due to high prices of the edible oil on the international market and rise in the exchange rate of dollar.

"Our minimum production cost stands at Tk 110 per kg. But we are selling below the price," he claimed, adding that import cost has gone up by Tk 5 a kg because of the rise in exchange rate.

According to the Bangladesh Bank, average exchange rate of US dollar rose to Tk 73.85 in June from Tk 69.34 a year ago.

Justice Sinha

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selecting candidates for the posts of lower court judges.

President Zillur Rahman made the appointment as per Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission Rules, 2007.

The ministry of law yesterday issued a gazette notification in this regard.

The post of chairman of BJSC fell vacant after Justice ABM Khairul Haque, previous chairman of the commission, retired on May 17.

Justice Sinha was appointed as judge of the Appellate Division on July 16, 2009 while he was appointed as a judge of the High Court on October 24, 1999.

Resist pickets

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the city and go tough on pro-hartal activists in a bid to ensure security of people.

A top-ranking leader of AL conveyed the instructions to party lawmakers and leaders of Dhaka city yesterday afternoon after intelligence agencies 'informed' him about possible subversive activities by BNP-Jamaat leaders, a close source to the leader confirmed.

"Guard every city streets stick in hand, take help from law enforcers, and resist if any unruly activist of BNP-Jamaat is found anywhere," the leader instructed the party leaders as quoted by the source.

"We have been directed to remain alert round the clock as the opposition can carry out subversive activities to make their hartal a success," a lawmaker of Mirpur area told The Daily Star preferring not to be named.

CARETAKER ISSUE
The ruling party also urged the main opposition BNP to join parliament and take decision through discussion on the much talked about caretaker government system and how the next general election could be held in a free and fair manner.

At home yet

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include any of the 111 Indian exclaves.

Indian exclaves are surrounded by Bangladesh land while Bangladeshi enclaves are encircled by Indian territory.

Bangladesh has to support about 150,000 Indian nationals in the 111 exclaves to meet their basic needs like food, education, healthcare, and so on. Bangladesh government recently extended its immunisation programme for the people there fearing germination of various diseases in these alien landpockets.

About 70 square kilometres of Indian lands lie inside Bangladesh, spreading across Panchagarh, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram. All 111 Indian exclaves are under the jurisdiction of one single Indian district of Cooch Behar.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, has 55 exclaves with 28 square kilometres of land surrounded by India.

Nearly 100,000 Bangladeshis living in Bangladeshi exclaves are not as lucky as the Indian counterparts in Bangladesh. Unlike the Indians, who enjoy freedom of movement inside Bangladesh, residents of Bangladeshi exclaves are in almost complete isolation.

Hundreds of them languish in Indian prisons, as they tried to enter their country of origin through Indian territory.

Moinul Haque, former Fulbari union parishad chairman and leader of local coordination committee for India-Bangladesh enclave exchange movement, said the Indian authorities have stopped issuing passes to the destitute population.

"The moment these people try to come out of the exclaves, they get arrested and are put in prison under the Indian Passport Act," he said.

Interestingly, in the middle of Dashiarchhara lies Chandrakhana, a 77-acre Bangladeshi enclave about the size of 22 football fields, which accommodates 182 Bangladeshi voters.

Ashraful Alam, a Bangladeshi youth living in Chandrakhana, said, "The place has no road, school, hospital or any sign of governance. But we have national identity cards."

Our children have to walk four kilometres through the Indian territory to attend school."

Fortunately for Ashraful and others in Chandrakhana, there is no restriction on movement to the mainland as the Indians have abandoned Dashiarchhara.

Legend has it that the 162 Indian and Bangladeshi exclaves were a result of a series of chess games between the maharaja of Cooch Behar and the faujdar of Rangpur. The noblemen wagered on their games, using villages as currency.

The other piece of information on exclaves comes from historian Brendan R Whyte. He says the exclaves are the result of peace treaties

"The door is still open for discussion. The opposition can come to Jatiya Sangsad and we can concertedly take decision on how the next poll will be held," AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafal Islam told a press briefing at the party chief's political office in Dhanmondi.

When there is still scope for discussion, BNP has no ground for going for hartal keeping people hostage, causing loss to economy and business and hampering academic environment, he said.

Ashraf, also LGRD and Cooperatives minister, said he still hopes that BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will sit for discussion with the government.

He said BNP resorted to falsehood on the issue of Bismillah and state religion Islam, which recommended keeping in the constitution the parliamentary special committee on constitution amendment.

AL leaders Mahabubul Alam Hanif, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Ahmed Hossain, Mrinal Kanti Das, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, among others, were present.

between the kingdom of Cooch Behar and the Mughal Empire in 1711 and 1713. The treaties ended several long wars in which the Mughals wrested several districts from Cooch Behar.

The sufferings of these isolated people may end soon as the two countries have agreed to settle the issue.

Bangladesh home ministry said a significant progress had been made in the recent meetings of the Joint Boundary Working Group towards a solution to the outstanding issues.

There have been speculations that an agreement to swap land might be signed during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's upcoming visit to Bangladesh this year. If the deal is inked, it will not only relieve those people of sufferings but also help reduce border conflict. Bangladesh may get around 10,000 acres of land in the process.

The residents of these exclaves will be given an option of choosing between the two countries to live in. For the people in the 111 Indian exclaves, Bangladesh is a popular choice. Parents like Abdur Rashid will no longer have to obtain a certificate covertly to get their children admitted to a school.

Beautification

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ministry, said: "I agree that the work might become meaningless, as visitors' movement will spoil the planted grass soon." He said he would discuss the matter with higher authorities.

Fazlur Rahman also said it would be impossible to continue the work due to the movement of hundreds of visitors and mobile vendors.

Asked why then they are wasting public money, he said: "I will do half the work and then postpone it."

The Tk 1.78-crore grass plantation work is part of the much-talked-about Swadhinata Stambha (independence memorial) project.

Dewan Mohammad Yamin, chief engineer of PWD, insisted the initiative was taken in line with the project proposal.

"But an unnecessary job should not be done even if it is in the scheme," he observed.

According to the project proposal, the glass tower was due to be completed by December this year, but the PWD has extended the deadline till June next year.

The process of building a 10-foot model of the tower is underway. Construction of the original tower will begin after the model is approved, sources said.

In 2006, the PWD undertook a similar grass plantation work worth Tk 50 lakh at the green lawn of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in the name of beautification.

It was abandoned temporarily on allegations of anomalies and wastage of public money. However, the department soon resumed the work on the ground of making the soil of the Sangsad Bhaban fertile.

Blasts kill 39

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The News.

"The first blast was quite small but as people gathered close to the site of the explosion, the second one, which was real big one, went off," said the official.

More than 4,500 people have been killed across Pakistan in attacks blamed on Taliban and other Islamist extremist networks based in the nearby tribal belt since government troops stormed a radical mosque in Islamabad in 2007.

"The first blast was triggered by a timed device planted in the bathroom of the hotel while a suicide bomber riding a motorbike blew himself up near the hotel," bomb disposal chief Shafqat Malik told AFP.

"We have found head and some other body parts of the bomber from the attack site," Malik added.

The attacks badly damaged six shops and the hotel. Crockery and furniture of the damaged hotel and pieces of human flesh were scattered outside.

Private TV channels showed ambulances zooming in and out taking away dead bodies and injured people.

"I was parking my car near the hotel when the first blast took place. I rushed to the hotel to see nature of the explosion when second bomb went off with a big bang," local journalist Safiullah Mehsud told AFP.

Mehsud, who sustained injuries to his head and legs, said he felt his body going up in the air after the second explosion and was knocked unconscious.

The latest violence came hours after visiting Afghan President Hamid Karzai called on Pakistan to eradicate militant sanctuaries at "detailed" talks about a peace process with the Taliban that inaugurated a joint peace commission.

Nearby Peshawar is the gateway to Pakistan's rugged northwest tribal region, which is known as the country's premier stronghold of Taliban and al-Qaeda linked militants, and bomb attacks are common.

Bike-jackers

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arrested members of several gangs, said Mirpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Kazi Wazed Ali.

Once all information is collected, the nifty lock pickers swing into action. They usually work in pairs and all they do is unlock the bike and leave it there for the wing of the gang that actually steals the bike. Each lock picker gets around Tk 5,000 for each break-in and unlocking.

After the unlocking, a group of thieves hijack the motorbike disabling, obstructing and in some cases beating up and tying up security guards. They sometimes drug security guards into unconsciousness.

Based on the resale value of the stolen bike, the thieves get between Tk 5,000 and Tk 20,000.

After the hijack, the marketing wing starts its operation and looks for customers preferably those who live outside the capital.

Meanwhile, another wing of the gang, which allegedly has connections in the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), gets fake papers for the stolen bike.

The documents collectors get around Tk 5,000 for each set of papers.

"The stolen motorcycle is usually sold between Tk 40,000 and Tk 70,000 along with necessary documents including the BRTA registration," said Aziz.

Operatives of the marketing tier are the most beneficiaries as they get all the money left after paying the operatives in the other tiers of the gang.

The arrestees' gang, which stole at least 100 bikes in the last two years, said they usually target new motorbikes of renowned brands.

Owner of a brand-new Bajaj Discover motorbike Abu Hena Russell, a senior reporter of a Bengali national daily, fell victim to such a gang in November last year.

"The gang locked the security guard from outside in his room in the car park of my home," said Russell, a resident of West Sheorapara in Mirpur.

No scrutiny, passage today

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of Jatiya Sangsad, said a senior official of the parliament secretariat.

The rules say, if any money has been spent on any service during a financial year in excess of the amount granted by the House for that purpose, the Public Accounts Committee will examine with reference to the facts of each case the circumstances leading to such an excess, and make such recommendation as it may deem fit.

Like previous years, PAC this time also did not move to examine the reasons for the excess expenditure.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith on Thursday placed the supplementary budget in the parliament along with the budget for the next fiscal year.

The revised budget shows 31 ministries and divisions spent more than the parliament had allocated for them.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, chief of PAC, said the supplementary budget should be sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the finance ministry for scrutiny.

"But in our country, that practice is not followed. It should be followed," he

added.

When his attention was drawn to the Rules of Procedure, the PAC chief said his committee can scrutinise the government expenditure on receiving audit reports prepared by the comptroller and auditor general.

Meanwhile, participating in the discussion on the supplementary budget that began yesterday, ruling coalition lawmakers spent much of the time criticising the main opposition BNP for enforcing a hartal to realise its demand for continuing the caretaker government system.

They urged BNP to join the House and place its proposals about the form of the caretaker government it wants to have.

Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain opened the discussion on the supplementary budget, justifying the additional expenditure of the ministries and divisions.

Interestingly, chief of PAC Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir also appreciated the government performance in the outgoing fiscal, and defended the additional expenditure.

ABM Golam Mostafa, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on public undertakings,

seemed to have forgotten that the excess money had already been spent and a post facto approval is now being sought from the House.

He surprisingly suggested that the excess money should be spent properly for specified purposes.

Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on law justice and parliamentary affairs ministry, lauded the ministries and divisions that were able to spend more money than the parliament had allocated for them.

He sought to know the names of 26 ministries and divisions which failed to spend the allocated money amounting to over Tk 9,000 crore.

"We don't want to condemn their failure to spend the allocated money. We just want to know their names," Suranjit said.

He pointed out that nothing was mentioned in the supplementary budget about the ministries' failure to spend allocated money.

Suranjit also blasted the main opposition for enforcing the hartal instead of joining the House.

Quiet hours on first day

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processions in support of the hartal. Police later filed two cases against the two on charge of torching vehicles at Mohakhali and Shahjadpur in the city.

Meanwhile, BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir threatened to call a 72-hour or even a seven-day hartal if police continued to arrest BNP men and bar them from staging demonstrations.

Fakhru gave the warning when police intercepted a procession he was leading in front of the party's Naya Paltan central office.

The hartal enforced by BNP and its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami from 6:00am yesterday is scheduled to end at 6:00pm today. This is the second opposition-sponsored hartal in a week.

The opposition is protesting what it says a government move to repeal the 13th amendment to the constitution that mandates an elected government to step down at the end of its term and hand over power to a non-partisan caretaker administration to oversee parliamentary polls.

The Supreme Court has recently voided the 13th amendment but suggested holding two more parliamentary polls under a non-partisan caretaker government.

In response, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said there is no scope to retain the caretaker system following the SC ruling. At the same time, she has invited the opposition to come to parliament to offer if it has any new formula.

The BNP-led opposition has refused to discuss the issue with the government and instead opted for hartal and street protests.

The scrapping of the caretaker system will mean the next parliamentary elections will be held under the Awami League government amid opposition fears the vote will be rigged favouring the ruling party.

The latest conflict between the government and the opposition has raised fears about another round of political deadlock long before the next parliamentary elections due in 2014.

The first day of the nationwide hartal or general strike passed off without any major violence barring sporadic explosions of home-made cocktails and scuffles between police and BNP activists in front of the party central office.

At least six cocktails were exploded in the capital's Mirpur, Naya Paltan, Nilkhet and Science Laboratory areas.

Of those, two were

Bangla Shopping Complex at Mirpur around 8:30pm, two near the BNP office and two others at Nilkhet and Science Laboratory areas around 9:00pm, police said.

New Market police said two youths were handed over to them by some students of Dhaka College who caught them when they were trying to torch a rickshaw in front of the college last night.

In Dhanmondi, a group of youth set fire to a taxicab around 9:00pm.

Even though a few buses, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and private cars operated in defiance of the shutdown, the streets of the capital were almost empty of its bumper-to-bumper traffic. The streets were dominated by rickshaws.

Long-distance buses remained parked in stations, but trains operated as usual. Launch services were disrupted. Shopping complexes, stores along the main streets, and educational institutions remained closed.

Government offices and both state-run and private offices opened with many of the staff walking or riding rickshaws to work. Many commuters were seen riding cargo-carrying vans.

BNP's central office was cordoned off by riot police who prevented party activists from taking out any procession. There were scuffles between police and some senior BNP leaders as they tried to stop the security forces from arresting their supporters.

In the port city of Chittagong, the strike hampered loading, unloading and transportation of goods to and from the port. Unloading of food items, including rice, wheat and sugar from five vessels at port jetties was partially disrupted as trucks could not reach the port.

BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir led the party activists' gathering in front of the central office.

"The government is suppressing our democratic rights and our freedom of holding meetings," Mirza Fakhru said. "So, what else can we do but observe hartal?"

On the other hand, Syed Ashraful Islam, general secretary of the ruling Awami League, yesterday called for a political dialogue to resolve the dispute.

Meanwhile, no significant picketing was seen in the capital, as huge contingents of law enforcers remained deployed at different points. Street presence of opposition leaders, workers and supporters was thin.

Sporadic clashes took place between police and opposition activists in different places outside the capital.

The opposition leaders, however, claimed that people spontaneously made the hartal a success. They said party men were trying to stay at different points of the capital but police did not allow them even to enter the party offices.

Police detained more than 256 pickets nationwide including 123 in the city.

Former ministers Hafizuddin and Altaf were arrested from the city's Mohakhali area when they were trying to bring out a procession.

Mirza Fakhru, however, claimed police arrested more than 700 leaders and workers across the country.

Meanwhile, pickets vandalised a pickup van in the city's Shahjahanpur and torched two buses at Mirpur-13. Police beat up photojournalists while they were covering events in front of the BNP office leaving four of them injured.

Police charged batons to disperse a procession of BNP's cultural wing at Tejgaon that left several persons including singer Baby Naznin injured.

Photojournalists briefly staged a sit-in protest after police beat up some of them while they were taking pictures of a female BNP leader being detained by security forces outside the party central office.

Muhith

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Bureau of Statistics, many newspapers have published a statement that I said the CPD's predictions never come true," the minister said in a rejoinder to the press.

"The news surprised me. It seems that some journalists circulated the motivated news to create a distance between the CPD and me," he said.

"Speaking at a memorial meeting on Dr Golam Rabbani, I praised Dr Rabbani and said he contributed immensely to the establishment of the BBS as an independent and impartial institution."

"I also said I had no comment to make on the CPD analysis. What I objected to was the CPD representative's comment that the rate of growth was shown under political influence."

"I don't think I have the authority to comment on CPD predictions. I have to go through CPD's reviews and reports to do that."

"I think the CPD has set a valued trend in dialogue on contemporary economic affairs. There is no scope for debate, as their analysis is based on information from other sources," Muhith said.

The BBS estimated the growth at 6.7 percent in the outgoing fiscal 2010-2011 while the CPD said it could be 6.2 to 6.3 percent.

UN chief calls for end to Sudan hostilities

AFP, United Nations

UN chief Ban Ki-moon called yesterday for an end to fighting in central Sudan, where border clashes have intensified as the south prepares to break away and become formally independent on July 9.

Ban issued a statement as the presidents of the two future Sudans met in Ethiopia to discuss the unrest in Abyei and also in South Kordofan, where clashes in the north's only oil-producing state have raged for the past week.

"The secretary-general is alarmed at the deterioration of the security situation and escalation of fighting in Southern Kordofan which has left thousands homeless," the statement from his office said.

3 killed

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Saturday after Jabbar was declared the winner.

Following the Saturday's clash, Moniruddin's men equipped with lethal weapons attacked the supporters of Jabbar, triggering a fight at around 11:00am Sunday, said the locals.

Anisuddin, who was passing by the area, was caught in the clash and sustained serious injuries, while Nilu and 15 others were also injured. The violence also left at least eight houses and shops vandalised.

Anis Uddin died on the way to Sarail Upazila Health Complex while Nilu Miah was declared dead at Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital.

Both Jabbar and Moniruddin were Awami League backed candidates of Sorail Sadar union.

Meanwhile, our Noakhali correspondent reports that Babul Hossain was shot dead after police allegedly opened fire to disperse a clash at about 8:00pm at Chatkhil Saturday evening.

Locals said police shot several rounds on an angry mob when supporters of a defeated candidate attacked the polling officials and on-duty law enforcement agency members after declaration of poll result at Karatkhill Community primary school centre.

Bullet-hit Babul was taken to Chatkhil Upazila Health Complex where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (Begumganj Circle) Ali Hossain, however, said, police shot into the air to disperse the mob. There was no point of getting anyone hurt by the bullets, he claimed.

Our Natore correspondent reports, at least 30 people including an ASP of police were injured in a clash between law enforcers and defeated mayor candidate's supporters at Baraigram UNO office.

Nasirul Islam, additional superintendent of police in Natore, said BNP nominated mayor candidate Mohua Noor Kochi's supporters attacked and vandalised the UNO office.

The ruling party backed candidate KM Zakir Hossain defeated Kochi by 16 votes in Bonpara municipality election yesterday.

Man dies

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Assistant Superintendent of Police Shafiul Sarwar, who oversees media affairs of Rab-2, told The Daily Star the battalion men signaled a microbus to stop at a temporary check post of Mohammadpur on Saturday afternoon.

The Rab personnel started chasing the vehicle as it ignored the signal.

However, it stopped at Mohammadia Housing Society after several crashes and brickbat attacks by locals.

Belal, who was behind the wheels, got caught while his accomplices fled. He already had suffered injuries, ASP Shafiul said.

The Rab seized the microbus and recovered three foreign pistols and seven machetes from inside the vehicle.