

## Food prices on the rise

### Curb the irrational hike

WITHIN just a week, prices of staples, including rice, sugar, onions, egg plant and other vegetables have increased by Tk. 5 to 15 per kg. For families with low and fixed incomes, this increase is hard-hitting, affecting their food basket and nutritional requirement.

Every year, we report on the practice of increasing food prices ahead of and during the month of Ramadan. But, this year, with the excuse of excessive rainfall and flooding in one part of the country only, the price hike has started earlier. But how much the destroyed rice and crops in affected areas contributed to this price increase, is still not clear.

We must also remember that the worst affected from the natural calamities are people who are going to be the most burdened with this extra cost. Even if it is argued that the price of some essentials increased due to rainfall, it does not account for the wide range of commodities, such as sugar and broiler chicken, whose prices have been hiked.

Strong government monitoring needs to be ensured to see what is causing this hike. Are there syndicates hoarding food essentials to create an artificial shortage and adding to the inflation? A recent estimate by an FAO expert puts the number of people in Bangladesh suffering from malnutrition at 2.6 crore. Hiking the price of food items now, a trend which might continue well into the month of Ramadan, only adds to the problem, and as always it is the poor and the middle classes that will be affected the most.

## Graft eats away rice supply for poor

### Flood-hit farmers being deprived of food

ALLEGATIONS have arisen against the chairmen and their relatives in Sunamganj district's Rajanagar and Rofinagar union that they are depriving the affected farmers of rice allocated to them under the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme. We understand that complaints have been filed with the Union Nirbahi Officer (UNO) on the question of money being demanded from flood-affected farmers to get enlisted on the VGF list. We hope the concerned UNO will launch a thorough investigation and put a stop to the alleged profiteering. The VGF programme is of utmost importance to the government's rural safety net, and given the massive floods in the haor areas this year that has adversely affected thousands of farmers; we certainly hope authorities will not turn a blind eye to these very serious allegations of graft.

The allegation of VGF rice ending up in the retail for sale does not happen magically; it happens when a section of the grassroots local administration gets involved in diverting government-allotted rice (OMS) from the target groups in a bid to make windfall profits. We witness such incidents whenever a natural disaster strikes any part of the country. The whole idea of VGF is to alleviate the suffering of most vulnerable groups in the aftermath of such disasters.

This year the flooding in the north was particularly severe and now entire communities are not facing simply hardship but malnutrition too. We have been informed that the deputy commissioner of Sunamganj has stated on record that he will not stand for any irregularities with regards to the distribution of VGF cards and OMS rice and can only hope his resolve and action will filter down the administrative hierarchy to put an end to this unethical practice.

# "Providing" for the "Protected"



**KNOT SO TRUE**  
 RUBANA HUQ

I am so glad that children of powerful people are not being able to get away with rape." I heard this from a 25-year old who was reading the news on her phone a few days ago. I am so glad that Macron married a woman his mother's age, said another. I am so glad Nirbhaya's rapists are to be hanged: another comment. I am so glad that Le Penn lost, European Union is safe. I am so glad the Chibok girls have been returned. The I-am-so-glad list could go on. Bangladesh, essentially a land of political *adda* in every tea stall around the corner thrives on opinions. These opinions need not come

*As responsible women, we are supposed to lead, but not be seen to lead; as women we are supposed to excel but not be perceived as a performer. When are you ever going to change, men? This question may remain unanswered for the longest time to come.*

from public intellectuals, but they come from the most basic people with basic needs. But these matter.

Women, poverty, injustice always top our agenda. Basically, women tend to be poorer, smaller in number when it comes to representation and are often faced with discrimination. Therefore, we are always making headlines. Either the men are turning us into headlines through abuse, indifference or we are attempting to make a mark because of who we are. Irrespective of achievements, women generally live in the space of danger. No one is ever spared. Rape may begin at 5 and stretch till 90. In a shocking incident of inhuman sexual assault in Kerala, a 90-year-old woman was allegedly raped brutally in March this year; in Dusseldorf, a teenager pleaded guilty to

raping a 90-year old in the courtyard of a church as she couldn't give him any money.

Who's safe and where? The recent story of two young women being raped in a hotel and of filing cases after almost a month raises eyebrows. Why would they go to a party in a room in the hotel? Why were they silent for so long? And why would the accused use the gun of an armed bodyguard to threaten the girls? How could the case not have been consensual when they were in the room themselves? Every time these thoughts crossed my mind, I kept on reminding myself that these women are "people" with their own judgments. Prejudging women must cease and we must patiently wait for the true story to surface with time.

In all honesty, (no pun intended), I often list a standard advice to all the young ladies that I meet in this town:



ILLUSTRATION: MUSTAFA RAFID AMIN

- 1) Always carry a scarf or a shawl when you are out, just in case if you come across strangers telling you that you need to be more modest;
- 2) Don't ever be alone while you are walking to catch a public or private transport;
- 3) Always have your phone fully charged so that your close ones can reach you;
- 4) Be careful all the time and be mindful and check if you ever suspect anyone to be posing a threat to you;
- 5) Text your close ones when you leave a venue and try and be on the phone with your mother or a friend while you are returning late from work or an event.
- 6) Subscribe to the "general" code of propriety when it comes to dressing... (in spite of knowing even using head

states supported Saudi Arabia's election to the commission, out of which three were European. Irish and the Danes are apparently outraged by their country's support on this. A country which promotes 'qiwamah' (concept of guardianship) giving authority of guardianship to men for women today leads a global forum. Ironically, in the same month of April, 29-year old Mariam-al-Oteibi fled Riyadh to escape abuse but was dramatically captured and brought back to a prison in Al-Qassim today. In the same month, 24-year old Dina Ali Lasloom wanted to escape from Kuwait and head for Australia only to be returned to Saudi Arabia after being detained and almost kidnapped in Manila while she was in transit.

Utterly ludicrous is yet another

## Backtracking on the Paris Agreement

### The US withdrawal might not be such a bad thing after all



**POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**  
 SALEEMUL HUQ

DURING his campaign for the US presidency, Donald Trump had said that he believed that human induced climate change was a Chinese hoax, and promised that he would "tear up" the Paris Agreement if he became president.

Since taking office, he has put in place confirmed climate change deniers at the head of the US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of Energy, and they have already put in place policies to dismantle practically all of President Obama's policies to tackle climate change in the US.

He has also sent his proposed budget to Congress (which is yet to confirm it), in which he has specifically stopped the previously committed US contribution to support climate change actions in developing countries, thus reneging on the commitment of the United States under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

When it comes to his attitude regarding the Paris Agreement, we are still waiting for a decision. Firstly, it is quite clear that he cannot "tear it up", but rather he can only withdraw the US from the Agreement if he wishes to do so. The Paris Agreement will carry on without the US if he does so.

The next UNFCCC meeting to review the implementation of the Paris Agreement started in Bonn, Germany, this week, and the White House met three times in the last few weeks to come to a decision before the meeting, but failed to do so.

The reason is that there is a clear division of opinion between the State Department and the White House on what they should do. The State Department is in favour of remaining in the Paris Agreement, saying that the US should keep a "seat at the table", which would be lost if they withdraw, while the President's chief strategist in the White House as well as the head of the EPA are

strongly in favour of taking the US out of the Agreement.

They all met three times in the run up to resolve the issue, but each time failed to do so. Thus the US delegation, under President Trump, is attending the meeting in Bonn after all. They have again postponed the final decision until later.

For the rest of the world, there is a mixture of views as to what we think the US should do and also what we think the consequences of a US withdrawal (or non-withdrawal) will be.

While almost all governments are officially

mean that the US will not make its promised financial contributions to tackle climate change in developing countries through the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

However, I would argue that the US actions both at home and the fund contributions have already been halted even without their withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. Hence, the only consequence for the rest of the world if the US stays in it is a very negative one of having to fight them on every little issue in the negotiations, as they will inevitably try to hold back all our actions.



SOURCE: AR.CONSTRUCTIONWEEKONLINE

appealing to the US administration not to withdraw, I will offer a contrary personal view here.

I feel that it is far better for the US to withdraw from the Paris Agreement and go their own way while the rest of the world can raise our levels of ambition as we have agreed to do under the Paris Agreement. This will obviously make it much harder to achieve the long term temperature goal of two degrees (let alone the more ambitious goal of 1.5 Degrees which we fought for). It will also

Hence, in my view, it is much better for the rest of the world, who have already agreed on the actions under the Paris Agreement, to carry on raising the level of our ambition and let the US go in the other direction if they wish, and not have them stay in and drag the rest of us back.

Hopefully, we shall know of their decision soon.

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example of Lebanon's appointment of a man as its first-ever women's affairs minister. Utterly discouraging is the Indian instance of noisy campaigns to protect cows while abuse and insecurity of women increase, an issue rightly nailed by Jaya Bacchan during a parliamentary session.

Are we any better? In spite of the positive gains in politics with regard to gender parity in our country, most women live with chauvinists who claim and believe that they are the ones "providing" for the family and are stressed about the security of "their" women. Patriarchal attitude haunts many women and mostly serve as backlash against the more progressive and talented section of women. This chauvinism, which is probably triggered by a sense of weakness in men, kills many of us. For many women amongst us, marriages have turned into organisations women create and run, husbands turning into projects to manage and our sacrifices becoming a necessity to sustain our marital ties. Most of the women are not "allowed" to function as a normal human being as we are supposed to be "precious" and our responsibilities have to be "borne." Most of the women are given more "protection" than is good for us. And when it comes to assuming a responsible position in the ladder, women are often told that the corporate world is a jungle infested with beasts and sickness, and that we are best served as an on-demand sandwich on a platter at home or in the workplace, while being carried in doggy bags only to be exposed and consumed as and when required.

It personally pains me to write all of this, specially as, in spite of being in the corporate world for the last two decades, women like us still find it increasingly difficult to combat bias at every corner. As responsible women, we are supposed to lead, but not be seen to lead; as women we are supposed to excel but not be perceived as a performer. When are you ever going to change, men? This question may remain unanswered for the longest time to come. And this column may just end up to be regarded as a feminist rant. There's nothing here that we don't know. Yet, women need to repeat their stories, shame chauvinists, break ceilings and move on. Move on with faith and defy routine. That's the best route to tread and be grounded on. In the end it's women for women and it's up to people like us telling our daughters that we once lived in a more secular society than the one that they live in today and that though times are tough, they have better chances of winning their wars, because of their own merit and temerity.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

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**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**  
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**Malpractice in university admissions**

Public universities are considered to be the best providers of quality higher education in Bangladesh. Among them, Dhaka University is revered as the finest.

However, media reports and internet videos have revealed unethical admission practices in public university admissions, particularly in Dhaka University. Those caught red-handed are punished for a while, but they resort to the same actions the following year. The university authorities need to take legal actions to eradicate these problems from the root. Handing out temporary punishments will never do any good.

Shamir Sarkar  
 University of Dhaka

**Honouring a friend of the country**

Professor Waris Mir was among the few Pakistanis to raise his voice against the genocide of Bangladeshis in 1971. The then military government could not stop Professor Waris from speaking out boldly against the oppression and torture of innocent Bangladeshis. For this, he faced brutal confinement by the Pakistani rulers. Our current government conferred the 'Foreign Friends of Bangladesh Award' to Professor Waris for his unflinching support.

Hamid Mir, son of the late Professor Waris, received the award on behalf of his father. However, he later announced that he would like to return the award because Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is not maintaining cordial relations with Pakistan today. As a Pakistani, he has the right to his own take on this matter. But in that case we request that he return the award so that we can preserve it in our museum as a show of respect for an upright Pakistani who proved to be a friend of the nation.

Md. Nasirullah Khan  
 Dhaka