



B1 Food prices keep rising
Food inflation up 5.6 percent in Jan



P3 Book fair buzzing
Day 2 sees large crowd



P9 See doctor for 'paranoia'
Russian diplomat tells West over Ukraine crisis



P15 New reality for Barca
Play against Napoli in Europa League first time

CHEMICAL STORES, PLASTIC FACTORIES

Long wait for relocation

SUKANTA HALDER and MOSTAFA YOUSUF

The government's move to relocate hazardous chemical warehouses and plastic factories from the congested neighbourhoods of Old Dhaka remains in limbo, 11 years after the initiative was taken in the aftermath of the Nimitoli inferno.

Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation drafted a plan on relocating the chemical warehouses elsewhere after at least 124 lives perished in the chemical-induced fire in Nimitoli of Chawkbazar on June 3, 2010.

However, the BSCIC took eight years to finally take up the project and decided that the businesses would be shifted to the city's outskirts in Keraniganj.

The project was revised after another devastating fire in Chawkbazar's Churihatta killed 71 people in February 2019. The authorities, at that time, decided the project site would be in Munshiganj.

The work progressed slowly since then.

The project, titled "BSCIC Chemical Industrial Park", was scheduled to be completed by June this year, but project officials say they need an extension of at least one year.

They mainly blame delays in selecting the relocation site and land acquisition for the slow pace of the work.

In the meantime, fear of another disaster like the ones in Nimitoli and Churihatta remains.

Seventy percent of the 310-acre project's land development work has so far been completed, Project Director Muhammad Hafizur Rahman told The Daily Star recently.

He said the structural work would start in June.

The project also involves construction of a drainage system, boundary walls, fire station, a Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) and two jetties.

Officials said the government planned to build two temporary sites in Tongi and Shyampur for the warehouses and factories, but the plan could not be executed.

In a survey in 2019, the Dhaka South City Corporation found 1,924 chemical warehouses in Old Dhaka. Ninety-eight percent of those were found to be "moderately risky", said the survey report.

Locals said the number would be much higher as owners of many other residential buildings rent spaces for warehouses taking advantage of lax monitoring by the authorities.

According to Bangladesh Environment Conservation Rules 1997, no industrial units using hazardous chemicals or goods can operate in and around a residential area.

After the Churihatta tragedy, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader had told reporters that the prime minister instructed to relocate the chemical warehouses and industries.

Around the same time, then DSSC mayor Sayeed Khokan said legal action would be taken against building owners if they were found renting spaces to chemical warehouses.

In 2017, BSCIC submitted a project proposal to the industries ministry on relocating hazardous businesses to Dakshin Brahmankritto area of Keraniganj.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

CHEMICAL WAREHOUSES

Initiative taken 2010

Project proposal 2017

Project revised 2019

To miss June 2022 deadline

Officials say it will need 1 more year



Red chillies being dried in the open near the Jamuna in Kalitala Groyen Badh area of Bogura's Sariakandi upazila. Officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension say char areas in the upazila are suitable for chilli cultivation, but local farmers are not happy because of low prices this year. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Essentials' prices go up ahead of Ramadan

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Chattogram

Like clockwork, the prices of Ramadan essentials like edible oil, chickpea, dried pea, date and sugar have started to spiral in the lead-up to the holy month despite higher imports.

But the reason for the price rises this year appears to be a new one: an upward trend in the prices of the commodities in the global market, brought on by lower production in the exporting countries and higher shipping freight, according to traders and importers.

Import data from the Chattogram Custom House supports this, too.

Between December last year and January this year, the average import cost of palm oil released through the

port stood at Tk 109,980 per tonne and that of soybean oil Tk 118,149 per tonne. A year earlier, it was Tk 69,860 and Tk 73,899 per tonne respectively.

During the period, the average import cost of sugar was Tk 51,332 per tonne, up 25.9 percent year-on-year. Similarly, the average import cost of chickpea increased 16.8 percent year-on-year to Tk 54,320 per tonne during the period.

"There is no sign of shortage in supply of Ramadan items such as chickpea, pea and sugar -- there is ample stock," said Rafikul Islam, an importer and wholesale trader at Chattogram's Khatunganj market, one of the largest commodity hubs in the country.

The import of all essential

commodities except edible oil have increased by 5 to 30 percent in the first seven months of the fiscal year, according to data from the Chattogram Custom House.

More than 9.16 lakh tonnes of edible oil including crude oil, soybean oil and refined palm oil were imported through the Chattogram port in the seven months to January, down 9.8 percent year-on-year.

Between July last year and January this year, about 1.44 lakh tonnes of chickpeas and about 3.05 lakh tonnes of dried peas were imported. A year earlier, their imported quantities were 1.33 lakh tonnes and 2.92 lakh tonnes respectively.

About 4.13 lakh tonnes of sugar were imported, up 35.4 percent year-on-year, according to Chattogram Custom House.

Some 49,350 tonnes of date, a non-negotiable Ramadan item, was brought into the country during the period, up 7.2 percent from a year earlier.

But retailers suddenly placed more orders before the wholesalers keeping Ramadan in mind, resulting in a slight

SEE PAGE 2 COL 8



BAPPI LAHIRI
1952-2022

Alvida, disco king

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The man beloved for the song "Chalte chalte mere yeh geet yaad rakhna/ Kabhi alvida na kehna" (As you walk remember this song of mine/ Don't ever say farewell) bade his final farewell, leaving the Indian subcontinent's music lovers shocked and saddened.

Bappi Lahiri or as his fans called him, Bappi Da, who set those lyrics by Amit Khanna to soulful music in the Hindi film "Chalte Chalte", passed away at the age of 69 on Tuesday night in Mumbai's

MORE ON PAGE 6

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

EC search panel cuts list down to 50

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The search committee, tasked with recommending 10 names to the president to form the next Election Commission, shortened the proposed list of 322 to some 50 people.

The committee is yet to decide whether it will publish the final 10 names to be recommended before sending them to President Abdul Hamid, sources in the committee said.

They added that whittling down the 50 names to 10 is a Herculean task as the proposed persons should be neutral, courageous and capable enough to hold a free and fair election.

The search committee held a marathon meeting yesterday to review the names proposed by political parties, professional bodies and individuals.

The committee will hold its next meeting on Saturday at 11:30am at the Supreme Court Judges Lounge to finalise the names, Md Shamsul Arefin, secretary (Coordination and Reforms) of Cabinet Division, told journalists after yesterday's meeting.

He declined to say anything further.

"We have shortened the list from 322 to some 50. We are hopeful of shortening it

further in the next meeting and submitting the names to the president by the stipulated time," a member of the search committee told The Daily Star, wishing not to be named.

The Cabinet Division, which is giving secretariat support to the committee, received 322 names and placed those before the committee to shorten the list.

After the formation of the six-member search committee on February 5, it held its first meeting on the following day and asked political parties, professional bodies and individuals to submit their nominations for chief election commissioner and four election commissioners.

The committee also held discussions with eminent citizens, media personalities and election experts in four rounds and following their recommendations, all proposed names were published on the Cabinet Division's website. But it was not disclosed who proposed each name.

The citizens also suggested that the final list to be sent to the president be made public beforehand so that people could express their views about the nominees.

According to the law, the search committee will propose two names for each post and the president will pick five names from those.

Schools can open for students of class-VI and above

Says NTAC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 yesterday said all educational institutions could be reopened now for students of class six and above as the transmission of the virus declined significantly.

The committee made the observation at a meeting with Education Minister Dipu Moni last night.

"As the overall Covid situation has improved significantly, we have opined that educational institutions can be opened now maintaining health protocols strictly and ensuring double-dose vaccine for all students," Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, president of the NTAC, told The Daily Star after the meeting.

He, however, said no recommendation was made for resumption of classes for primary students.

Meanwhile, the education ministry will hold a press conference at the secretariat at 11:00am today regarding the opening of educational institutions, said a ministry

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

You wil be Remembered...

Mr. Ekram Uddin Mollah
(Born : 30th January 1991 - Died : 17th February 2019)

We remember him in honor of the 3rd death anniversary of **Mr. Ekram Uddin Mollah**, the honorable director of the **Osman Group of Industries**. We pray for the forgiveness of the departed soul in the court of Almighty Allah and pray by the grace of Allah will dwell in Paradise.

Board of directors of Osman Group of Industries,
A multitude of entrepreneurs, executives and employees

Osman Group of Industries