

## Govt Okays edible oil price hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A one-litre bottle of soybean oil will now cost Tk 168, as the commerce ministry yesterday agreed to the refiners' proposal of hiking the prices of edible oils.

A litre of non-bottled soybean oil will cost Tk 143 while a litre of bottled palm oil will now cost Tk 133, according to the commerce ministry decision.

The price of a five-litre bottle of soybean oil was fixed at Tk 795.

The previous prices were formally fixed on October 19. But the refiners have been selling edible oils at increased prices for a month.

"We formally approved the refiners' proposal," said AHM Shafiquzzaman, additional secretary at the commerce ministry.

The rising prices of crude soybean and palm oil in the international market have pushed the prices up in the local market, officials said.

Bangladesh needs nearly 20 lakh tonnes of edible oil and it has to import 90 percent of it, according to Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission.

## 5 'robbers' held after 'gunfight'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Rab yesterday arrested five members of a robbery gang and seized arms and ammunition following a "gunfight" in the Jangal Salimpur area of Chattogram city.

The arrestees are members of Mashiur Bahini, said Nurul Abser, assistant director of Rab-7 media wing.

After a two-hour-long "gunfight", Rab arrested the five men, while the rest managed to flee, he said, adding 11 arms and huge ammunition were recovered.

They were handed over to Sitakunda Police Station.



Suhrawardy Udyan is being readied ahead of the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela. The book fair got delayed this year amid the rising number of coronavirus cases. The authorities said the health guidelines will be followed during the event.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### COVID-19 ORIGINS PROBE

# China, WHO seek 'stronger collaboration'

Aussie PM signals reopening of borders to tourists

#### AGENCIES

China and the World Health Organization have discussed the need for "stronger collaboration" on tracing the origins of Covid-19, amid tensions over the WHO's plans to further investigate the theory that the virus could have leaked from a Wuhan lab.

This came as WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus met Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Beijing on Saturday, where they also asserted the need to aggressively pursue vaccine equity.

Tedros, who attended the Beijing Winter Olympic Games opening ceremony on Friday, is visiting China for the first time since January 2020, after the first Covid-19 cases were reported in the central city of Wuhan.

"Pleased to meet with Premier Li Keqiang," the WHO director general tweeted late on Saturday, alongside a photo of the pair with other officials in a meeting room.

"We discussed Covid-19 and the need for an aggressive effort on vaccine equity

this year to vaccinate 70 percent of all populations."

And in a follow-up tweet, he said the two leaders "discussed the need for stronger collaboration on Covid-19 virus origins, rooted in science and evidence".

A statement released by the Chinese foreign ministry after the talks said: "[T]edros said] the WHO adheres to scientific principles in tracing the origins of the virus and opposes politicising it."

The origins of Covid-19 have been a source of tension between China and some Western countries, as well as the WHO, since the Sars-CoV-2 virus behind the disease was identified in China in late 2019.

Last year, a WHO-backed team of scientists released a 300-page report after visiting Wuhan, capital of the central Chinese province of Hubei, where the first outbreak of the virus was reported.

The scientists concluded that it was extremely unlikely for the virus to have come from a lab – a theory linked to the Wuhan Institute of Virology's study of coronaviruses, including those found in bats.

Coronavirus has killed over 5.7 million people worldwide since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources yesterday.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said yesterday that the reopening of the country's borders to international tourists may not be far away, adding that the parliament will debate the matter this week.

Australia, which shut its borders in March of 2020, has been going through a staggered reopening in recent months, allowing in only its citizens and residents, skilled migrants, international students and certain seasonal workers, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday urged New Zealanders to unite in their battle against Covid-19, as the pandemic forced the country to celebrate its national Waitangi Day online.

"We all have a duty to do everything we can to protect our communities with all the tools that science and medicine have given us," Ardern said in a pre-recorded speech.

## Boy dies falling from roof

#### STAR REPORT

A five-year-old boy died after falling from the rooftop of a building in Dhaka's Uttar Jatra Bari area yesterday afternoon.

The dead is Mohammad Bappi, son of Mohammad Swapan, a pick-up van driver.

Bappi was playing with other children on the rooftop of the two-storey building, with no railings, around 2:00pm. He fell from the rooftop and sustained critical injuries, Swapan said.

Bappi was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he said.

## Woman arrested with 10k yaba pills

#### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested a woman and seized 10,000 pieces of yaba pills from her in the capital's Kurmitola area yesterday.

The 39-year-old arrestee was coming from Cox's Bazar with the yaba consignment worth Tk 30 lakh, said the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The woman pretended to be in a religious order wearing burqa, niqab, hand gloves and socks to avoid police attention, the law enforcers said.

## One answer for all questions

#### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Shahab Uddin has one answer for all the questions regarding the deaths of one tiger, one tigress, and 11 zebras at Bangabandhu Safari Park in Gazipur.

"An investigation is undergoing," it is.

After his visit to the safari park, he organised a press briefing yesterday.

Journalists there asked him why the deaths of wildlife in the enclosed greenery were hushed up, and what steps would be taken to inform people of any further deaths.

He was also asked why the 12-point recommendation, placed by a committee in 2020, was not followed.

## Prof Zahir Uddin Ahmed relieved

Our Correspondent, Sylhet

Prof Zahir Uddin Ahmed is relieved from his position of the director of students counselling and guidance at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology.

In an order signed by Registrar Mohd Ishfaqul Hussain circulated yesterday, Prof Zahir was relieved on the ground of illness.

Prof Amina Pervin of the Social Work Department is appointed as the new director, according to the order.

Prof Amina is the first woman professor to be assigned to this position.

## Search panel asks parties for names

FROM PAGE 1

The previous search committee, in 2017, had sought names from political parties for appointments to the EC. The parties submitted names, but those were never disclosed.

The president held talks with 25 political parties from December 20 to January 17 on forming the upcoming EC. Seven other parties, including the BNP, however, did not participate in the dialogue, terming it "meaningless".

Asked whether the BNP will submit any names to the search committee, party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star, "There is no reason why we should submit them. We have repeatedly said no free

and fair election is possible under the incumbent government.

"This is our stance on the issue."

The cabinet secretary said the search committee would hold talks with civil society members, media personalities and election experts.

The cabinet secretary said in its first meeting, the committee mainly discussed its work procedures. The next meeting will take place at 4:30pm on Tuesday at the same venue.

Asked whether the 10 finalised names would be disclosed, he said, "If the president does not give his approval, how will the names be disclosed."

The committee is headed by Justice Obaidul Hassan, a Supreme Court lawyer. Its other members are Justice

SM Kuddus Zaman, a High Court judge; Comptroller and Auditor General Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury; Public Service Commission Chairman Md Soharab Hossain; former election commissioner Sohul Hussain; and psychiatrist and writer Anwara Syed Haq. All of them attended the meeting yesterday.

Later, Justice Obaidul Hassan told journalists that the cabinet secretary would brief the media after every committee meeting.

Meanwhile, Sushasoner Jonno Nagorik (Sujan) said finding competent people for the EC appointments was possible if the work was done maintaining transparency and neutrality.

## The songbird falls silent

FROM PAGE 1

"Lata di died at 8:12am due to multi organ failure after over 28 days since her Covid-19 diagnosis," Dr Pratit Samdani, who was treating the singer at the hospital, told reporters.

The Indian government declared a two-day national mourning during which the national flag would fly at half-mast. The Maharashtra government announced a public holiday in the state and the West Bengal government half a day's holiday today as a mark of respect for Lata.

Lata Mangeskar had a prodigious career spanning almost eight decades during which she sang an estimated 25,000 songs in 36 Indian languages, including Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, Tamil and Kannada, of classical and other genres.

Soon after news of Lata's death broke, tributes poured in with President Ram Nath Kovind and PM Modi leading a heartbroken nation in remembering her.

"Lata ji's demise is heart-breaking for me, as it is for millions the world over. In her vast range of songs, rendering the essence and beauty of India, generations found expression of their inner-most emotions. A Bharat Ratna, Lata ji's accomplishments will remain incomparable," Kovind said.

Modi said he was "anguished beyond words".

"The kind and caring Lata Didi has left us. She leaves a void in our nation that cannot be filled. The coming generations will remember her as a stalwart of Indian culture, whose melodious voice had an unparalleled ability to mesmerise people," he said in a tweet.

"Lata Didi's songs brought out a variety of emotions. She closely witnessed the transitions of the Indian film world for decades. Beyond films, she was always passionate about India's growth. She always wanted to see a strong and developed India," he added.

Lata Mangeskar's cross-border appeal was evident when Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Pakistan's Information and Broadcasting Minister Fawad Hussain paid rich tributes.

Considered one of the greatest playback singers in Indian cinema, Lata received several film awards and Indian government's top civilian honours like Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Bharat Ratna (2001), and Dada Saheb Phalke Award, Indian cinema's highest award, and multiple national film awards.

During her career, she had earned many sobriquets – Queen of Melody, Nightingale of India and simply The Legend. Many, including some the biggest music directors and actors, equated her voice with that of Goddess Saraswati.

Among some of her most popular numbers are "Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon", which brought tears to the eyes of the then Indian PM Jawaharlal Nehru in 1963.

Born in Indore, Lata Mangeskar was the eldest child of Deenanath Mangeskar, a Gujarati musician and Gujarati homemaker Shevanti.

The untimely death of her father brought the financial burden of the family on her teenaged shoulders. Family friend Master Vinayak came to the aid of the family and Lata started singing and acting in his father's theatre company.

Since music was the be-all and end-all of Lata Mangeskar's life, it would be apt to wrap up a tribute by recalling the 1966 Hindi film "Mamta" song "Rahen na rahen hum", the lyrics of which loosely translate to "Whether or not I am here, I will remain as a fragrance in this garden". Lata's voice will continue to live long after her death.

## Govt worried about high gas prices

FROM PAGE 1

awareness on the economic use of natural gas," he said, adding that gas exploration activities are ongoing.

He spoke on issues

related to the automation process, prepaid metre and the irregularities of Titas.

A price hike for pipeline gases was proposed recently by the state-

owned Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation.

It wanted to raise the price of single burners from Tk 925 to Tk 2,000, and double burners from Tk 975 to Tk 2,100.

Berc, who is in charge of regulating gas prices, approved the proposal and formed a technical committee to evaluate it. After getting a report, they will hold a public hearing.

## Noab asks for tax reduction

FROM PAGE 12

Since this increases the income tax of newspaper employees, the Noab proposed raising the tax-free house rent to 70 percent, Azad added.

It is the only industry that bears the income tax of its employees, Anam said, adding that the issue should be addressed.

In response, NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem said the income tax is usually provided by individuals, not companies. "I will see the corporate tax issue of newspapers," he said.

At present, the newspaper industry is paying 30 percent corporate tax, according to Azad.

"It should not be more than 10 or 15 percent considering the fact that it is an ailing industry," he added.

Devan Hanif Mahmud, editor and publisher of Bangla business daily Bonik Barta, also proposed cutting the source tax and VAT on payment to international news outlets.

On behalf of the Association of Television Channel Owners, its vice-president Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury proposed waiving the duty on import of set-top boxes.

With digitalisation, the government will earn more revenue in the future. "So, an incentive should be offered now," he added.

FROM PAGE 1

Covid-19, told The Daily Star yesterday.

After Serum suspended supplies, the government started exploring alternative sources desperately.

By June, it purchased 1.5 crore doses of China's Sinopharm vaccine and then another six crore in August.

The country also got around one crore doses

of different brands from Covax in phases.

The government has so far been using Covid-19 vaccines developed by six different companies – Covishield, China's Sinopharm and Sinovac, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson's.

As supplies and the campaign gained momentum, the government reduced the age bar to 18 years, from

55, by August 20 in phases, in an effort to reopen educational institutions.

By this time, the government also implemented multiple special inoculation drives to bring more people under the vaccine coverage, especially for people living in rural areas.

Out of the regular 1,005 regular vaccination centres, the DGHS expanded the vaccination

campaign to union and ward levels. Currently, vaccines are also available in countrywide community clinics.

Meanwhile, there were some complaints of irregularities and sufferings during special drives. At least four people were injured during a scuffle at yesterday's vaccine drive near Kamalapur Railway Station.