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RAMADAN PRICE SHOCK

## Family cards may ease it a little

Govt to issue those to 88 lakh poor families

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and ASHUTOSH SARKAR

As the prices of daily essentials continue to soar, the government has decided to sell several essential goods at subsidised prices to 88 lakh selected low-income families outside the capital from Sunday.

The beneficiaries will be given "Family Cards", which will make them eligible to buy the commodities from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) once before Ramadan. They will also be able to avail themselves of the benefit once in the middle of the Arabic month, which starts in the first week of April.

The TCB dealers will sell the essentials to the beneficiaries in metropolitan areas, districts, upazilas and unions, said officials.

Officials have already started preparing the cards with the help of deputy commissioners' offices across the country, they added.

Twelve lakh families in the capital are now getting the benefits of the open market sales (OMS) programme of TCB without any cards, said Humayun Kabir, senior executive and press relationship officer at the corporation.

However, there are concerns as to whether the actual low-income families would benefit from the initiative, especially since the government in 2020 faced difficulties in distributing a one-off cash incentive under a stimulus package to 50 lakh families.

Under the Tk 1,258 crore package, each of 50 lakh families were supposed to get a cash support of Tk 2,500. But the initiative was suspended before reaching 35 lakh families amid allegations that the names of well-off people were on the list of beneficiaries. Such initiatives also failed to reach the desired goals as officials could not prepare the lists of beneficiaries.

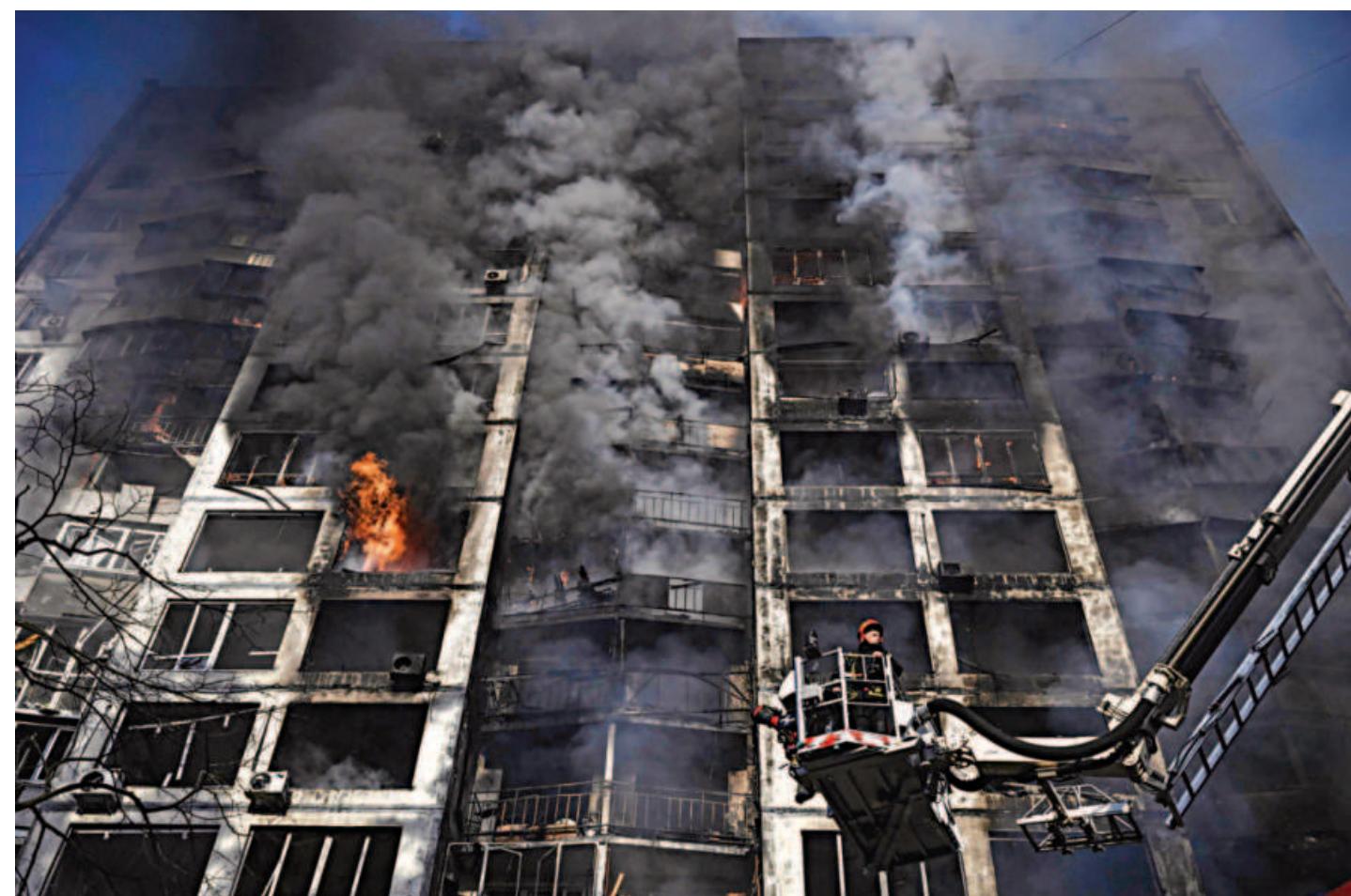
Under the new arrangements, two litre of soybean oil and two kg each of lentils and sugar will be sold in the first phase and two kg of chickpeas will be added to the three items in the second.

Soybean oil will be sold at Tk 110 a litre, lentils at Tk 65 a kg, sugar at Tk 55 a kg, and chickpeas at Tk 50 a kg.

Dates will only be sold in the capital for Tk 80 a kg.

Contacted, Deputy Commissioner Asif Ahsan of Rangpur said officials started preparing the list of beneficiaries in late February and have already printed

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Firefighters trying to extinguish a fire in an apartment building in Kyiv yesterday after strikes on residential areas killed at least four people as Russian troops intensified their attacks on the capital, Ukraine emergency services said.

PHOTO: AFP

## SHOW OF SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

## European PMs take train to Kyiv

Offensive appears to stall; Russia sanctions Biden, several top US officials; missiles hit capital ahead of resumption of peace talks

AGENCIES

Three European prime ministers rode a train for Kyiv yesterday, the first visit by foreign leaders to the Ukrainian capital since Russia launched its invasion, and a striking symbol of Ukraine's success so far in fending off Russia's assault.

"It is our duty to be where history is forged. Because it's not about us, but about the future of our children who deserve to live in a world free from tyranny," said Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who set off across the border with Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala and Janez Jansa of Slovenia.

Top aide to Morawiecki, Michał Dworczyk, told reporters the delegation had

crossed the Polish-Ukraine border by train after 8:00 am.

They arrived in a city still under bombardment, where around half of the 3.4 million population has fled and many are spending nights sheltering in underground stations.

At least four people were killed after two powerful explosions rocked the capital before dawn yesterday and tracer fire lit up the night sky. Kyiv's mayor announced a 35-hour curfew that started at 8:00 pm.

The airport in the eastern city of Dnipro also came under heavy bombardment overnight.

Worst-hi is the southeastern port of Mariupol. People trapped in Mariupol by Russian shelling were "essentially being

suffocated in this city now with no aid," Ewan Watson, spokesperson of the ICRC, told a UN briefing in Geneva.

Convoys of private cars were not sufficient to evacuate people from Mariupol and buses needed to be let through, Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said, as some 2,000 civilian cars have been able to drive out of the besieged city yesterday amid bombardment.

But despite shelling that has reduced some Ukrainian cities to rubble, Europe's biggest invasion force since World War Two has been halted at the gates of Kyiv.

Major road and train routes from the capital are still open and Russia has failed

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EDIBLE OIL PRICES  
Consumers yet to reap benefits of VAT cut

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Even though the government on Monday partially removing VAT on edible oils, consumers have yet to get any relief as traders have not reduced prices as of yesterday.

The government waived the 15 percent VAT at production and five percent at retail to reduce prices of soybean and palm oils amid an outcry over the spiralling cost of essentials.

The finance ministry yesterday said VAT on imports of refined and crude edible oils, mainly soybean, would be cut to five percent from 15 percent. The National Board of Revenue will issue a notification in this regard, according to Gazi Towhidul Islam, public relations officer of the finance ministry.

But the benefit of such measures was not evident at the capital's Karwan Bazar kitchen market yesterday.

"I am waiting for the price to drop," said Monu Mia, who bought a one-litre bottle of soybean oil. Usually he buys a five-litre container.

A five-litre container was selling for Tk 795. There was no loose soybean oil available there.

Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), which compiles market prices data in Dhaka city, showed that loose soybean oil was unavailable in the market.

It said the prices of one-litre bottled soybean oil remained unchanged from the previous day while 5-litre containers were also selling at Tk 780-Tk 800 yesterday, like the day before. The government

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PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

A view of the Sutki river in Bhatipara of Habiganj's Baniachong upazila. People living along the water body cannot fish in it or use its banks as a family claims that it is a "water reservoir" owned by them. The family has put up a fence across the river to stop fish from getting out. Land documents show it is a river. The photo was taken recently.

## The Sutki in shackles

### River remains in the grip of a family for centuries

MINTU DESHWARA

The river is called Sutki. It flows at least 20 kilometres after originating from the Kushiara river in Lohajuri area under Baniachong upazila in Habiganj before falling into the Ratna river at Pratabpur of the same upazila.

Recent land documents seen by The Daily Star clearly earmark the water body as a river. And yet a single family has long been claiming its ownership as a private property, depriving thousands of inhabitants living along its two banks to fish in it or use its banks.

To deter other villagers from

fish, the family, who identify themselves as descendants of a Mughal-era ruler, even fenced up parts of the banks. They also placed bamboo and thorny shrubs at different points so that no one could use fishing nets there.

The saga around this disputed water body goes centuries back and has a history of half a century's court battle.

One King Govinda Singha during the Mughal era established his rule in this area and built a palace. He later converted to Islam, a common trend at the time, and took the name Habib Khan, according to local historian Sheikh

Fazley Elahi. The palace, now partly renovated and located in No. 2 Haveli village in Baniachong Uttar Purba union, is inhabited by the family of Ahmed Zulkar Nayen, who claims to be a descendant of Govinda Singha's dynasty.

The family refuses to call Sutki a river. Instead, they say it is a "water reservoir" that their ancestors dug up centuries ago for irrigation.

In independent Bangladesh, Zulkar's uncle Dewan Yahiya Raja filed a case with a Sylhet court in 1972, claiming ownership of the river land on the same ground.

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