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# 1cr families to get essentials from June 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to provide essentials at a subsidised rate to one crore families through "family cards" from June 1, aiming to ease the pressure they are facing with prices hikes.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi yesterday announced the decision at a press briefing after the second meeting of a task force at the ministry's conference room.

The force was formed recently to keep rising commodity prices in check.

The government earlier issued the card to 88 lakh low-income families across the country. The remaining 12 lakh families will be getting their cards withing the June 1, the ministry said.

"[Around] Three crore people are below the poverty line. As we are giving essential commodities to one crore families, it means at least five crore individuals will reap its benefits."

The essentials that will be delivered through the family cards are edible oil, lentil and sugar.

Munshi said essentials, however, will not be sold at the subsidised rate at TCB trucks or open market sales points.

Responding to a question, he said they are going to develop a system in which the TCB can sell products at subsidised rates directly in order to reduce subsidy.

Asked about edible oil supplies, he said, "After a

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Bangladesh batsman Mushfiqur Rahim pumps his fist after scoring a century against Sri Lanka on the fourth day of the first Test at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Mushfiqur's ton gives Tigers edge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mushfiqur Rahim's eighth Test century was the highlight of fourth day's play while Taijul Islam's late all-round effort gave Bangladesh a ray of hope of winning the first Test against Sri Lanka in what is expected to be an exciting final day at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram today.

Resuming the second innings, Sri Lanka faced a double blow at the fag end of the day, losing Oshada Fernando through a brilliant Taijul throw. The left-arm spinner then removed nightwatchman Lasith Embuldeniya with a magnificent turning delivery that came into the left-hander and hit the timber.

The visitors will resume the final day on 39 for two, still trailing by 29 runs.

It was, however, Mushfiqur who stole the show with his sheer determination and

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

## Finland, Sweden apply to join Nato

### Erdogan urges allies to 'respect' Ankara's concerns

AGENCIES

Finland and Sweden yesterday submitted a joint application to join Nato as Russia's invasion of Ukraine forces a dramatic reappraisal of security in Europe.

The reversal of the Nordic countries' longstanding policy of non-alignment came as Ukraine opened the first war crimes trial of a Russian soldier since the invasion began.

Vadim Shishimarin, 21, from Irkutsk in Siberia, pleaded guilty to killing an unarmed 62-year-old man in Ukraine's Sumy region on February 28 - four days into the invasion.

"By this first trial, we are sending a clear signal that every perpetrator, every person who ordered or assisted in the commission of crimes in Ukraine shall not avoid responsibility," prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said.

Russia's government has no information on Shishimarin, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, adding that many such cases reported by Ukraine are "simply fake or staged".

The Kremlin also intensified a tit-for-tat round of diplomatic expulsions against European countries, ordering out dozens of personnel from France, Italy and Spain.

At Nato headquarters in Brussels, alliance chief Jens

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Govt faces higher import costs for fertiliser

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and DWAIPIYAN BARUA

The country will have to import fertiliser at higher prices from the international market in the wake of the global price hike due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

The government will import diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser at \$21 higher than the per-tonne price in the previous procurement.

The cabinet committee on purchase in a meeting yesterday approved import of 40,000 tonnes of DAP fertiliser at a cost of Tk 407.41 crore from OCP SA, a fertiliser producer in Morocco.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal chaired the meeting.

While addressing a virtual press briefing after the meeting, Zillur Rahman Chowdhury, additional secretary of the Cabinet Division, said the DAP fertiliser would cost \$1,177.50 per tonne this time. The price in the previous procurement was \$1156

per tonne.

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzak in a meeting on Saturday also said in the 2021-22 fiscal year, the government had to give Tk 30,000 crore as fertiliser subsidy for farmers due to the global price hike.

The average price of DAP fertiliser rose to a record high of \$1,014 per tonne in the global market in March this year, up from \$874 per tonne immediately before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February.

The average price was \$616 per tonne a year ago.

Price of urea also rose to \$976 per tonne in March, against \$885 in February.

At the start of the fiscal year, the finance ministry allocated Tk 9,500 crore as subsidy for agriculture, but in the revised budget it was fixed at Tk 15,000 crore.

However, the government has settled procurement of liquified natural gas (LNG) from the spot market at a slightly cheaper rate.

The purchase committee yesterday approved import of 33.60 lakh MMBTU (Metric Million British Thermal Unit) of LNG at a cost of Tk 909.14 crore from M/s Vitol Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore.

Zillur said it was good news that LNG was being procured at a lower price than before.

He added that per unit LNG would cost \$26.40, while the previous unit price was at \$29.25.

Meanwhile, the cabinet committee on economic affairs yesterday approved appointment of a Chinese company to collect tolls of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel being built under the Karnaphuli river in Chattogram.

China Communications Construction Company Ltd has been appointed as the service provider or operator for maintenance and toll collection of the 3.32km long tunnel.

The total length of the tunnel

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Inflation hits 18-month high

### Rose to 6.29 percent in April amid high food prices, says BBS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inflation shot up to an 18-month high of 6.29 percent in April amid persistently high food prices and rising price of non-food items, according to data released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics yesterday.

In March, the overall inflation was 6.22 percent. The previous high of 6.44 percent was recorded in October 2020.

In April, food inflation, a measure of increase in prices of a basket of commodities, stood at 6.24 percent, down from 6.34 percent the previous month.

Non-food inflation surged 6.39 percent in April from 6.04 percent in March this year, according to BBS.

People in rural areas bore the brunt of higher inflation in April.

General inflation was 6.59 percent in rural areas whereas it was 5.75 percent in urban areas, according to BBS.

Economists said actual inflation would be higher than the BBS estimate as it has been using 2005-06 prices for years to calculate the consumer price index.

## BANGLADESH-US CO-OP Monitoring may begin in July

### Says foreign secretary

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and the US will form a monitoring mechanism to address the challenges and pending issues as the two countries are working on deepening their ties on multiple fronts.

"He [the US ambassador to Bangladesh] proposed a monitoring mechanism on the dialogues that take place between the two countries and the pending issues and existing challenges.

"We may start it [the system] from July,"

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen said after a meeting with US Ambassador Peter Haas at the foreign ministry yesterday.

Momen said Bangladesh has such a mechanism with many countries, including with Japan and India. "I don't see any problem with that, in principle. It is important to check the progress of the dialogues from time to time."

Bangladesh and the US have been engaged in a number of dialogues, including for partnership, security, defence, high-level economics, etc.

The economic dialogue, which is scheduled in early June, will mainly include discussions on US investments and Bangladesh export.

Bangladesh's export to the US is currently \$10 billion a year, as the latter remains our largest

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7



People gathered at a slum burnt to ashes in Chattogram EPZ's Kalshi Dighirpara area yesterday. The blaze was suspected to have started from a house around 11:00am and around 11 firefighting units were needed to douse it. At least one person was reported to have died in the incident and 66 establishments, including shops and houses, were razed to the ground. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN