

## Hoarding of essentials, unacceptable Says HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday said monopoly and hoarding of daily essentials like soybean oil for profits is not acceptable.

Buying more soybean oil than needed can turn out to be a cause of the price hike, the HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice SM Maniruzzaman said while hearing a writ petition that sought a directive on the government to set up a monitoring cell to control the price of soybean oil.

The bench said the issue of the prices of other daily essentials should also be included in the petition.

The court will hold a further hearing on the matter today.

On March 6, Supreme Court lawyers Monir Hossain, Syed Mohidul Kabir and Mohammad Ullah submitted the petition as a public interest litigation based on a report published in The Daily Star on March 3 on soybean oil hoarding and price hike.

Approach in war coverage biased

Says Russian envoy on some Bangladesh media

UNB, Dhaka

Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh Alexander V. Mantytskiy has slammed a section of Bangladeshi media for what he said "biased approach" in their coverage of the situation in Ukraine and Russia.

He described it as a "deliberate efforts" to undermine Dhaka-Moscow relations.

"I consider the biased approach of certain Bangladeshi media towards the situation in Ukraine and Russia's actions there as a result of deliberate efforts by those forces that have always sought to undermine mutually beneficial cooperation between the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



Many farmers in Hatchola area of Sylhet have given into the temptation of selling the topsoil from their lands to brick kilns and real estate developers. As a result, the lands lose their fertility and cause poor crops.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## INDIAN STATE POLLS The true scale of Congress's loss

### INTERNATIONAL DESK

The Congress's disastrous showing in the assembly elections to five states has added to a series of poor results, raising serious questions about the road ahead for India's oldest party.

With the results out, Congress, which has ruled most of the time since India's independence, now directly rules only two states -- Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh -- out of 28 states. It also has state governments supported by it in Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Tamilnadu.

On the other hand BJP rules in 12 states -- Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Tripura. In addition to those it is coalition partner in 6 states -- Bihar, Puducherry, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

In the worst show since independence, the congress managed to win only 52 seats in the last general election in 2019. Leadership crisis, failing to get the vibe of present day India, rise of populism, Narendra Modi's bigger than party personality -- reasons are many for the poor show of Congress. And ahead of the coming 2024 election, the picture doesn't look bright either. BJP has managed to

win public support even after a pandemic that raised more questions in people's mind than answers.

However, the latest state polls show the regional parties, not BJP, have won the biggest vote shares lost by Congress. That might not be a good news for BJP, but Congress has nothing to cheer on.

In the latest polls, the Congress not only lost Punjab but was decimated in all states, reported NDTV in a special story yesterday.

In Punjab, one of the last big states that it ruled, the Congress witnessed a huge 15 per cent swing against it. The Aam Aadmi Party, which swept the elections, emerged as the biggest gainer in votes with a huge 19 percent swing in its favour. The BJP had a much smaller swing of +2 percent.

The AAP primarily benefited (19%) from the combined enormous 21 percent drop in votes of the Congress, Akali Dal and smaller parties, leading to a landslide for the party.

The assembly elections in Goa also proved to be disastrous for the Congress; it registered a huge 6 percent swing against it. The newly-formed RGP saw a 10 percent rise in votes, leaving the AAP, Trinamool Congress, and Maharashtra Congress (MGP) behind.

In Uttar Pradesh, India's most politically vital state, the Congress failed to make any

impact despite a high-voltage campaign led by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

It saw a swing of 4 percent against it; Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) saw the biggest drop in votes with a 9 percent swing against it. The votes of the non-Samajwadi Party opposition -- the Congress, BSP and others -- went down by 16 percent. While 3 percent of those votes went to the BJP, 13 percent went to the Samajwadi Party.

Uttarakhand -- the hill state where the Congress had hoped for a comeback, or at least, a close fight -- was the only state where the Congress saw a rise in its vote share.

The party emerged as the biggest gainer in votes with a substantial 5 percent swing in its favour -- but since only 2 percent of this came from BJP, the Congress could not overtake the BJP in votes -- and remained the second largest party.

The election in Manipur also turned out to be catastrophic for India's oldest party as it lost 19 percent of its vote share, reducing the party to less than half its size in 2017.

The huge swing against the Congress did not go to the BJP -- instead it went to other parties opposing the BJP: 12 percent to the NPP and 11 percent to the JDU -- making JDU the new second (joint) largest party in the state.

## 100 acres

FROM PAGE 1

On the Dhaka city side, the government built a walkway along the river bank.

"So, we did not see any new grabbers on this side," Azad said.

But there have been fresh encroachments on the Keraniganj side to create commercial plots, he added.

"There are 90 shipyards along the Buriganga. All of them were set up filling up the river," he said, adding that much of the grabbing took place from 2015 to 2020.

Though the BIWTA recovered some of the land, most of the freed land remained filled up, the map shows.

Contacted, Gulzer Ali, joint director of BIWTA, said they have made the Buriganga "almost free of encroachment".

He admitted that they could not evict all the grabbers such as those who built mosques to occupy the river, but said any land inside the boundary pillars are river land and will be

claimed as such.

"We are making a list of the remaining encroachers. All of them will be evicted," he said.

Environment lawyer Syeda Rizwana Hasan said the authorities so far conducted most of the eviction centring the Buriganga.

"Still, they could not make it fully free of encroachment," she said.

In fact, the government could not create an example of an encroachment-free river, she said.

In 2009, the High Court directed the government to demarcate the original territory of the four Dhaka rivers -- Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalakhya -- to restore the river areas to their original state and protect them from pollution and grabbing.

The HC in its order had also directed the government to remove earth used to fill up the rivers and realise the cost from the grabbers. But the BIWTA is yet to do it.

World University of Bangladesh VC Abdul Mannan Choudhury proposed a referendum on the issue of the caretaker government.

Writer and academic Prof Muhammed Zafar Iqbal proposed that there should be further discussions with science and technology teachers to make the EVM a foolproof system.

"There should be assurances to all minorities that their safety would be ensured, whatever happens

November 2023.

Ayub Hossain, spokesperson for the DGDA, said the drug administration formed two committees to investigate the matter, and one of them has already visited the factory in Tongi.

The other committee, headed by DGDA Director Akib Hossain, talked to the family members of the children and recorded their statements, reports our correspondent in Brahmanbaria.

Drug administration officials in the district said they found eight bottles of the syrup at Maa Pharmacy and sent them to the DGDA headquarters for lab testing.

"We hope to get the results by tomorrow [today]. Once we have the report, we will decide whether the

syrup will be withdrawn from the market or not," Ayub Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said legal actions would be taken if anyone is found guilty over the deaths of the two children.

"The Directorate General of Drug Administration is doing whatever is necessary. Our Health Services Division is also working on the matter. Steps will be taken and you'll see that," he told journalists following an event in Dhaka.

Contacted, Rabbur Reza, chief operating officer (COO) of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said the company produces around 1.5-2 lakh bottles of Napa syrup every day.

"Around 100 crore

bottles of the syrup have been produced in the last 40 years and not a single case of adverse effects was reported," he said.

He also said they had no connections with the drug store in Brahmanbaria and that the store had "no licence".

"We want to know how such a store continued its operations. We are cooperating with the DGDA authorities for the investigation."

Replying to a question, he said 83,000 bottles of syrup were produced under the batch in question. "After releasing every batch in the market, we keep their samples with us. We tested the samples and found everything was perfect," he also said.

Contacted, Rabbur Reza, chief operating officer (COO) of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said the company produces around 1.5-2 lakh bottles of Napa syrup every day.

"Around 100 crore

Khan, meanwhile, proposed staggered national polls so that the EC could better manage elections.

DU Prof Sadeka Halim said the EC's call for political consensus is a promising one.

There is an opposition political party that has had a negative reaction to the current EC as well as elections, and they should be offered more space, she said.

"People lack trust in the EC and have developed an apathy toward casting votes. There should be strong awareness programmes to bring a change in this matter," Independent University, Bangladesh Pro VC Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan said.

"Political will and consensus among all political parties are needed. It is difficult for us to perform our duties if they do not create any conducive situation for us and if they remain in their adversarial stance," he said.

need for political consensus and dialogue between all political parties.

Southeast University VC AFM Mafizul Islam, DU Professors Lailul Faruq, Yasmin, Akhtar Hossain and Bangladesh University of Professionals Pro VC Prof M Abul Kasem Majumder also talked at the programme.

CEC Awal said they got recommendations and would take necessary steps regarding the matters after reviewing.

"Political will and consensus among all political parties are needed. It is difficult for us to perform our duties if they do not create any conducive situation for us and if they remain in their adversarial stance," he said.

He also emphasised the

## No plan for military facility on foreign land

Chinese ambassador refutes media report on missile facility installation here

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

In the wake of media reports that China is setting up a missile maintenance facility in Bangladesh, Chinese Ambassador Li Jiming yesterday denied any such plan.

"China would not set up any military facility for its use in any foreign country, including in Bangladesh," Li said during a dialogue with journalists at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in the capital.

On March 11, the Japanese newspaper Nikkei Asia reported that China was preparing to set up a maintenance facility in Bangladesh for surface-to-air missile systems it supplied in 2011.

The deal on the maintenance hub has not been officially announced either by Beijing or Dhaka, but a senior Bangladeshi diplomat confirmed to Nikkei Asia that the two countries have reached an agreement on the facility.

Beijing and Dhaka want to keep this development under wraps currently as China is under increasing scrutiny from the West -- particularly the US -- for upsetting the security balance in Asia with its territorial aggression," Nikkei Asia quoted the diplomat as saying.

The US has an Indo-Pacific Strategy supported by its allies including Japan, Australia and India, while Australia, US and UK have signed a security

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

### BIMAN CBA LEADERS

## HC orders ACC to probe graft allegations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the Anti-Corruption Commission to properly inquire into graft allegations against 17 Collective Bargaining Agency (CBA) leaders of Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

After hearing a 2014 writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), the HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman also asked ACC to complete the inquiry in eight months.

Petitioner's lawyer Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star that he had sought a fresh hearing as there had been no sufficient action on the matter.

He said the ACC in January 2014 asked them to appear before it for questioning about the allegations, but they refused, prompting HRPB to file the petition seeking necessary order on ACC to question the CBA leaders.

Lawyer Fawzia Akter appeared for ACC while Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik represented the state during yesterday's hearing.

## Greek, Turkish leaders seek common ground over Ukraine war

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held talks in Istanbul yesterday, seeking a rapprochement between the neighbouring Nato members to the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The meeting came as Ankara seeks to shore up its credentials as a regional power player by mediating in the conflict.

## School ground

FROM PAGE 12

Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital, said such activities would surely impose the students to health risks.

It should not be allowed to process tobacco leaves in a certain radius of schools or hospitals, he added.

Meanwhile, talking to The Daily Star, farmers said they have been doing the same for years and no one ever asked them to stop.

Another farmer in the locality Ashraful Islam, 48, said at least 20 to 25 farmers get benefit from the playgrounds.

Local farmer Minajul Haque, 55, said they were using the playgrounds as there was no other open field in the village.

"Our children also study here. We understand the students face a little problem," he said.

The UN estimates that more than 2.6 million people have fled Ukraine since the invasion, most of them to Poland, Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II.

Meanwhile, efforts continue to get help to the strategic southern port

## 'Haha' react on FB

FROM PAGE 1  
Health Complex where doctors declared Nayem and Faruk dead. Robin succumbed to his injuries on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, locals said.

Kapasia police said a case was filed against 10 named and 3 or 4 unnamed individuals. Of them, six have already been arrested.

Health Complex where doctors declared Nayem and Faruk dead. Robin succumbed to his injuries on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, locals said. Writer and academic Prof Muhammed Zafar Iqbal proposed that there should be further discussions with science and technology teachers to make the EVM a foolproof system. "There should be assurances to all minorities that their safety would be ensured, whatever happens

in the election," he said. Zafar and DU professor Anwar Hossain both proposed making postal ballot system more effective. Anwar proposed that law enforcement agencies be fully brought under the Election Commission well ahead of an election, adding that the EVM system should be made more transparent. DU professor Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah proposed that there should be compensation schemes for families of those who die in violence centring the polls. Jhangirnagar University Prof AL Masud Hasanuzzaman said the EC should take measures against use of money and muscle in election. DU prof Borhan Uddin said.

He also emphasised the

city of Mariupol, which aid agencies say is facing a humanitarian catastrophe.

Ukraine says more than 2,100 civilians have died in a near two week siege, which has left the