



And we know that when cases increase, so do deaths. ... We call on all countries to remain vigilant. The pandemic is not over.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus as world sees 8 percent rise in Covid-19 cases in a week

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

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'Tear down' the new wall in Europe

Ukraine president pleads as shelling kills dozens; Biden slams 'war criminal' Putin

AGENCIES

Ukraine's leader yesterday charged Moscow with building a new Cold War wall across Europe "between freedom and bondage", as his government said Russian shelling had killed 21 civilians near one city.

Three weeks in to their devastating invasion, Russian forces also stood accused of bombing a theatre sheltering many civilians and marked with the word "children".

Kyiv emerged from a 35-hour curfew to new destruction, as Russian troops try to encircle the Ukrainian capital as part of their slow-moving offensive.

Beneath a Kyiv apartment block damaged by a downed rocket, AFP journalists saw a distraught man crouched over a body draped in a bloodstained cloth, after the latest in a series of early-morning attacks.

The 21 were killed when overnight artillery fire pounded a school and a cultural centre in the town of Merefah outside the hard-hit eastern city of Kharkiv, regional prosecutors said.

In besieged Mariupol to the south, searchers were combing through the smoking rubble of the Drama Theatre where more than 1,000 civilians had been sheltering in a basement bomb shelter, and Ukrainian officials said that Russian shelling was continuing.

Kremlin denied it had targeted the theatre, and also rejected an order by the top UN court to halt its Ukraine invasion.

President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday addressed the German parliament a day after a speech to the US Congress, when he secured \$1 billion in new US military aid, including Stinger anti-aircraft missiles used against Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

Zelensky reached back to that Cold War era as he drew on a 1987 speech in Berlin by US president Ronald Reagan: "Dear Mr Scholz, tear down this Wall," he implored German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

"It's not a Berlin Wall -- it is a Wall in SEE PAGE 2 COL 8 MORE ON PAGE 12

HOLIDAY NOTICE

The Daily Star offices will remain closed today on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. Therefore, the newspaper will not be published tomorrow.



"I returned home empty-handed for the last two days. I am here again today to get some essentials. We were already struggling with daily expenses, but this time the prices have just gone out of reach."

Nasima, a resident of Kazipara

FOOD SAFETY SCHEMES

- Vulnerable Group Feeding
- Vulnerable Group Development
- Open Market Sales
- Gratuitous Relief
- Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest
- Food for Work/Money for Work
- Test Relief
- Food friendly Programme

OMS

The food ministry runs 1,948 OMS centres across the country -- of which 137 are in Dhaka city -- where lentil, edible oil, onion and sugar are currently sold at a subsidised price.

RATION CARD

First introduced in the sub-continent during the British rule centring on the famine in 1943; abolished at the beginning of the 1990s.

PRICES IN DHAKA KITCHEN MARKETS

ITEMS	LOWEST TO HIGHEST March 18, 2019	LOWEST TO HIGHEST March 16, 2022
Rice (coarse)	Tk 38-42	Tk 45-48
Soybean (1 litre bottle)	Tk 100-106	Tk 165-170
Lentil (small)	Tk 85-95	Tk 115-130
Flour	Tk 27-30	Tk 35-40
Sugar	Tk 50-55	Tk 78-80

SOURCE: TCB



SUBSIDISED ESSENTIALS

OMS can't keep up with queues

HELEMUL ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Nasima Begum, in the advanced stages of pregnancy and carrying her two-year-old, was waiting for over two hours at the designated point in the capital's Kazipara Bus Stand for a TCB truck to arrive with daily essentials.

The 25-year-old defied her doctor's advice to avoid strenuous activities in her desperation to buy essentials at lower prices from a mobile shop of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB). But the truck was nowhere in sight.

"I returned home empty-handed for the last two days. I am here again today to get some essentials. We were already struggling with daily expenses, but this time the prices have just gone out of reach," said Nasima, whose husband, a construction worker, is the breadwinner in the family.

Like Nasima, several thousand low-income people and middle-class residents in Dhaka have been scrambling to buy essentials at different open market sales (OMS) points of the TCB.

OMS is a government price support programme for the low-income group to cushion the blow of rising food prices. The food ministry is running 1,948 OMS centres across the country -- of which 177 are in Dhaka city -- where lentil, edible oils, onion and sugar are sold at subsidised prices.

However, the queues in front of the TCB trucks are getting longer than ever with many returning home empty-handed as the supply of goods remains inadequate.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of people said their suffering was due to a flawed system.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Ration cards a pressing need now

HELEMUL ALAM

The demand for the reintroduction of ration cards has been growing in recent times with the continued rise in the price of essentials.

The High Court on Tuesday, in response to a writ petition, ordered the government authorities concerned to distribute daily essentials -- edible oil, onion, rice, wheat, sugar, and lentils -- among the people through ration cards under the open market sale (OMS) policy.

But the OMS has proved to be too scanty to provide the support to the poor who often return empty-handed from long queues before OMS trucks. This has prompted many,

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EDIBLE OIL PRICES

Hike on despite the tax cuts

AKANDA MUHAMMAD JAHID and MUHAMMAD SUMAN

The prices of edible oil have gone up at the wholesale level yesterday despite the 30 percent tax exemption at the import and production stages.

Amid public outcry over the spiral in the prices of edible oil, the government on March 14 waived 15 percent value-added tax at the production stage and 5 percent at the retail level. Two days later, another 10 percent VAT was cut at the import stage.

And yet, the wholesale prices of soybean and palm oils increased by Tk 200-Tk 280 per maund in a day to Tk 6,200 and Tk 5,250 respectively at Khatunganj in Chattogram.

Retailers at several kitchen markets in Dhaka were seen selling a litre of bottled soybean oil for Tk 168 while the five-litre bottle was selling at Tk 795. Loose soybean oil was not available at most of the shops in the capital yesterday.

However, data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) showed that the price of bottled soybean oil has remained unchanged in Dhaka since March 14.

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AKS

100% REFINED STEEL

