



P5 Tangail hillocks
Grabbers continue feasting on them



P6 'Fame fades'
Actor Sohel Mondal tells The Daily Star



P7 Journo funeral
Mourners attacked, outcry mounts



B1 Forex crisis
Experts suggest BB weaken taka

INDIAN EXPORT BAN Pressure now brews over wheat

Prices shoot up by 25pc

STAR REPORT

After edible oil, wheat, the second-most consumed cereal in Bangladesh, is posing to be the next pressure point for food inflation, which in March leapt to its highest level since October 2020.

Yesterday, a day after India announced a shock ban on wheat exports, the prices of the grain shot up here, in a testament to the interconnected nature and fragility of agricultural systems that have been exposed by a perfect storm of war and weather.

At Chattogram's Khatunganj, the country's largest wholesale market, the price of wheat has increased by as much as 25 percent. The Indian wheat is selling for Tk 1,500 a maund (about 37.5 kilograms), up from Tk 1,200 on Thursday.

The Canadian wheat's price too increased: by about Tk 250 to Tk 2,050-Tk 2,080.

It was the same case similar all over the country, including the capital, according to traders.

Bangladesh, which depends on imports to meet 86 percent of its annual requirement of 85 lakh tonnes of wheat, started procuring the cereal in significant volumes from India in 2020.

And in the financial year that ended on March 31, Bangladesh was the largest importer of wheat from India, accounting for nearly half of the neighbouring country's record seven million tonnes of wheat exports, according to estimates by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade under the Commerce Ministry.

"We have kept the window open for [our] neighbours. We have also kept the window open for a large number of vulnerable countries if their governments do make such requests. The order is to divert trade to the needy, poor and the vulnerable countries,"

Indian Commerce Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam

WHY A GLOBAL WHEAT SUPPLY SHORTAGE IS EXPECTED

- Russia-Ukraine war
- Poor harvest in China
- Inventories tight in the US, Canada
- Argentina restricted exports
- Australia shipping at full capacity
- Drought and heat in India

The Indian export restriction comes after searing heat in March and April, where temperatures of up to 45C hit large parts of India's wheat belt, have heightened concerns about the country's domestic supply.

Subsequently, the wheat price in India, where inflation has hit an eight-year high, has risen to record levels, going well above the government's minimum support price of Rs 20,150 in some spot markets.

However, Indian Commerce Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam yesterday calmed the fears of its neighbours.

"We have kept the window open for [our] neighbours. We have also kept the window open for a large number of vulnerable countries if their governments do make such requests. The order is to divert trade to the needy, poor and the vulnerable countries," he told the media, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

He, however, did not name any country.

Indian officials said while the ban on wheat export may hit private traders, it is unlikely to affect government-to-government deals. For

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Dinghies with commuters negotiate a water hyacinth-covered stretch of the Buriganga at the capital's Swarighat. The invasive plant becomes ubiquitous during this time of the year.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

PK Halder arrested in West Bengal

The man who 'embezzled Tk 2,500cr' was posing as an Indian, defrauding banks there too; Momen says he will be brought back to Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

Prashanta Kumar Halder, who has been on the run from facing charges of money laundering since 2019, was arrested along with an associate in West Bengal yesterday.

The former managing director of NRB Global Bank, better known as PK Halder, was arrested by the Indian Directorate of Enforcement, which investigates money laundering and violations of foreign exchange laws, said officials at Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata.

The arrests were made at the request of Bangladesh, our correspondent in New Delhi reports, quoting Bangladeshi officials.

In cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), PK Halder is accused of swindling multiple non-banking financial institutions out of more than Tk 2,500 crore. The ACC will take measures to bring him

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back to the country as soon as possible, said its chairman Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah.

"We have an extradition agreement with India... We will bring him back," he told The Daily Star.

Contacted yesterday evening, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Journalists decry DSA

Worried over laws in the offing, shrinking space for free speech

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalism in Bangladesh is under siege on the digital front, beginning from surveillance to draconian laws.

This has led to a culture of fear and self-censorship, curtailing freedom of expression and silencing independent media.

Editors and publishers of newspapers across the country convened yesterday to present this statement at a discussion to mark the World Press Freedom Day. The programme was organised by the Editors' Council at the CIRDP auditorium.

At a session titled "Press Under Digital Siege", all speakers condemned the expansive list of laws that can be used to silence journalists.

These include the defamation law in the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Information Communication Technology Act, the Digital Security Act, the draft Data Protection Act, the draft BTRC regulations for social media and the draft OTT platform regulations.

Mahfuz Anam, president of the Editors' Council, asked, "What is it that journalists do that our hands and feet must be bound with so many laws?"

There are 20 provisions in the DSA that prosecute offences related to freedom of expression and 14 of those are non-bailable, he said.

Even the most impartial, best-intentioned judicial system cannot prevent the incarceration of a journalist being prosecuted under the DSA, since the offences are non-bailable, he added.

"What offences do journalists commit that they do not even deserve bail?"

Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age, said the press operates within a culture of "extralegal" oppression - a kind that abuses repressive legislation.

"Whenever a culture of fear is established, it is always because of the deficit of a free press. Freedom of expression is a political right."

Kader Gani Chowdhury, the president of the BNP-faction of the Dhaka Union of Journalists, said, "Previously, it was not possible to write against influential people on mass media. Now it is not possible to write against them on [even] social media."

He added, "Laws should be made for the public's benefit, whereas they have [instead] been made to violate the rights of the people. This is meant to threaten them into silence. Leaders should be open to criticism."

Nazrul Islam Mithu, president of Dhaka Reporters' Unity, said, "The defamation law in the country is a remnant of our colonial legacy. But even the British have turned defamation into a civil offence - it is no longer a criminal offence [there]."

Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, former president of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, said the Official Secrets Act is another colonial act that gets pulled up on a whim to persecute journalists.

"Globally, trust in the media is eroding. New laws that repress independent media will intensify this."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

Tigers face new-look SL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will be desperate to start the process of transforming themselves into a proper Test unit when they face Sri Lanka in the first match of the two-Test series at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram today.

The match is scheduled to begin at 10am [BST].

Since their historic win against New Zealand at Mount Maunganui earlier this year, Mominul Haque and his troops have been unable to live up to expectations. They were outplayed in the two-match Test series in South Africa in April.

The hosts will be without two of their crucial cogs of the bowling department - pacer Taskin Ahmed and Mehedi Hasan Miraz - due to injuries. However, Bangladesh will be boosted by the presence of Shakib Al Hasan, who was supposed to miss the Test due to Covid-19, as

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7



Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo (C) and team director Khaled Mahmud (R) laugh with ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (L) at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday, ahead of the first Test against Sri Lanka beginning today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED