

Shutdown pushes up prices of commodities in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Prices of vegetables, eggs and meat in the port city soared in the past week, in some cases by 50-60 percent, due to supply crunch and political strikes, retailers and consumers said.

Frequent shutdowns enforced by BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami have snapped the supply link between Chittagong and other regions of the country which further aggravated the existing seasonal shortfall in supply.

At Reazuddin bazaar kitchen market yesterday, current prices of cauliflower at around Tk 50 a kg, aubergine at Tk 45-50 a kg, tomato at Tk 80-100 a kg, green chilli at Tk 60-80 a kg and beans at Tk 55-60 a kg, rose by 40-67 percent from a week ago.

Retailers blame the increased prices on limited supply and higher wholesale prices.

Prices of onion rose to Tk 25 a kg from Tk 15 and prices of imported garlic doubled to Tk 70 a kg, a Karnaphuli market

retailer said.

"All items are becoming costlier and vegetable prices are soaring, going beyond our purchasing power," said Fatema Begum, a housewife, who went to Kazir Dewry market for shopping.

Aziz Hasan, an employee of a private bank and a regular customer at Karnaphuli market, said the prices of most vegetables are showing an upward trend.

Prices vary slightly at different markets including Karnaphuli market, Bahaddarhat market and Kazir Dewry market.

"All the vegetables are not available in all markets now and vendors cannot bring whatever vegetables are available to the markets because of frequent strikes," said Nur Hossain, a vegetable vendor at Reazuddin Bazaar.

The prices of chicken remained stable even as meat and egg prices went up by around 10 percent compared to the previous week.

Prices of fish rose more than 10 percent on average in the past week.

Stocks rise for second day

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks gained for the second day as investors went on a buying spree anticipating a short-term rally in the market.

DGEN, the benchmark general index of Dhaka Stock Exchange, advanced 14.70 points or 0.36 percent, to close at 4,063.30 points at the 2:30pm closure.

The premier bourse saw active buying pressure right from the beginning of the session, to finally close in the black.

"An uprising session eventually led to only marginal gain as selling pressure towards the close of day wiped out the early gain. The bourse closed flat," IDLC Investments said in its regular market commentary.

Turnover advanced 24.55 percent from the previous day to Tk 199 crore.

The merchant banks said: "Since political violence looks to be continuing, investors are not placing any bets on stock prices with their full exposure."

In the last two sessions, index gained by 54.5 points, due mainly because of the large cap bank sector, it said.

A total of 0.70 lakh trades were executed, with 6.46 crore shares and mutual

fund units changing hands on the Dhaka bourse.

Among the major sectors, banks went up by 2.01 percent, followed by non-bank financial institutions, by 0.36 percent.

Power dropped by 0.45 percent, telecommunications 0.30 percent and pharmaceuticals 0.14 percent.

Of the 262 issues that traded on the DSE, 91 advanced, 144 declined and 27 remained unchanged.

Envoy Textiles was the most traded stock of the day, with 25.56 lakh shares worth Tk 13.79 crore changing hands.

United Airways and Unique Hotel and Resorts were the next most popular stocks.

City Bank was the biggest gainer of the day, posting a 9.48 percent rise.

Seventh ICB Mutual Fund was the worst loser, slumping by 7.49 percent.

CSCX, the selective categories index of Chittagong Stock Exchange, finished the day at 7,911 points, after gaining 25 points or 0.31 percent.

Losers beat gainers 101 to 58, with 14 securities remaining unchanged at the port city bourse that traded 1.05 crore shares and mutual fund units worth Tk 36.87 crore in turnover.

American tariffs, Bangladeshi deaths

FROM PAGE B4

Bangladesh's government and industries have a moral duty to prevent catastrophes like the November fire from ever occurring again. They need to insist that factory operators meet safety standards, that inspections are conducted honestly and that recommendations are enforced.

But levelling the playing field of international trade could advance all of these goals. International brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Gap, H&M, Target and Walmart demand low prices and fast turnaround. In that context, high tariffs work against the goals of fair-labour standards and factory safety.

In the fire's aftermath, it's tempting to focus only on local corruption and lax labour standards. But there have been positive changes in recent years; labour groups, businesses, nongovernmental organisations and even some international buyers have formed coalitions to improve safety at many factories. In a survey I conducted of garment workers at established factories, 62 percent said labour conditions had improved.

But for improvements in workers' well-being to have lasting effect, tariffs on exports to the United States, the world's largest consumer market, must be eased.

Sanchita B Saxena is a political scientist and associate director of the

Row over surplus lands at state enterprises

FROM PAGE B1

The industries ministry informed the committee that mills under its three corporations -- Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation, Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation and Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation -- do not have any surplus land.

The commission earlier estimated that the mills under the industries ministry have 1,259 acres of surplus lands that can be leased out.

The commerce ministry also said the enterprises under its control do not have any surplus land, while the jute and textiles ministry did not send any information to the committee, according to the commission.

SA Samad of the Board of Investment said the entire exercise of the Privatisation Commission on the surplus lands has turned futile due to the disagreement between the ministries and the commission.

Chairman of the commission Mirza Abdul Jalil, however, said the commission had earlier published the survey findings but no ministry opposed the estimates then.

"We have estimated the surplus lands considering that each mill requires five acres of land on an average. The rest are surplus," said Jalil.

He said 257 industrial units, mainly mills, could be set up on the surplus lands estimated by the commission.

Following the survey, the commission also drafted rules on leasing out the state mills' surplus lands to

Scams, political unrest take toll on businesses

FROM PAGE B1

"Foreign banks (sellers' banks) have become cautious, especially after the Hall-Mark and some other scams," said MA Yousuf Khan, deputy managing director of Mercantile Bank.

HSBC Bangladesh said there is no fixed market rate for LC confirmation as it depends on the confirming bank's appetite/limit for the respective bank counterparty.

In an email reply, the bank said it has not increased its rates in general.

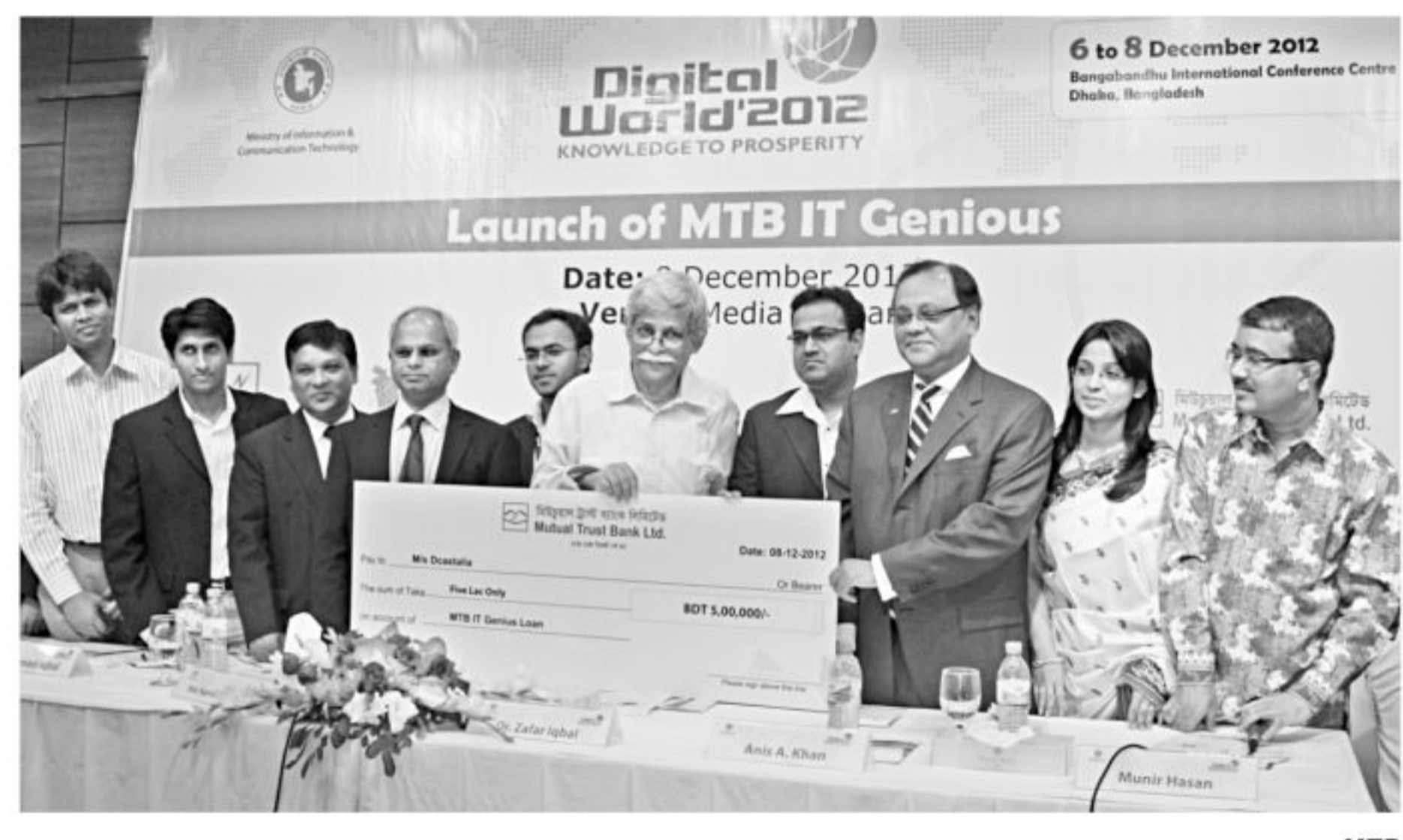
"Country risk rating does remain a factor in many international transactions," said HSBC.

It, however, said Bangladesh has a stable country rating from renowned ratings agencies.



ROBI

Michael Kuehner, managing director of Robi, and Abul K Shamsuddin, chief operating officer of RanksTel, sign a bilateral infrastructure sharing agreement between their companies at the Robi's corporate office in Dhaka recently.



MTB

Anis A Khan, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, hands over a cheque to Dcastalia, the first client of MTB IT Genius, a loan product for IT entrepreneurs, at the closing day of Digital World 2012 at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka recently. Prof Dr Muhammed Zafar Iqbal is also seen.

Flash protest at BGMEA for justice for Tazreen workers

FROM PAGE B4

The organisers were particularly critical of the role of the BGMEA and the government in what has been the worst industrial fire tragedy in the history of the nation.

They have created smokescreens, the activists claim, to let the owner of Tazreen Fashions off the hook and reduce the likelihood of compensation.

"BGMEA has complicity in the deaths of Tazreen's workers," said Annie, branding the association as a "propaganda machine" and asking for "fundamental changes in its philosophy and agenda".

Of the 112 workers who died, 53 were buried at the Jurain graveyard without identification, and BGMEA said they have preserved their DNA samples to conduct further tests. BGMEA would compensate the bereaved families upon successful identification via DNA tests.

On hearing this, distraught relatives have come to Dhaka from distance corners of the country -- but many returned without getting any DNA tests done.

"They [BGMEA] led many to think that getting a DNA test is easy, but they did not even set up adequate facilities to conduct the tests," said the protesters.

The activists are also in disagreement with the official count of casualty from the fire, and demanded the "actual death toll" be revealed.

"The government and the BGMEA should have right away launched a serious drive to ascertain the exact number of those who have died. Instead, they displayed a callous indifference, which amounts to nothing short of criminal negligence."

The demonstrators said their language of protest would be non-violent, and that they would continue with their flash protests until the BGMEA and apparel factory owners return to their "senses".

When asked what they meant by the "senses", a protester said: "It means owners' seriousness in ensuring workplace safety for the workers."

Apple works with Asian suppliers to test new TV

AFP, Taipei

US technology giant Apple has been working with component suppliers in Asia to test new TV sets in a possible move to branch into the television market, a report said Wednesday.

Apple has been testing several TV prototypes for large-screen high-definition TV for a few years, sources familiar with the situation were quoted by the Dow Jones Newswires as saying.

Among the suppliers, Taiwan's Hon Hai Precision has been working with Japan's Sharp Corp. on the design of the new TV, the report said, citing unnamed company officials.

Hon Hai, better known as Foxconn, is the world's largest maker of computer components and produces goods for tech giants including Apple, Sony and Nokia.

Apple's move into the television market would intensify competition with some of its biggest suppliers, including South Korea's Samsung Electronics, the world's biggest TV

Biggest garment expo starts on a sombre note

FROM PAGE B1

The recent political instability and the fire incident, however, have put a damper on the three-day exposition showcasing the best of local apparel products to international buyers.

"Around 20 buyers from Germany and France have cancelled their planned visit to the fair due to the recent turn of events," said BGMEAVice-President Faruque Hassan.

This correspondent, though, found a healthy crowd size at the exposition.

But it was at the stalls selling ready stock apparel for export where most visitors flocked around.

This year, several garment manufacturers are showcasing ready stocks all kinds of clothing items, ranging from trousers to winter coats, T-shirts to shirts.

"We have now eleven types of ready stock items, including men's shirts, ladies' T-shirts, complete suits and ladies knitted tops," said Haqkani MM Alom, managing director of 3A Garments & Hosiery Pvt Ltd.

At present, the company has stock of: 1500 complete suit sets costing \$60 a set; 1,000 pieces of ladies' knitted tops at \$5 apiece; and 20,000 pieces of printed shirts, each costing \$3.10.

Alom said his company can deliver the stock within 30 days of receipt of the letters of credit from the buyers.

Also present was JUKI Machinery Bangladesh, displaying modern sewing machines that can perform lockstitch,

buttonholing, cover stitch, over lock and different spare parts, for sale.

"Interested apparel manufacturers can buy JUKI machines from Bangladesh as the company prepares local stock based on customer demands," said Md Abul Hashem, the company's manager for sales promotion.

Different banks including Prime, Mercantile, AB, IFIC, EXIM, South East and NCC are showcasing their financial products -- to facilitate trade.

"The expo is designed to showcase the diversification of readymade garments and the development of local backward linkage industries, including the progress in textile and accessory production," said Hassan.

Last year, Hassan said, buyers from 40 countries attended the exposition, and orders worth \$64.77 million were received and stock lots worth \$1.58 million were bought -- on the spot.

He said around 100 international buyers have so far set up sourcing or liaison offices in Bangladesh.

"We expect that our spot orders will increase by 20 percent this year," said the BGMEA vice-president, although expressing concern over the recent political instability and fire incident.

The three-day exposition will end on Friday, and as a mark of respect to the Tazreen victims no cultural programme would be held this year.

Prime Bank and MGH Group are the lead sponsors of the show.



NCC BANK

Md Nurun Newaz Salim, chairman of the NCC Bank, opens the bank's 91st branch in Parulia of Debhata in Satkhira yesterday. Mohammed Nurul Amin, managing director, was also present.



EASTERN HOUSING LTD

Manzurul Islam, chairman of Eastern Housing Ltd, attends the company's 48th annual general meeting in Dhaka recently. Dhiraj Malakar, managing director, was also present. The company declared 10 percent cash and 10 percent stock dividends.



STANDARD BANK

Abul Kalam Azad, cultural affairs minister, inaugurates the 75th branch of Standard Bank on Old Bus Stand Road in Bakshiganj of Jamalpur on Tuesday. SA Farooqui, managing director, was also present.