

Fish, vegetables

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Prices of aubergine along with tomato, bitter and teasel 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 hortal 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 added.

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 national economy.

"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 Mahabubul 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 Doyer Chittar 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.

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.

Even if the current caretaker system is repeated, 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.

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.

After hearing both the sides, the magistrate cancelled remand prayer and granted them bail in the case filed with Gulshan Police Station on June 4.

The court also directed the jail authorities to produce them before it on the scheduled date when the remand hearing will be held.

Anybody can appeal against mobile court verdicts before the district magistrates, he added.

Dead Sea

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The Dead Sea, which is linked to the sites of the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, runs more than 60 miles through Israel, the West Bank and Jordan.

Current efforts to preserve the Dead Sea as a natural treasure shine a spotlight on how extensively the lake has been exploited by modern industry -- and how it paradoxically also depends on industry for its survival.

The southern basin now in danger of flooding nearly dried up before the chemical companies intervened. In the 1960s, Dead Sea Works dug a 10-mile canal to pump saltwater from the lake's northern basin into its nearly parched southern end, turning it into a network of evaporation pools.

Summary

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were found.

Allegations were raised that the mobile courts convicted all of them who were picked up either by law enforcers or leaders and activists of ruling Awami League.

Executive Magistrate Al Amin told The Daily Star on Sunday that the mobile courts are supposed to deliver a verdict if they witness any crime while patrolling. For other cases, the mobile courts can deliver verdicts on the basis of accounts of the crimes' witnesses and the confessional statements of the accused.

Al Amin said Rampura police handed six people to him on Saturday but he awarded jail terms to three of them.

"I found that allegations raised by police against three others were not correct, so I freed them."

Dhaka District Deputy Commissioner Mohibul Haque said all the 10 mobile courts in the capital are carrying out activities properly.

"The mobile courts are not influenced by anybody," said the DC. There are many instances of freeing the accused persons as allegations against them were not proved.

Anybody can appeal against mobile court verdicts before the district magistrates, he added.

Israel, Jordan and Syria are responsible for the

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 Shaiful 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.

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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 Siddhinganj by around four months.