

Farmers block road for fertiliser in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinaipur*

Several hundred farmers blocked a road in Kaharol upazila town for one and a half hours yesterday in protest of not getting fertiliser from a government-enlisted dealer.

Locals said around 600 farmers gathered in front of Sonali Traders, the fertiliser dealer, in the town to buy fertiliser. But they failed as its owner Faruk Mia had allegedly sold the fertiliser to selected farmers.

Protesting it, the agitating farmers put bricks on the road in front of the shop to block the road from noon to 1:30pm.

There are 17 fertiliser dealers in the upazila, according to the upazila agricultural office.

Farmer Sadhan Chandra Roy said he had been trying to purchase fertiliser for the last two days, but failed.

He also alleged that the price of fertiliser was higher than the rate fixed by the government. “The dealer [Faruk] was charging Tk 100-Tk 200 extra for each bag of fertiliser.”

Around 1:30pm, the farmers

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A cop along with two locals inspects the foot of a hillock at Lakkhaichara tea estate in Moulvibazar's Sreemangal upazila yesterday after a landslide there killed four female tea estate workers who were collecting mud for coating their earthen huts. PHOTO: COLLECTED

SHAHBAZPUR GAS FIELD Petrobangla starts drilling development well Tagbi-1

UNB, *Dhaka*

Petrobangla has begun drilling a development well at Shahbazpur Gas Field in Bhola.

Russian state-controlled gas giant Gazprom was appointed as the contractor for drilling the Tagbi-1 well.

The Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company (Bapex), a subsidiary of Petrobangla, appointed Gazprom as part of the government's initiative to increase domestic production amid volatility in global liquefied natural gas (LNG) market.

Mahbub Hossain, senior secretary at the Energy and Mineral Resources Division, inaugurated the drilling yesterday. Petrobangla Chairman Nazmul Ahsan was present.

“The Tagbi-1 drilling initiative is part of Petrobangla's plan to dig 46 wells across the country by 2025,” Nazmul told UNB.

Gazprom will drill the development well up to 3,500 metre depth. After the completion of drilling, the well is expected to produce 20-25 million cubic feet (mmcfd) of gas daily.

Shahbazpur Gas Field was discovered by Bapex in 1995, and gas production started in May 2009.

Blasts rock Crimea, Russia

Western officials say half of Russia's Black Sea aviation force wiped out; Putin, Macron call for IAEA inspection of Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant

AGENCIES

Explosions erupted overnight near military bases deep in Russian-held areas of Ukraine and Russia itself, an apparent display of Kyiv's rapidly growing ability to wreak havoc on Moscow's logistics far from front lines.

The explosions follow huge blasts last week at a Russian air base in Crimea. In a new assessment, a Western official yesterday said that incident had wiped out half of Russia's Black Sea naval aviation force in a stroke.

Russia has denied any aircraft were damaged in what it called an accident at the base, although commercial satellite pictures showed at least eight warplanes completely burned out and several huge impact craters. Moscow sacked the head of the Black Sea Fleet this week.

Ukraine also issued a new warning about a frontline nuclear power station where it said it believed Moscow was planning a “large-scale provocation” as a justification to decouple the plant from the Ukrainian power grid and connect it to Russia's.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron called for independent inspections at the Moscow-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the Kremlin said in a statement

yesterday.

According to the Kremlin, both leaders called for experts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect the plant “as soon as possible” and “assess the real situation on the ground”.

The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant was seized by Russian troops in March and recent fighting around it has raised the spectre of a nuclear incident comparable to Chernobyl.

In Crimea - which Moscow seized and annexed in 2014 - explosions were reported near an air base in Belbek, on the southwest coast near Sevastopol, headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. On the opposite end of the peninsula, the sky was also lit up at Kerch near a huge bridge to Russia, with what Moscow said was fire from its air defences.

Inside Russia, two villages were evacuated after explosions at an ammunition dump in Belgorod province, near the Ukrainian border but more than 100 km (60 miles) from territory controlled by Ukrainian forces.

Closer to the front, Kyiv also announced a number of strikes overnight behind Russian lines in southern Kherson province, including at a bridge at the Kakhovska Dam, one of the last routes for Russia to supply thousands of troops on

west bank of the Dnipro River.

“The Ukrainian armed forces treated the Russians to a magical evening,” Seriy Khlan, a member of Kherson's regional council disbanded by Russian occupation forces, wrote on Facebook.

Kyiv has been coy about its role, withholding official comment on incidents in Crimea or inside Russia while hinting that it is behind them using long-range weapons or sabotage.

Russian officials reported no one hurt in the latest explosions in Crimea or Belgorod. They said they had shot down drones in Belbek and Kerch, and confirmed that they had ordered the evacuation of two villages in Belgorod where they were investigating the cause of a fire.

Since last month, Ukraine has been fielding advanced rockets supplied by the West to strike behind Russian lines. The overnight explosions in Crimea and Belgorod are beyond the range of ammunition Western countries have acknowledged sending so far.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's nuclear power operator yesterday said it suspected Moscow was planning to decouple the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant from Ukraine's grid and hook it up to Russia's, a complex operation that Kyiv says could cause a disaster.

Tea workers continue demo for 7th straight day

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Moulvibazar*

The workers of 167 tea estates across the country continued abstaining from work for the seventh consecutive day yesterday, demanding a daily wage of Tk 300 from the current Tk 120.

The demonstrators would put barriers on roads in Sylhet, Sreemangal, Rajnagor and Kamalganj today, said Nipen Paul, general secretary (acting) of Bangladesh Tea Workers Union.

He added that protests in the gardens will continue.

Tea estate workers began their protests amid continued price hike of essentials.

Not even a half-decent meal can be bought with Tk 120.

Last year, a record 96 million kg of tea was produced in the country.

Bangladesh sees zero Covid death, 273 cases

UNB, *Dhaka*

Health officials yesterday reported 273 new cases of Covid and zero death from the disease.

The new case took the total to 2,009,697, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The positivity rate fell to 3.32 percent from Thursday's 3.52 percent.

In July, the country reported the highest monthly death toll and caseload since March this year.

Man held with fake currency notes

UNB, *Chapainawabganj*

Rab on Thursday caught a suspected currency counterfeiter with Rs 1.87 lakh and Tk 11,950 in fake notes in Shibganj, Chapainawabganj.

Shamim, 40, was detained during a raid conducted by a Rab-5 team near Sonamasjid Degree College around 10:00pm, officers told a press briefing.

A case would be filed in this connection, officials said.

US says ‘concerned’ by Israeli closure of Palestinian NGOs

AFP, *Washington*

Washington said Thursday it was “concerned” by the Israeli government's forced closure of several Palestinian NGOs operating in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli military announced earlier in the day that it had conducted overnight raids of seven organizations in Ramallah, the West Bank city where the Palestinian Authority's headquarters are located.

Six of the Palestinian organizations were labeled last October as terrorist organizations by Israel for their alleged links to the leftist militant group Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), though Israeli officials have not publicly shared any evidence of the links.

The NGOs have all denied any links to the PFLP, which many western nations have designated a terrorist group.

Scientists find way to destroy ‘forever chemicals’

AFP, *Washington*

“Forever chemicals” used in daily items like nonstick pans have long been linked to serious health issues – as a result of their toxicity and extreme resistance to being broken down as waste products.

Chemists in the United States and China on Thursday said they had finally found a breakthrough method to degrade these polluting compounds, referred to as PFAS, using relatively low temperatures and common reagents.

Their results were published in the journal Science, potentially offering a solution to a longstanding source of harm to the environment, livestock and humans.

“It really is why I do science -- so that I can have a positive impact on the world,” senior author William Dichtel of Northwestern University told reporters during a news conference.

PFAS, or poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances, were first developed in the 1940s and are now found in a variety of products, including nonstick pans, water-resistant textiles and fire suppression foams.

Over time, the pollutants have accumulated in the environment, entering the air, soil, groundwater and lakes and rivers as a result of industrial processes and from leaching through landfills.

A study published last week by Stockholm University scientists found rainwater everywhere on the planet is unsafe to drink because of PFAS contamination.

Chronic exposure to even low levels has been linked to liver damage, high cholesterol, reduced immune responses, low birth weights and

several kinds of cancer.

Although PFAS chemicals can be filtered out of water, there are few good solutions for how to dispose of them once they have been removed.

Current methods to destroy PFAS require harsh treatments, such as incineration at extremely high temperatures or irradiating them with ultrasonic waves.

And incineration isn't always foolproof, with one New York plant found to still be releasing some of the compounds into the air through smoke.

PFAS' indestructibility comes from their carbon-flouride bonds, one of the strongest types of bonds in organic chemistry.

Fluorine is the most electronegative element and wants to gain electrons, while carbon is keen to share them.

PFAS molecules contain long chains of these bonds, but the research team was able to identify a glaring weakness common to a certain class of PFAS.

At one end of the molecule, there is a group of charged oxygen atoms which can be targeted using a common solvent and reagent at mild temperatures of 80-120 degrees Celsius, decapitating the head group and leaving behind a reactive tail.

“Once that happens, that provides access to previously unrecognized pathways that cause the entire molecule to fall apart in a cascade of complex reactions,” said Dichtel, ultimately making benign end products.

A second part of the study involved using powerful computational methods to map out the quantum mechanics behind the chemical reactions the team performed to destroy the molecules.

Soaring rice price deepens their plight

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“Things have become extremely difficult for the limited-income people like me because of the soaring price of rice and other essentials. If prices continue to go up, how will we survive?” questioned Abu Saleh, a college teacher in Rajshahi.

Our correspondents from several districts including Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Pabna, Dinajpur, Kushtia, Faridpur, Bogura, Thakurgaon, Pirojpur, Barisal and Gazipur visited rice markets yesterday and found the lowest price of any variety was Tk 52.

Retailers say wholesalers cashed in on the rising trend of rice price and reduced supply, while the latter cited the increase in transport and other costs for the price hike.

The wholesalers also put the blame on the big millers for creating an artificial crisis by stockpiling paddy and rice.

The rice millers, on the other hand, said farmers sold paddy at a higher rate. An increase in their production cost amid the fuel price hike ultimately contributed to such a rise in the rice price, they claimed.

Rice price has been seeing an upward trend over the last one month after a low yield of Boro due to flooding, and an increase in the wheat price at the international market leading to soaring demand of rice.

A syndicate of big traders and wholesalers seized the opportunity to increase the price by creating an artificial crisis, said the millers.

Even the government's move to reduce the import duty from 62 percent to 25 percent last month is yet to make any impact on the rice market because of the low import.

Following the reduction of import duty, only 26,850 tonnes of the grain entered Bangladesh between July 1 and August 14 though the government gave permission to private firms to import nearly 10 lakh tonnes and market it before the Aman harvest in November-December period, said

food ministry sources.

“Traders are not importing as the price of rice in the Indian market increased after our government reduced the import duty,” said Nirod Baran Saha, president of the Paddy and Rice Stockists and Wholesalers' Association in Naogaon, referring to media reports.

According to a report run by the Economic Times of India on August 1, prices of all varieties of rice have increased by up to 30 percent since the beginning of June, due to higher demand from Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia and also a shortage in paddy acreage in several Indian states.

In the meantime, people belonging to limited- and lower-income brackets are bearing the brunt of the situation as they are struggling to keep heads above the water due to the rise in prices of essentials.

BLAME GAME

Mohammad Amanullah, a rice trader from Pirojpur town, said the price of every sack of 50-kg rice went up by up to Tk 500 in the wholesale market.

“When the price began to rise, wholesalers created an artificial crisis of rice and they supplied fewer sacks than our demand for several days,” he claimed.

Amanullah said the wholesalers and millers are responsible for the increasing price and that they maintain the business through a syndicate.

Faruque Ahmed, general secretary of Sylhet District Rice Traders' Association, said, “Due to the flood, the quality of freshly produced Boro in the greater Sylhet region fell dramatically. While flood affected the price in the first place, our expenses increased further due to the fuel price hike.”

“But,” he claimed, “the syndicate of traders took advantage of the situation by increasing the price.”

The wholesalers and small millers, however, said it is the big mill owners

who have created an artificial crisis.

“Large millers are now controlling the market and they have so much stock that many of them are hiring our warehouses for storing rice,” said Md Kamal Uddin, owner of Kamal Auto Rice Mill from Rajshahi.

Akhtaruzzaman Russel, general manager of AR Specialised Rice Mill, one of the biggest rice manufacturing companies, claimed that the price of paddy soared at the farmers' level and the increase in the production cost only worsened the situation.

Besides, the electricity bills and other costs like that of transportation rose by 2 to 3 percent, which caused the production cost of rice to go up by Tk 4 to 5 each kg, he said.

Currently, the government has a stock of 18.76 lakh tonnes of grains including 15.43 lakh tonnes of rice and 1.29 lakh tonnes of paddy as of August 14.

The country needs over 3.5 crore tonnes of rice every year. Most of the stock remains with the private traders who control the rice market.

MONITOR THE MARKET

Dr AM Asaduzzaman, former research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said the price hike of rice is not only affecting the poor section of the society, people of limited-income groups are also bearing the brunt of the situation.

He suggested that the government should monitor and ask the big traders and rice mill owners the reasons for increasing the price. “If the government gets to know the reason, it would be able to control it,” he said.

Contacted, Ismiel Hossain, secretary to the ministry of food, alleged that the traders have been increasing the price of rice at their will.

“It is not like the price went up due to the rise of production cost. They [traders and millers] already stockpiled rice and paddy. If they cite

the rise in fuel price as the reason, they should have increased the price not more than Tk 1,” he said.

About the monitoring, the secretary said the government does not have enough manpower to monitor every market in the country.

On import, he said the deadline for importing rice has been extended till the end of September.

“The government will sell 2.5 lakh tonnes of rice under the open market sale programme each month starting from September 1. We will ensure that the poor people get rice at a cheaper rate,” he added.

Bring an end

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detention are completely prohibited in the constitution of Bangladesh.”

The signatories to the statement are: Hameeda Hossain, Badiul Alam Majumdar, Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, Shahdeen Malik, Ali Riaz, Anu Muhammad, Asif Nazrul, Shapan Adnan, Perween Hasan, Firdous Azim, Ali Imam Majumder, Gitiara Nasreen, Rahnuma Ahmed, Shahidul Alam, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Samina Luthfa, Shahnaz Huda, Tabarak Hussain, Shireen Haq, Sanjeeb Drong, Hana Shams Ahmed, Nur Khan Liton, Naser Bakhtiar, Salma Ali, Arup Rahee, Subrata Chowdhury, and Nova Akhem.

Landslide kills four

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Ali Rajib Mahmud said the incident happened around 11:30am and the two injured were admitted to Sreemangal Upazila Health Complex.

Medical officer Redwan Ahsanullah said the four workers had died before they were brought to the hospital.

The UNO later announced to financial assistance to the family members of the victims.

An unnatural death case has been filed, said Inspector Humayun Kabir, of Sreemangal Police Station.