

Bags of beef hung on temple doors, house

OUR CORRESPONDENT, LALMONIRHAT

Raw beef packed in polythene bags were hung on the doors of three Hindu temples and a house in Gendukuri village of Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila in the early hours of Friday.

Four complaints were filed with Hatibandha Police Station later that night over the matter.

Yesterday, local Hindus gathered at Sri Sri Radha Govinda temple in the village to protest the incident. They said their religious sentiments were hurt and that they would continue the protest until the culprits were arrested.

Talking to The Daily Star, Dilip Kumar Singh, president of Hatibandha Upazila Pujya Ujapan Parishad, said raw beef in polythene bags were hung over the doors of Gendukuri Camp Para Sri Sri Radha Govinda Mandir, Gendukuri Kuthipara Kali Mandir, Gendukuri Battala Kali Mandir and Monindranath Barman's house.

After locals saw them, they informed the matter to the police, who then visited the spot. Dilip said, adding, "Police have assured us that

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Posters line a street in Noarda area as politicians in Narayanganj launch full-on campaign ahead of the election to Narayanganj City Corporation scheduled for January 16.

PHOTO: SANAD SAHA

Cash incentive on remittance now 2.5pc

Govt gunning for \$26b inflows in fiscal 2022-23

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

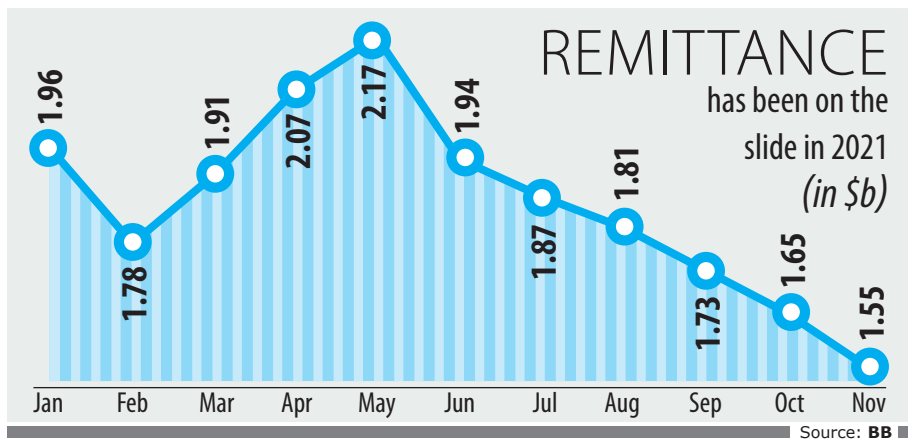
The government yesterday increased the cash incentive for sending remittance through the official channel to 2.5 percent from 2 percent as it looks to stem the tide of sliding inflows.

Between June and November last year, which is the latest available data of the central bank, expatriate Bangladeshis sent home about \$10.6 billion, down 17.1 percent year-on-year.

In the first 11 months of 2021, expatriate Bangladeshis sent home \$20.4 billion, meaning the country will still register a record-setting year of remittance.

In 2020, a record \$21.7 billion was received in remittance, which has progressively become a pillar for the economy, helping it to prevent a crash-landing during the pandemic.

The government has set a target of receiving \$26 billion in remittance this



fiscal year and Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal is hoping the higher cash incentive will help to hit the number. Bangladesh received \$24.6 billion last fiscal year, up 36 percent from fiscal 2019-20.

There is a charge for sending

remittances through the legal channel and the cash incentive offsets that, Kamal said at a virtual press briefing yesterday.

"We are trying to bring remittance through the right channel -- that is why the incentive has been increased," he added.

COVID VACCINE

Special campaign launches to jab 3.32 cr people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a target to inoculate 3.32 crore people with the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine, the government launched a special vaccination campaign yesterday.

"The campaign will continue throughout January at certain ward-level centres," Shamsul Haque, a line director at the health directorate, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has been conducting the regular Covid-19 vaccination campaign at 1,005 centres across the country.

So far, 5.18 crore people have received two Covid shots.

Meanwhile, the DGHS reported 370 new cases in the last 24 hours since 8:00am yesterday. During that period, four Covid-19 patients were reported dead, raising the total number of fatalities to 28,076.

Another party rejects

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president's invitation for dialogues on the formation of the EC.

The talks with the registered political parties began on December 20 and, so far, eight political parties including the main opposition in parliament -- Jatiya Party -- have attended.

The five-year tenure of the current EC, led by Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, will expire on February 14.

Till yesterday, President Hamid has invited 16 political parties.

According to the EC website, there are currently 39 registered political parties. However, only nine have representation in parliament.

Islamic Andolon Bangladesh at a press conference in the party headquarters yesterday

said they are rejecting the president's dialogue as they were disappointed with the past talks, in 2012 and 2017, regarding EC formation.

"The Election Commission, formed following the 2012 dialogue, organised unilateral elections in 2014 to reflect the will of those in power, in which 153 MPs were shown to be elected unopposed," said Rezaul Karim, ameer of IAB, in the briefing.

He added that in 2017, the EC, formed after yet another such dialogue, was responsible for a controversial and unacceptable election in 2018.

"These two national elections were so controversial and rigged that they have left us extremely frustrated and embarrassed as a nation.

"What is even more infuriating is that the president, who appointed

the election commissioners, had not held the EC accountable for the scandalous elections. He did not take any action against the commission. As a result, the dialogue with him seems meaningless to us."

The IAB chief also said none of the proposals they had earlier placed before the president in dialogues over holding a free and fair election were evaluated.

"He could not go beyond the interests of the party that elected him as president... People [already] think that the president's dialogue will not be fruitful. The previous talks have failed to meet the people's expectations and there will be no exception this time.

"Therefore, we do not consider it appropriate to take part in such a meaningless dialogue contrary to the aspirations of the people."

Fruits, veggies to last longer

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chain. At the same time, one in nine still goes to bed with an empty stomach every night and a third of the world's population suffer from malnutrition," he told The Daily Star in an interview lately.

His concerns also stemmed from the indiscriminate use of highly toxic preservatives like formalin in some countries, including Bangladesh. Wax coating is also commonly used, but studies found that it affects the human body.

Maksud, who was born in Chattogram and did his PhD at Cornell University in 2016 on "Protein-based Green Resins and Nanocomposites from Waste Residues", started looking for a safe and sustainable green strategy to preserve perishable goods without altering their biological and physicochemical characteristics.

Following extensive research, he settled on working to develop a protein-based biocompatible and sustainable alternative. He came up with the idea of using eggs because about three percent of all eggs produced in the US, or 200 million, end up in landfills, he said.

In 2018, Maksud and four of his students created the egg-based coating. In their initial experiment, they coated a few avocados fully with the mixture and kept some uncoated.

After a week, the eureka moment came when they found that the non-coated avocados turned black, whereas the coated ones were still green. "That was

the very first positive sign of what was about to come, and we were really excited about the results," Maksud recalled.

He extended the experiment to other perishable food items such as bananas, papayas, and strawberries. He observed the same result: the uncoated ones ripened, while the coated fruits almost remained the same in terms of freshness.

Maksud explained that the egg-based coating significantly reduced oxygen exposure and water-loss -- the two factors responsible for ripening. The coating retained freshness, appearance, and aroma for at least one week longer than the uncoated samples.

Moreover, the coating completely dissolves upon washing for two minutes, thus dispelling worries for the vegans.

The work took one year and three months to complete, said the scientist.

In recognition of his work, Maksud was selected for the prestigious "Herschel M Rich Innovation Award" at Rice University in 2019. He was also selected as the "Sustainable Technologies Category Winner" in Create the Future Design Contest, a worldwide competition organised by Tech Briefs last year.

Maksud believes in collaboration to bring the best out of science. He took help from knowledge in the related field and noted academics like Prof Pulickel Ajayan at Rice University to develop the solution.

Currently, the team is set to test alternatives

created with soy and corn proteins so that the coating can address the allergy issue related to eggs. Moreover, the researchers are extending their work to extract the protein from various fruits and vegetable wastes that are going to be used for producing the coating for vegans.

Additionally, the researchers will also work to test a spray protein to make it easier for both commercial providers as well as consumers looking for an at-home option.

For making the product commercially, the researchers are now carrying out technological-economic analysis.

"This will bring down the cost of the coating industry, cut food waste and help recycle food," said Maksud.

The scientist plans to roll out a startup early next year.

Asked about his thoughts on Bangladesh, Maksud said, "My beloved country has given me a lot; now it is my time to give something back."

He believes that the country has a huge pool of talented students and researchers, and he is interested in providing them with a strong research platform so that they can solve different problems with innovation. He hired two Bangladeshi PhD students in his research lab last year who are doing exceptionally well, he said.

Also, he dreams of making his coating technology available in Bangladesh to save his own people from food hazards.

Search committee for EC will yield no good results

Says Akbar Ali Khan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The formation of a search committee will yield no good results as the Election Commission will be constituted with the persons picked by the government, said Dr Akbar Ali Khan, noted economist and former adviser to the caretaker government.

The president began talks with registered political parties over the formation of the new EC on December 20.

So far, eight political parties held dialogues on the reconstitution of the EC with the president.

Four political parties -- BNP, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal and Islami Andolon Bangladesh -- refused to join the dialogue.

Addressing a debate programme as chief guest, Akbar Ali Khan said the incumbent EC could protect citizen rights by holding fair polls. But that did not happen.

The five-year term of the incumbent EC will expire on February 14. The president will form a new commission that will hold the 12th parliamentary elections, scheduled to be held in 2023.

There are 39 registered political parties in Bangladesh, according to the EC, and only nine of them have representation in parliament.

Debate for Democracy held the debate on "Local Government's Role in Ensuring Good Governance" at Bangladesh Film Development Corporation

yesterday.

Debate for Democracy Chairman Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiron said the incumbent EC could not hold an acceptable election during its tenure.

"Experiences say these dialogues are only formalities. The dialogue will lose its importance as BNP, BSD, CPB and other parties refuse to participate," he said.

While talking about the local government, Akbar Ali Khan said, "Local government does not actually exist in the country. It is actually controlled by the central government."

Pointing out that the local government does not have financial abilities, he said the central government allocated money for the local government.

He said that there should be an independent commission to probe into the irregularities and allegations against the local government.

"To empower the local government, the existing act needs to be changed," he said.



Joyous start

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Moshiuzzaman, acting chairman of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), hopes all books would be delivered by January 7.

The government is set to distribute about 34.7 crore textbooks to more than 4.17 crore pre-primary, primary and secondary students for the 2022 academic year.

About 2.27 crore primary students will receive 9.98 crore textbooks and 1.89 crore secondary students 24.71 crore textbooks free of cost.

Delays in the tendering process, the issuance of work orders and the other necessary work related to the printing of pre-primary and secondary textbooks have caused delays this year, according to NCTB officials and textbooks printers.

As of December 30, about 22 secondary crore textbooks have been

printed and about 20 crore books have been sent to the upazilas, according to NCTB.

Most primary school books reached the upazila level, while 95 percent of the secondary school books have either reached the upazilas or are on the way, Moshiuzzaman said.

This year, the government could not hold the "Textbook Festival" -- the ceremony to hand out textbooks to secondary and primary students on the first day of the year -- due to the pandemic.

So the school authorities handed over the books to students of different classes in batches. Mask-clad students were seen collecting new books with enthusiasm.

Several class 9 students of Ideal School and College in Motijheel said they got new books but not the full set. They received six

books although they were supposed to get 13 in total.

The students of classes 3 and 5 of Patuakhali's Gabtani Government Primary School only got their Bangla books, according to Mahinur Begum, its headteacher. They were supposed to get six textbooks.

The district primary education officer Mollah Baktar Uddin said they received about 62 percent books of the requisite 9.12 lakh books. "All students will get a full set of books soon," he said.

Netrokona district education officer Abdul Gafur said they have received just over 50 percent of the needed 30.43 lakh copies as of Friday.

"We will not be able to give a full set of books to many students. As we are giving books in phases, students' learning will not be hampered," he added.

talks with the registered political parties to form the next EC. Tenure of the current commission expires on February 14.

The BNP termed the talks pointless and boycotted it.

Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, and Khelafat Majlish also refused to take part in the dialogue. Many people believe some more left-leaning parties may demand elections under a non-partisan interim government.

The AL insists that the EC formation will continue whether other parties participate or not.

AL leaders said they will soon ramp up organisational activities targeting the 2023 polls with central leaders touring the country.

Contacted, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the AL will focus on activities to make the party stronger.

On the other hand, BNP leaders said they will take to the streets, demanding a non-partisan interim government during the election.

BNP standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said, "We started a movement to restore the peoples' rights. Our movement will intensify in the coming days."

Prof Shantanu Majumder, who teaches political science at Dhaka University, said the BNP does not have what it takes to put pressure on the ruling party as the party is in a leadership crisis.

On the other hand, he said, the UP polls revealed that there is no discipline within the AL.