

Fish, vegetables

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Prices of aubergine along with tomato, bitter and teal gourd, and green chilli went up for supply shortfall.

Vendors in residential areas were seen asking as high as Tk 40 for a kg of aubergine. They sold tomato for Tk 40-50 and bitter gourd for Tk 28-36 a kg.

However, prices of a few other vegetables including okra, pointed gourd and green bean remained stable.

"Wholesalers are charging us more on grounds of a rise in transport costs for hartal and fuel price hike," said a street vendor at Wari in Old Dhaka.

Mohammad Miraz Molla, an employee of a vegetable storehouse at Karwan Bazar, said prices of aubergine and tomato went up, as fewer goods-laden trucks could make it to the kitchen market from outside the capital.

"At least 500 trucks carrying vegetables are usually loaded and unloaded here every night. That number slipped to almost half on Sunday night," said Miraz.

Many goods-laden trucks that had remained stranded on the outskirts of the capital entered the city last night.

EC to invite

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circumstance and it will be held on 30 June, he said.

Sohul Hossain also informed that the dialogue with Bangladesh Awami League was scheduled for June 9. But, the date was shifted to June 18 as they (AL) could not attend dialogue due to placing of national budget in the parliament, he added.

Slight drop

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month, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Last month, prices of rice maintained a downbeat as boro rice started hitting the market with prospect of another bumper harvest. Favourable weather and low prices of fertiliser helped farmers bag the bumper harvest.

Recently, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has estimated that the boro paddy harvest would stand a record level of about 19 million tonnes, 1.6 percent more than that of the last year.

Adequate irrigation along with distribution of subsidised fertiliser, quality seed and electricity and diesel for irrigation played a good role in the increased production, said FAO.

The winter crop wheat is also expecting a good harvest of 1 million tonnes, it added.

Prices of flour, bulk of which is imported, also eased allowing consumer price index to come down over the last month.

Launch fares

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fare due to fuel price hike, increased salaries of workers and repairing costs of vessels, said Shafiqul Haque, member secretary of the committee.

According to him, the repairing costs have soared by 150 to 200 percent on an average in last three years, while salaries of workers increased by 65 to 150 percent.

The launch owners demanded an increase by at least 20 to 25 percent, said Badiuzzaman Badal, a member of the committee.

"We met several times and had long debates about fixing the fare. Finally we agreed on about 10 percent," added Badiuzzaman, also the senior vice president of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carrier) Association.

He mentioned they would discuss operating vessels on rotation, taxes on river route maintenance, berthing and vessel survey issues with the shipping minister.

"We want to inform the minister about corruptions in this sector. We will request him to take necessary steps to curb corruption," he noted.

Hartal ends

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Demonstrations will be staged in the capital tomorrow and across the country the following day.

Announcing the BNP programme at a press briefing at its central office, acting Secretary General of the party Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir threatened to announce more agitation programmes.

He alleged that police arrested more than 100 party workers and leaders including lawmaker Harunur Rashid and former lawmaker Nazimuddin Alam, and mobile courts jailed at least 60 people in the capital yesterday.

However, the two lawmakers were released from Cantonment Police Station later at night, UNB adds.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Masudur Rahman said they arrested seven persons, and mobile courts jailed four persons.

Their jail terms ranged from one month to one year.

The Jamaat programme was announced by acting Secretary General ATM Azharul Islam at a press briefing at the party central office at Moghbazar.

Meanwhile, the ruling Awami League has asked the main opposition BNP to refrain from taking up any more tough programmes like hartal for the sake of the nationaleconomy.

"Please give up calling hartal, come to parliament. We are ready to discuss with you [opposition] to resolve the caretaker government issue," AL Joint Secretary General Mahbubul Alam Hanif said at a press briefing yesterday at the party president's political office at Dhanmondi.

But Fakhrul said, "First the government must cancel its decision to scrap the caretaker government system, and only then we can sit for talks."

He claimed people spontaneously made the 36-hour hartal a success while Hanif claimed people rejected the opposition programme.

Recently, the Supreme Court voided the caretaker government system but suggested holding two more parliamentary polls under a non-partisan caretaker gov-

ernment.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the opposition to return to parliament with its formula for caretaker government.

But Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia said there is no scope for discussion as continuation of the 13th amendment to the constitution (providing for caretaker system) is the only solution.

On the second day of the shutdown yesterday, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and private cars plied many streets. Other motorised vehicles started operating in most of the areas around noon.

Pickets set fire to three passenger buses at Joarshahara, Banani and Mirpur. A cocktail was exploded at Doyel Chattar that left three persons injured.

Shops, business establishments and educational institutions remained closed.

Law enforcement personnel were deployed at different strategic points.

The opposition men could not bring out processions due to the presence of a large number of police and Rab personnel on the main streets.

Like on Sunday, BNP leaders and activists, including Mirza Fakhrul gathered in front of the party's Naya Paltan central office, but they could not bring out any procession as police kept the office cordoned off.

Police arrested lawmaker Harunur Rashid and former lawmaker Nazimuddin at the gate of party office where they were sitting.

In the port city of Chittagong, the hartal hampered loading, unloading and movement of cargo to and from the port. Police picked up at least 21 opposition men from different points of the city.

In the capital, on behalf of the BNP chairperson and the party, Mirza Fakhrul thanked people for making the hartal a success.

Bitterly criticising the government for jailing opposition workers through mobile courts, he said it is absolutely a violation of law and human rights. "We will face it both legally and politically," he added.

Family claims

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deceased told The Daily Star that Belal worked as a driver of a private car.

Moreover, he had no criminal record and was not involved in any groups which carry firearms, she claimed.

Rab arrested an injured Belal, at the wheel of a microbus on Saturday afternoon and took him to DMCH where he died the next day.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Shafiqul Sarwar told The Daily Star that Rab-2 members signaled the microbus to stop at a temporary check post of Mohammadpur and started chasing it after it ignored them.

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

Belal, who was struck on the head by a brickbat got caught while his accomplices escaped, he alleged.

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

Morgue sources said the injuries on his head suggest he was struck by a heavy object.

BGB men

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"Arms and ammunition will be handed over to all the BGB men at Pilkhana. They will also be given the charge to guard the BGB headquarters when the mutiny trial ends. I hope it [the trial] will complete by December this year," BGB Director General Maj Gen Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star.

At present, a number of BGB special courts are holding trial of 3,800 members who actively took part in the Pilkhana mutiny. Some 6,000 BGB men were present there at the time.

Those charged with mutiny will not get arms and ammunition, said the BGB chief.

As the mutiny cases continue, police are investigating murder, arson, looting and other criminal charges brought against them.

Battalions 13, 24, 36 and 44 of Dhaka will be disbanded if the mutiny charges against those are proven.

Seven battalions outside of Dhaka did not take part in the rebellion. Two of them will be brought to Dhaka for posting in Pilkhana.

Once the deployment of the BGB men starts, the army and police personnel will be gradually pulled out, said Rafiqul Islam.

Altaf, Hafiz

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Rahman Bhuiyan passed the order sending them to jail after they were produced before it with a ten-day remand prayer in two cases.

The court however granted bail to them in another case for setting fire to a vehicle on June 4 in the city's Mohakhali area.

Gulshan police produced the two BNP leaders before the court with a remand prayer and the court fixed June 15 for hearing the prayer.

In the forwarding reports, the investigation officers (IO) of the cases mentioned that on instructions of the two leaders their supporters had set fire to two passengers' vehicles that created anarchy among the people. So, they need to be remanded to find out vital clues to the incidents.

Opposing the prayers, defence lawyers submitted petitions for bail along with cancellation of remand prayers, adding that their clients were implicated in the cases as part of a conspiracy to harass them.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who also heads AL, directed party lawmakers to rally the civil society, and drum up public opinion in favour of the government's stance on the caretaker issue.

The ruling party thinks if the civil society backs it, and the public opinion is created in favour of the government, then opposition's agitation programme on the issue will have no public acceptability.

More power by August

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The load-shedding situation has gone back to a tolerable level this summer due to a relatively cooler weather in which electricity demand falls, and addition of more than 15 power plants in the last two years, say PDB officials. Even last year, the custodian of electricity had to impose an hourly load-shedding, causing widespread commotion among citizens.

Understandably, the PDB is found to be buoyed by the latest on the rental power sector, which got off to a miserable start after the government went for a desperate move to salvage the country's grave electricity crisis.

Industry watchers said the PDB has learnt from its mistakes in handling rental power deals.

The PDB had incorporated certain clauses in contracts with the power companies so that they take their contracts more seriously, an observer said. In the past, the companies had not only failed to launch their power plants in time but also resorted to court injunctions over payment of penalties.

The rental power investors now know a failure can be way too costly. The PDB has already realised a Tk 210 crore penalty from different rental power companies over failure in meeting contractual deadlines without valid reasons, a top official said.

The PDB expects that due to this stringent measure, most of its two dozen rental power projects will come into operation by August. It is also set to scrap a few deals for absolute failure of the contractors.

More than a dozen rental power companies are facing penalty notices for their failures. Some power com-

panies have reasoned with the PDB and paid their penalties, while some others have either appealed to the PDB to waive the penalty on grounds of "force majeure" or other causes or have turned to court.

Among those who paid penalties are Quantum Power of Otobi which paid over Tk 64 crore for missing the deadlines for launching two 100 MW power plants by many months. Both these plants are now in operation.

Desh Energy has paid nearly Tk 40 crore for missing the deadline of its 100 MW plant in Siddhirganj by around four months.

British company Aggreko had paid Tk 3.5 crore for missing the deadline of its 100 MW Ghorashal plant by 20 days.

Hyperion Power Ltd, which was supposed to launch a 100 MW plant at Meghnaghat early this year, was served with a notice for around Tk 40 crore fine. It paid around Tk 5 crore and then turned to the High Court which stopped further payment of penalty for the time being. According to the PDB, the progress of work at Hyperion's Meghnaghat site is pitiable and it is unlikely to be launched ever.

Besides, the PDB served penalty notices on Summit Narayanganj, Khulna Power Company, IEL Consortium, Aggreko, Dutch Bangla Power, Acorn Infrastructure, Sinha Power, Northern Power Solution and Max Power. All of them however claimed that they were not responsible for missing their deadlines.

A PDB high official said, "Not all of them are really at fault for missing their deadlines. If they have valid grounds, we will forgo our claims."

A PDB committee reviews the explanations for delay submitted by the

defaulting companies. They explained that their delay was due to the PDB's delay in handing over land, providing power evacuation facility or other matters for which they were not responsible.

The PDB committee makes recommendations concerning whether penalty should be waived or reduced, and places those before the board. The board upon approval sends those to the power ministry.

Through such practice, the PDB has exempted penalty imposed on Max Power. The company has failed to launch its plant in time crossing the deadline by several months because the ship that brought in power plant equipment was attacked by pirates. Three persons were killed and many of its equipment were damaged.

The PDB also waived penalty on IEL Consortium and Aggreko for their Meghnaghat and Brahmanbaria plants. It could not provide power evacuation facility to IEL and land to Aggreko in time. Both these plants have launched operation. The IEL plant will be inaugurated by the prime minister next week.

All these penalty issues however angered some of the defaulting power companies that have political connections.

At a recent meeting of the parliamentary standing committee concerned, representatives of these companies which include one owned by a lawmaker came down heavily on the PDB for "not patronising local entrepreneurs" by imposing penalty. But government officials watered down the heat saying they were realising penalty as per the prime minister's instructions.

AL open to remodelled

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the AL policymaker.

BNP has so far refused to hold any dialogue with AL or return to parliament to debate the issue. It instead opted for street protests to force the government to keep the 13th amendment to the constitution which provides for the non-partisan caretaker government system to oversee parliamentary polls.

IF BNP sticks to its hard-line, the government will soon unilaterally place a bill in the parliament aimed at scraping the 13th amendment showing respect to the SC verdict, several top AL policymakers told The Daily Star.

Even if the current caretaker system is repealed, AL will keep its doors open to dialogue with BNP to find a new formula for a caretaker government system to supervise the next national election, the AL leaders said.

BNP may come up with its suggestions any time before the next parliamentary poll due in early 2014.

"We [AL, BNP] have to sit for discussion to decide whether we will hold one or two more elections under a re-modelled caretaker government system," said Suranjit Sengupta, co-chair of the parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment.

He said if the parliament scraps the caretaker government system for now, a new model can be developed any time before the next election, once BNP places its proposal on the issue.

"We have two-thirds majority in the House, and we can amend the constitution again anytime on consensus," Suranjit said.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam urged BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to join the parliament and start a discussion.

Meanwhile, AL is gearing up to face BNP-led opposition which launched a campaign of hartal and demonstrations to force the government to keep the current caretaker system untouched.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who also heads AL, directed party lawmakers to rally the civil society, and drum up public opinion in favour of the government's stance on the caretaker issue.

The ruling party thinks if the civil society backs it, and the public opinion is created in favour of the government, then opposition's agitation programme on the issue will have no public acceptability.

Suranjit said, "I don't think that BNP can continue movements on the issue for two and a half years, since it doesn't have that kind of strength."

"Besides, people will go against BNP when they will understand that the government has kept the door open for discussion," he said.

Bracing for more BNP-led hartals, AL plans to strengthen its activities at the grassroots, and bring the frustrated or neglected leaders back to the fold.

The party high command started paying more attention to the stalwarts who had been sidelined.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahabubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star that they will start working on strengthening the party from the grassroots next month.

Both Suranjit and Ashraf, meanwhile, hoped BNP will eventually join the parliament and agree with AL on the caretaker government system.

Voiding the caretaker system, the SC on May 10 also observed that the system might be practiced for another two parliamentary polls for the sake of "safety of the state and its people".

It also asked the parliament to amend the constitution to make sure that former chief justices or other Supreme Court judges are not chosen to head caretaker governments in case the system is kept for another two parliamentary elections.

55 forest

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order today, said Sayed Ali, divisional forest officer in Bhola.

"As the local police refused to cooperate with us in this regard, we filed the cases with the court of justice," he said.

The filing of the cases came a day after The Daily Star ran a report headlined "Mangrove forest plundered".

According to the report, thousands of trees inside the mangrove forest have been chopped down by a group of locals to build a road in the remote island. AL lawmaker Abdullah Al Islam and his supporters allegedly backed the tree felling.

The court could not give order yesterday, as there was no official due to the 36-hour countrywide hartal. BNP and its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami enforced the hartal that ended at 6:00pm yesterday.

Mobile courts

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public property by foiling opposition party's "attempts to create anarchy".

She said this while responding to independent lawmaker Fazlul Azim, who on a cut motion on supplementary budget raised questions on mobile court activities during the hartal hours.

Attacking Fazlul Azim personally, the home minister also termed him both "forest robber" and "killer of forest robbers".

Independent MP Azim walked out of parliament in protest against Sahara's remark and demanded that the Speaker expunge those unparliamentary words.

Azim, who was the lone opposition MP in yesterday's parliament sitting, strongly criticised the mobile court activities during hartal.

"Many opposition activists were sent to jail unlawfully and were not even given any chance for self-defence," he said.

"This practice [operation of mobile courts during hartal hours] is not good for democracy. We all should remember that no-one will remain in power for good," Azim said.

In reply, the home minister blasted Fazlul Azim by attacking him personally.

She even termed Azim "forest robber" and at one stage of her discussion, Sahara also said Azim was involved in killing of forest robbers.

After the end of Sahara's speech, Azim stood up and demanded that the Speaker expunge her unparliamentary words including "forest robber".

Speaker Abdul Hamid questioned the home minister: "Honourable minister, you have termed the honourable MP Fazlul Azim forest robber, but again you have mentioned that he was engaged in killing forest robbers."

"Which allegation is correct?" a smiling speaker asked the home minister.

At this stage, Fazlul Azim walked out of parliament protesting against the comment of the home minister.

The Speaker told the House that any unparliamentary words used by the home minister will be expunged.

Foreign aid

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be able to utilise foreign assistance to the tune of 2 percent of the GDP, but we could utilise only 1.3 to 1.4 percent," the finance minister said.

He said the culture of failing to utilise foreign assistance has to be changed, and for that alongside increasing the administration's efficiency, its commitment also needs to be improved.

After the concluding speech the finance minister placed the current fiscal year's supplementary budget in the parliament which passed it in absence of the main opposition BNP.

At the beginning of his speech Muhith urged the opposition to shun destructive politics.

The finance minister said many have been saying that the proposed new budget is too ambitious, with a huge deficit.

"But I don't find any basis for such criticism," he said adding that the projected budget deficit is kept confined to only 5 percent of the GDP, and earlier budgets also kept deficits below 5 percent. And finally every time the deficit stays lower than the projected level.

He said the government always tries to keep budget deficit low, as deficit increases inflation.

In the last two fiscal years the budget deficits were more than the development budgets, but in the next fiscal year the development budget will be bigger than the deficit, Muhith pointed out.

He said although every year the development budget has been seeing significant increase under the current government, the rate of implementation has also been increasing.

About the criticism that the projected non-development budget is bigger than the development budget, the finance minister said every year non-development budget will keep getting bigger because it takes much spending to maintain the assets created over the last 40 years.

He said in agriculture sector the allocation was not cut, rather every fiscal year in revised budget the allocation to the sector is increased.

The trend will continue as the agriculture sector helps the economy to develop, he added.

Steel mill

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Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of DMCH with 75 percent body-burn.

Joyal Abedin, another injured worker told The Daily Star from his bed at DMCH that five of them worked at Century Metal Industries. They were inserting iron scraps into the boiler around 3:00am when it suddenly exploded, he said.

They were taken to a local hospital first and later shifted to DMCH as their conditions deteriorated.

Our Narayanganj correspondent spoke to Md Shahin, manager of the mill who admitted to the incident of boiler explosion but denied any worker being killed or injured.

Md Yunus Ali, officer-in-charge of Sonargaon Police Station said the injured were sent to DMCH with one of them in a critical state.

Another explosion occurred in the same factory around six months ago, he added.

Two dyeing

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In a drive, led by DoE Director (Enforcement) Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, the team found the two factories -- Sarder Apparels Limited (Unit-2) and Classic Attires Limited -- dumping chemical mixed water into the local canal which flows into the local Makhsh Lake posing threat to environment.

Sarder Apparels Limited was fined Tk 29.18 lakh while Classic Attires Limited was fined Tk 10.85 lakh. They have been operating without environmental clearance and ETP from 2003 and 2004 respectively, said the press handout.

Earlier, the factories got several notices to stop pollution and to establish ETP. But the notices were not taken into cognisance by the owners.

According to the Bangladesh Environment Protection Act (Amendment)-2010, these two dyeing factories are categorised 'Red' which is considered very dangerous for environment.