

Errant polls officials will face music

Says Election Commissioner Alamgir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Action will be taken against election officials found guilty of neglecting their duties, said Election Commissioner Md Alamgir yesterday.

Alamgir's comments came when journalists prodded him on the sit-in programme of at least 35 candidates for chairman and member candidates of two unions of Hatiya in Noakhali.

The candidates staged the sit-in in front of the Election Commission building in Agargaon with poison bottles and wearing shrouds.

At the time, the candidates said that they could not hold electioneering due to the intimidation of the husband of a local MP.

"I came to know about the issue from you [reporters] and will talk with reporters," Alamgir said.

If there is an allegation against any candidate that he or she obstructed another candidate and the allegation is proved, the former's candidature will be cancelled.

The EC would take actions like cancellation of voting if any voters were obstructed from casting their vote.

Meanwhile, the EC yesterday asked the Chattogram deputy commissioner and the superintendent of police to identify the actual reason why a Union Parishad election candidate is spreading propaganda about the electronic voting machine.

Fishermen, visitors banned in Sundarbans

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Fishermen and visitors have been banned from entering the Sundarbans for three months, starting today, for the smooth breeding of fish inside the forest's rivers and canals.

This restriction will be in force until August 31.

The forest department has made the decision as per a resources management plan.

To enforce the ban, the department has stopped issuing all kinds of passes for entering the Sundarbans. At the same time, security has been beefed up in the forest.

Belayet Hossain, divisional forest officer of the Sundarbans east forest department, said fishing in all rivers and canals in the forest used to be suspended for two months from July 1.

This year, in coordination with the fisheries department, the restriction has been extended by a month.



An elderly woman walks away from a burning house garage after shelling in the city of Lysychansk at the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on Monday, on the 96th day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Russians seize 'half' of Severodonetsk

Zelensky says situation in Donbas remains 'extremely difficult'; EU oil embargo agreed upon

AGENCIES

Russian forces have seized control of half of eastern Ukraine's key city of Severodonetsk, a senior official said yesterday, hours after EU leaders struck a watered-down deal to ban more than two-thirds of Moscow's oil imports.

In central Ukraine, two Russian soldiers were sentenced to more than 11 years in jail each after a court found them guilty of firing artillery at civilian areas soon after Moscow's February 24 invasion.

Severodonetsk is one of several industrial hubs that lie on Russia's path to capturing the Donbas's Lugansk region, where Moscow has shifted the bulk of its firepower since failing to capture Kyiv in the war's early stages.

"Unfortunately, the front line divides the city in half. But the city is still defending itself, the city is still Ukrainian, our soldiers are defending it," said Oleksandr Stryuk, head of Severodonetsk's military and civil administration.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelensky said the situation remained "extremely difficult" in the Donbas region.

But as Russian troops edged closer to the Severodonetsk city centre, EU leaders at a summit in Brussels were tightening the economic screws on Moscow.

A compromise oil embargo deal reached late Monday, meant to punish Russia for its invasion, cuts "a huge source of financing for its war machine," European Council chief Charles Michel tweeted.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said the ban "will effectively cut around 90 percent of oil imports from Russia to the EU by the end of the year".

The situation on the eastern front line in Donbas has become increasingly desperate, with Ukrainian towns facing near constant shelling by Russian forces.

A French journalist, Frederic Leclerc-Imhoff, was killed while covering civilian evacuations in the area on Monday.

An overnight rocket attack killed at least three people in the

city of Slovyansk, Donetsk regional governor said. In the southern region of Kherson, the country's military leadership said Ukrainian forces have pushed back.

But while Ukraine is pushing for solidarity from its allies, European leaders meeting in Brussels for a second day played down the chances of a rapid embargo on Russian gas to follow the partial ban on oil imports, reports AFP.

Gazprom, meanwhile, turned off the tap to the Netherlands, halting gas shipments after Dutch energy firm GasTerra ignored a demand that gas supplied from April 1 be paid for in rubles.

During a visit to Bahrain yesterday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said it was up to the West and Kyiv to resolve a growing global food crisis provoked by the conflict in Ukraine.

"They need to seriously consider what is more important for them: to do PR on the issue of food security or to take concrete steps to solve this problem," he added.

Ex-OC transferred after tapes of alleged bribe deals leak

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A police officer, who was closed in March over allegations of bribery, was recently transferred to Barishal range.

Mohammad Touhiduzzaman, then officer-in-charge of Sundarganj Police Station Gaibandha, was closed after several audio clips allegedly of him asking for bribes went viral on social media.

According to allegations, he was heard telling two individuals that their family member, arrested in a murder case, could be released in exchange for money.

On March 15, Touhiduzzaman was closed and attached to Gaibandha Police Lines. A committee was formed to probe the matter.

Contacted, Touhidul Islam, superintendent of police in Gaibandha, said, "Touhiduzzaman was transferred to Barishal range 4-5 days ago by the police headquarters... We submitted an investigation report on the allegations [of bribery] and the investigation is still going on. If we find him guilty, we will take departmental action against him."

Contacted over the phone, Touhiduzzaman said, "I am not guilty and did not take bribes. I will join Barishal range soon. Currently, my mother is very sick and I am visiting her in my village."

2 'organ sellers' land in jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police in Kalai, Joypurhat, arrested two men on charges of brokering deals between those needing a kidney transplant and those willing to donate a kidney.

Gaffar Sarkar, 45, and Nur Aftab, 42, both residents of Kalai, were arrested on Monday by a team of police from Dhaka, said Masum Hossain Bhuiyan, superintendent of police in the district.

A court sent them to jail yesterday afternoon. Masum said the suspects used to promise the poor donors of hefty sums, but gave them less than half of the sum promised at the outset.

Local AL leader hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A local Awami League was hacked to death by unknown assailants in Lohagara, Narail, on Monday morning.

Nizam Sheikh, 55, was hacked near a tea stall in Kotakol union.

He died before he was taken to a hospital, said Upazila Health and Family Welfare Officer Kajal Mallick, adding that there were injuries all over his body.

Abu Hena Milon, officer-in-charge of Lohagara Police Station, said police were looking for the suspects.

Rice-Price

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BLAME-SHIFTING

In Dinajpur's NA Market, one of the largest markets of rice in the country, our correspondent yesterday found that each 50kg sack of Miniket rice was sold for Tk 3,200-3,300, BIRRI-28 for Tk 2,750-2,800, Paizam for Tk 2,600, Swarna for Tk 2,300 and Basmati for Tk 3,800.

Traders said the price of each 50kg sack increased by Tk 400-500 in two weeks.

"The prices are changing almost every day," said Golam Rabbani, a shopkeeper at the market. He blamed the rice mill owners for this.

On the other hand, Azizul Iqbal Chowdhury, joint secretary of Dinajpur Mill Operators' Association, claimed that the mill owners were buying paddy at higher prices.

In Kushtia, rice prices shot up by Tk 4 a kg on

Saturday.

Umar Faruk, managing director of Fresh Agro Mill, echoed Azizul and blamed paddy prices.

But farmers disagree. Jakaria Hossain, a paddy grower in Kushtia's Khajanagar, said paddy prices had not risen.

In Rajshahi, rice traders blamed the supply dearth. Rain, hailstorms, and pest attacks significantly reduced paddy yield, they said.

Nirod Baran Saha, president of the Paddy and Rice Stockists and Wholesalers' Association in Naogaon, said rice yield was 1.12 tonne less than expected per hectare in Rajshahi division.

"The price of rice will hopefully go down this week as millers will be able to produce and supply rice," he said.

Our correspondents from Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Kushtia contributed to this report.

Mominul

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twice. The 30-year old was in hot water over his poor run of form recently, scoring 162 runs at an average of 16.20 in six matches.

"I was unable to contribute as captain in the last few series and I think I wasn't able to motivate my team. I think it's better to give the responsibility to someone new. I have said what I wanted; the rest will depend on the board's decision. At the moment it would be better for me to take a break and focus on

my batting. Probably they will decide in the board meeting soon," Mominul told the media after the meeting with the BCB president.

The Test captain said his decision was not influenced by any pressure from any quarters or any emotions within himself.

Although Mominul expressed his desire to not continue the Test captaincy, the decision eventually rests with the board high-ups, who are take a decision on the issue on Thursday.

Railways of 2 countries to work on one route

FROM PAGE 1

No bank yesterday showed any interest in buying or selling the dollar through the interbank platform as they considered the interbank rate to be still lower than the actual market demand, managing directors of four banks told this correspondent.

The BB has so far depreciated the interbank exchange rate of the taka against the dollar seven times this fiscal year.

The latest large depreciation of the interbank rate came on Sunday when the BB devalued the taka by 1.25 percent to Tk 89 per dollar. The rate was at Tk 85.80 per dollar on December 30 and Tk 84.80 on May 29 last year.

Mashrur Arefin, managing director of The City Bank, said the BB yesterday supplied greenbacks to banks at Tk

89 per dollar to help them settle import bills. "We have settled smaller import bills of below \$1 lakh with the central bank's support."

But most of the banks settled large import bills at Tk 92-94 per dollar as they had to add risk management premium to the prescribed interbank exchange rate of Tk 89.15, he mentioned.

"Banks are running short of dollars... We settled the bills by adding risk management premium..." he said. Risk management premium is a charge that a client pays to a bank, which has to take the risk of depreciation of the local currency against the US dollar.

Every bank bought foreign remittances from local money exchange houses at Tk 89.20 a dollar. But two large foreign

The Indian team held a high-level meeting with BR delegations led by Quamrul Ahsan, additional director general (infrastructure), at the Rail Bhaban in Dhaka on April 21.

"It was discussed that transit of IR trains through Bangladesh could be win-win for BR, IR and people and trade of the two countries," reads the meeting document.

"Both sides agreed to work out the finer details and obtain necessary approvals of relevant authorities. This is expected to help reduce congestion for IR and provide apportioned earnings to

BR," reads the document.

"Yes. They [Indian Railways] have placed a proposal. However, no final decision was taken in this regard. This is a major issue and is needed to be discussed at policy level," a participant of the meeting told The Daily Star.

Quamrul Ahsan declined to comment on the proposal.

BR Director General Dharendra Nath Mazumder did not respond to The Daily Star's request for comments.

The Indian proposal came at a time when an Indian newspaper reported that its central government

is mulling a second rail route that would connect its north-eastern state of Meghalaya with the rest of the country via Bangladesh.

Recently, the Katihar division of Northeast Frontier Railway sent a proposal to the Railway Board, seeking approval of the project, The Telegraph Online reported on May 5, citing IR sources.

The proposal says the rail route will enter Bangladesh from Hilli and move through places like Ghoraghat, Palashbari and Gaibandha in northern stretches of Bangladesh, and connect Mahendraganj of Tura, reads the news.

OTHER ISSUES

The Indian side also raised the issue of increasing the number of trains from India at various interchange points by at least 10 to 15 trains per point per month.

BR side said some increase is being planned in the near future at some specific points.

The IR side expressed interest in some projects including conversion of Kaunia-Lalmonirhat section into broad gauge from meter gauge.

The BR expressed interest in restoring the Burimari-Chengrabandhalink and building the Panchagarh-Banglabandha-Rangapani (India) link.

Many banks fail to follow BB exchange rates

exchange houses - Western Union and MoneyGram International - sold the US dollar to banks between Tk 93.62 and Tk 95 per dollar, which was unfair, he said.

"This will ultimately render the BB directives ineffective. If we buy remittance at Tk 93-95 per dollar, how will we comply with the BB rules?" he asked.

He said no dollar transaction was made through the interbank platform yesterday as the banks had earlier bought the greenback for Tk 94-95 per dollar.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, said he was informed that some banks had sold the dollar to importers at Tk 92-94.

He further said some exchange houses had already reduced the rates in line with the BB directives, but some others were yet to

follow those.

If all exchange houses follow the BB-fixed rates, the market will become stable. The BB should continue its supports by injecting US dollars into the market on a regular basis, he said.

"The central bank should issue a circular like it had done in the past so that all banks follow the rules related to exchange rates," he said.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the BB should observe the market trend for a week. If the exchange rates do not work properly, it should reconsider the rates.

The central bank should lift the 9 percent cap on all types of loans, except for credit cards, to restore stability in the foreign exchange market. Interest rate on post-

import financing, which is now 9 percent, will go up sharply if the central bank withdraws the cap, said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

Higher interest rate on post-import financing will help contain the soaring import payments, he observed.

Post-import financing is a short-term loan that the importer takes from a bank to make import payments.

A BB high official, involved in managing the foreign exchange reserves, said it will take time to bring stability to the forex market.

"We are now cautiously monitoring the market. The central bank will take measures in the light of the market situation," said the official seeking anonymity. Bangladesh's foreign exchange market has been facing an acute shortage

of the dollar over the last couple of months as prices of commodities have gone up in the global market, pushing up the country's import payments to a large extent.

The Covid pandemic initially disrupted the global supply chain, which worsened further after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Bangladesh's import payments stood at \$61.52 billion between July and March, up 44 percent year-on-year, while exports grew 33 percent to \$36.61 billion.

The large import payments created a record trade deficit of \$24.90 billion in the first nine months of the current fiscal year ending in June.

The reserves stood at \$42.29 billion on May 25 this year in contrast to \$46.15 billion on December 31 last year.