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Khulna road in sorry state for 11 years



Why we need to rethink the Press Council



Nadal, Serena in focus as US Open begins



Rice production growth slows down

Govt to cut diesel price

Says energy ministry official after reduction in import tariff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to bring down the diesel price following the cut in import duty on the key fuel by the National Board of Revenue, said an energy ministry official yesterday.

"The ministry officials will sit and announce a new price [of diesel] as soon as possible," said Mir Mohammad Aslam Uddin, deputy principal information officer of the power, energy and mineral resources ministry.

Yesterday, in a gazette notification, the NBR reduced the import tariff to 22.75 percent from 34 percent.

The NBR move comes amid demands from various quarters to slash import duty after the government

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A view of the unfinished bridge over Nabaganga river in Narail. Work on the 651.83-metre bridge was supposed to be completed by June 2019, but it is only half-finished more than three years after the deadline. The photo was taken recently from the district's Kalia upazila.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

PROJECT TO BUY CARRIAGES

After 6 years, it now needs a fresh start

"We have decided to cancel the commercial contract with the Chinese contractor and now we have to go for a new investor for the project."

BR's Director General Dharendra Nath Mazumder

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Another railway project involving a Chinese contractor has plunged into deep uncertainty after a government committee directed the authorities not to take the hard loan arranged by the company.

The project, undertaken in October 2016 to procure 200 rail carriages, was supposed to be implemented with the fund arranged by the contractor.

In November 2018, Bangladesh Railway signed a commercial contract with CRRC Sifang Company Ltd, which reportedly managed a financier which would provide a hard loan for the project.

A meeting of the project steering body led by the railways ministry secretary yesterday decided to cancel the contract with the Chinese company following the government committee's directive over the hard loan, according to two meeting participants.

"We have decided to cancel the commercial contract with the Chinese contractor and now we have to go for

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'ANOMALIES' IN HIRING

Resentment runs rife among Biman pilots

RASHIDUL HASAN

Alleged anomalies in Biman's recent recruitment of pilots have stirred resentment as well as concerns over flight safety among the pilots of the airline.

In February this year, Biman Bangladesh Airlines recruited 14 pilots – eight captains and six first officers (FO) – for the four Boeing 777s in its fleet.

It all came to the fore after several media reports and aviation officials alleged how the recruitment was done in flagrant violation of the national flag carrier's rules and procedure.

In a letter to the Biman MD and CEO, Bangladesh Airlines Pilot Association (BAPA) yesterday demanded that the authorities thoroughly investigate the "irregularities" in the recent recruitments.

Earlier on April 4, the Prime Minister's Office sent a letter to the civil aviation and tourism ministry, asking it to investigate the recent hiring of "controversial" and "underqualified" people as pilots and co-pilots.

An investigation report by an intelligence agency, highlighting "irregularities" in the

hiring process, was attached to the letter.

The recruitment, according to the investigation, did not follow the rules and procedure that Biman has had in place for years.

The airline has ignored its own resources and appointed pilots from other airlines, most of whom were either sacked or denied promotions due to a lack of skills, the report observed.

As such, it added, specific conditions and requirements mentioned in the job circular were violated when the new pilots were recruited.

Biman had published the circular for the new recruitments in November last year.

Of the eight new captains, only two have the experience of flying an aircraft for the number of hours necessary to operate a Boeing 777.

The report also said the FOs recruited were not skilled or efficient enough for the post.

"Flights operated by the recently recruited incompetent pilots might be at risk of accidents," the report warned.

RESENTMENT

The Daily Star has recently spoken to several senior pilots of BAPA.

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"Flights operated by the recently recruited incompetent pilots might be at risk of accidents."

All-out effort to tame rice prices

Govt slashes import duty, raises import target

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government yesterday slashed the import duty on rice and is also working to import about 12 lakh tonnes of food grain including rice as it looks to rein in the price of the staple amid a cost of living crisis.

As on August 24, the government's food stock stood at 19.14 lakh tonnes, which is the highest in recent times and much above the safe benchmark of 12 lakh tonnes, according to data from the food ministry.

Of the food stock, 17.69 tonnes are rice.

And yet, the government is scrambling to shore up its rice reserves as it expects a lean Aman harvest for droughts in large parts of the country. Last fiscal year, Aman accounted for 39 percent of the total rice output of about 3.76 crore tonnes.

Farmers typically start transplanting Aman crops from the middle of July for harvesting towards the end of the year. But this year, vast parts of the agricultural lands, particularly up north, are dry, affecting the transplantation of Aman seedlings.

"We are predicting Aman production would be lower, so we have taken a precautionary measure to import rice to keep the market stable," said a food ministry official on the condition of anonymity.

Alongside its own imports, the government in June allowed private firms to import rice. But the response has been lukewarm due to high import duty.

As of August 24, the private sector players imported 74,000 tonnes of rice against the target of 10 lakh tonnes.

Subsequently, the National Board of Revenue yesterday slashed the regulatory duty on rice imports by 20 percentage points to 5 percent.

This has brought down the total tax incidence on rice imports to 15.25 percent from upwards of 25 percent previously.

"It is a good and necessary move – I support both the import of rice and cut in import duty," said Quazi Shahabuddin, an agriculture economist.

The Aman crop will be affected for a number of reasons including the recent price hike of diesel, which is essential for irrigation of rice crops.

"Even if it is not a major crop, Aman is still important – the government must be prepared to increase the food stock," said Shahabuddin, a former director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

Other than the anticipated lower Aman output, the government has another reason to procure food grains including rice: doubling the open market sales and the family card programme to give relief to the poor and the low-income people from the price spiral.

In July, which is the most recent available data, inflation stood at 7.48 percent, well above the budgetary target of 5.6 percent, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. And food inflation was 8.19 percent.

"Historically, rice prices have never been this high – this is too big a blow for the low-income people," Shahabuddin said.

Coarse rice, which is mostly consumed by the poor and the low-income people, is now selling for Tk 55-58 a kg, up from Tk 48-50 a month earlier, according to data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Fine rice costs Tk 65-80 a kg, up from Tk 64-75 a month earlier.

The government had a plan to import a total of 7 lakh tonnes of food grain this fiscal year, 2 lakh of which would be rice and the rest wheat. That plan has been revised upwards to 12 lakh tonnes.

The food ministry already opened a tender on August 22 to purchase one lakh tonnes of food grain, including 50,000 tonnes of rice.

Work is on way to import 2.30 lakh tonnes of rice from Vietnam on a government-to-government basis, while plans are being made to import from Myanmar and India as well, said a food ministry official.

Alongside, the government is all set to import 5 lakh tonnes of wheat from Russia in a G2G deal. The shipment will take place in phases by January and the bill will be paid in US dollars, he added.

"It takes about 1-2 months to import and most of the major rice producing countries are also major consumers, so the import market for Bangladesh is slim pickings. It is good that the government has started the preparations in advance," Shahabuddin said.

Historically, rice prices have never been this high – this is too big a blow for the low-income people.

Quazi Shahabuddin, former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies

DEMO OVER PRICE HIKE

45 BNP men hurt in clash with cops, AL supporters

BNP leader's car, house come under attack in Jashore

STAR REPORT

At least 45 BNP leaders and activists were injured in clashes with police and Awami League men in Narsingdi and Tangail yesterday.

In Jashore, the house and car of a BNP leader were vandalised.

The BNP, from August 22, began a series of countrywide programmes to protest the hikes in prices of fuel and daily essentials.

During the protests, clashes broke out when police obstructed BNP activists; ruling party men also launched attacks on them in some places.

These attacks were carried out even after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 14 said the BNP should be allowed to protest and that no one should be arrested.

In Narsingdi, at least 35 BNP men were injured as police baton-charged them and fired rubber bullets after they brought out a procession.

Quoting police and local BNP leaders, our Narsingdi correspondent reports that the local BNP was supposed to hold a rally at the Hafizpur schoolground in Monohardi.

Around 2:00pm, when the BNP leaders and activists, some carrying weapons, brought out a procession, police stopped them near Hetemdi intersection, and a clash ensued.

Aminur Rahman Dolon, member-secretary of the upazila BNP, claimed 27 of his party men were injured by

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India's Hardik Pandya hits a six off the fourth delivery of the final over, bowled by Pakistan's Mohammad Nawaz, to guide his side to a five-wicket victory in their Asia Cup Group A fixture at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pandya helps India edge Pakistan

AFP, Dubai

Hardik Pandya starred with bat and ball to lead India to a five-wicket win over Pakistan in a last-over Twenty20 thriller in the Asia Cup on Sunday.

Chasing 148 for victory, Ravindra Jadeja, who hit 35, and Pandya, unbeaten on 33, put on a key fifth-wicket stand of 52 as India achieved the target with two balls to spare in Dubai.

Pace bowlers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Pandya shared seven wickets to set up victory for India in their opening match as they bowled out Pakistan for 147.

Pandya, who returned figures of 3-25 with his medium-pace bowling, then stood calm to hit the winning six in a tense chase in the six-nation tournament which acts as a tune-up for the T20 World Cup in October-November in Australia.

Debutant pace bowler Naseem Shah stood out for Pakistan with figures of 2-27 but a foot injury

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