

Govt raises sugar price 2 weeks after reducing it Shows high import cost as reason

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday increased the retail price of sugar by Tk 6 a kg citing high import costs due to dollars getting dearer.

The hike is the same amount as the reduction made two weeks ago.

Non-packaged sugar will now cost Tk 90 a kg and packaged sugar Tk 90-95, said Senior Commerce Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh.

Refiners said the new prices would come into effect from tomorrow.

After a meeting with millers and refiners, Ghosh said sugar prices at the international market, freight charges, the exchange rate of dollars, and a few other factors were considered before raising the prices.

He also said the super palm oil price was reduced by Tk 8 a litre. Now one litre would cost Tk 125 as the prices in the international market dropped.

On October 3, the refiners slashed the retail prices of soybean oil by Tk 14 a litre to Tk 178 per litre after its prices in the international market dropped.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday extended the reduced 5 percent value-added tax on edible oil for another three months.

The extension up to December 31 comes after the benefit expired on September 30, according to a notification by the finance ministry.

In March, the National Board of Revenue slashed the VAT on soybean oil and unrefined palm oil from 15 percent to 5 percent at import and exempted the indirect tax at production and trading stages.

Ghosh said the commerce ministry could not fix the prices of rice and flour because of the agricultural product distribution and marketing rules of 2018. The agricultural ministry was responsible for fixing the prices, he added.



PHOTO: AFP

Firefighters trying to extinguish a blaze at a building after a strike in Zaporizhzhia yesterday amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Russian missile razes Ukraine apartment block

Three killed, several feared trapped under rubble

REUTERS, Kyiv

A Russian missile demolished an apartment block in a Ukrainian region that Moscow says it has annexed, killing at least three people, as discontent mounted inside Russia about the handling of the war by the top brass.

The missile attack on the city of Zaporizhzhia in the southern region of the same name left some people buried under the rubble, the regional governor said yesterday.

It was a reminder of Moscow's ability to strike targets even at a time when its forces have been pushed back in the south and east.

There was no immediate comment from Russia, whose invasion of Ukraine

has begun to unravel after a Ukrainian counteroffensive in which thousands of square miles of territory have been retaken since the start of September, including dozens of settlements in recent days.

In a blow for Moscow, thousands of Russian troops have retreated after the front line crumbled, first in the northeast, and, since the beginning of this week, also in the south.

Public criticism of Russia's top military brass, once taboo, is mounting after two allies of President Vladimir Putin criticised what they said was the incompetent way the war was being prosecuted.

On Thursday, a Russian-installed official in occupied Ukraine openly mused about the idea of Sergei Shoigu, the defence minister and an ally of Putin,

shooting himself for his military failures.

"Indeed, many say: if they were a defence minister who had allowed such a state of affairs, they could, as officers, have shot themselves," Kirill Stremousov, the deputy head of the Russian-installed administration in Ukraine's Kherson region, said in a video.

"But you know the word 'officer' is an incomprehensible word for many."

There was no immediate comment from the defence ministry.

Images of the aftermath of yesterday's missile strike, which took place in the early hours of the morning, showed a gaping, rubble-strewn hole where a terracotta-coloured five-storey apartment block used to stand next to a wine shop.

WB lowers GDP

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for India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

It revised down the growth projection for India by 0.1 percentage points to 7 percent, for Pakistan by 2 percentage points to 2 percent, for Sri Lanka by 0.5 percentage points to a negative 4.2 percent, and for the Maldives by 2 percentage points to 8.2 percent.

It raised the economic growth outlook for Nepal by 1 percentage point to 5.1 percent.

At a virtual press briefing yesterday, WB Chief Economist for South Asia Hans Timmer said Bangladesh is one of the countries that was hit hard by the most recent developments, especially the increase in commodity prices and the slowdown in high-income countries, particularly in Europe.

Since Bangladesh exports a lot of readymade garments to Europe, high commodity prices have led to a sharp increase in the cost of the garment industry.

That is a big hit for Bangladesh because it relies so much on RMG industry, Timmer said, adding that it led to the weakening of the currency and a decline in the foreign exchange reserves.

Garment shipment accounts for about 85 percent of Bangladesh's exports.

Amid dollar shortages, Bangladesh's national currency has lost its value by more than 20 percent since the outbreak of the war and the reserves fell to \$36.44 billion on September 28, down 21.25 percent from a year ago, Bangladesh Bank data showed.

According to the WB report, the balance of payments pressure has in turn resulted in dwindling foreign exchange reserves. This led Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh to request the International Monetary Fund for support.

But unlike the two other countries, Bangladesh's reserves have not fallen to dangerously low levels, the country is not facing political instability, and inflation is still below 10 percent although it is above recent historical levels, it stated.

WB Vice President for South Asia Martin Raiser said, "Pandemics, sudden swings in global liquidity and commodity prices, and extreme weather disasters were once tail-end risks. But all three have arrived in rapid succession over the past two years and are testing South Asia's economies.

"In the face of these shocks, countries need to build stronger fiscal and monetary buffers, and reorient scarce resources towards strengthening resilience to protect their people."

Police torture victims of robbery

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"The DB officers beat me mercilessly and forced me to say I was involved in the robbery," the mother of two told The Daily Star on September 14 when she was still being treated at Manikganj Sadar Hospital for what she said were the injuries she received in the DB office.

"An officer with a long beard and a female officer hit me more times than anyone else did. They strung my son by his hands from the ceiling and beat him in front of me. So I said whatever they wanted me to say," she told this correspondent.

She was later able to identify the bearded officer as Inspector Yasin Munshi.

She added that her family members had to give the DB officers Tk 150 lakh in bribes for her release on September 9.

Godadhar, who filed the robbery case, yesterday said, "My daughter-in-law and grandson were detained and brutally tortured at the DB office for no reason. I want justice for this."

Contacted, Dhaka district (north) DB Sub-Inspector Sheikh Farid, who is investigating the robbery case, and Inspector Yasin Munshi refuted all the allegations.

"Rupa is staging a drama. She coordinated the robbery due to a family feud," Farid said.

THE INCIDENT

After the robbery case was filed on

June 18, Arafat Uddin, sub-inspector of Dhamrai Police Station, was assigned to investigate the case.

Police then detained a local man as a possible suspect and released him two days later, said Arafat, who was transferred to Dhaka's Keraniganj Model Police Station recently.

Godadhar's younger son Shyamol Halder said he, Rupa, Diganta and a relative named Kirton Halder, went to the DB office on September 6.

Sub-Inspector Farid, Inspector Kamal Hossain, a woman officer, and another cop then started interrogating Rupa. "They physically and mentally tortured Rupa Boudi [sister-in-law] for almost 12 hours straight."

"We were sitting right outside the room. We heard the DB officers continuously hurling abuse at her. They threatened to beat Diganta if she did not say that she was involved in the robbery. Boudi was screaming loudly."

Around midnight, the DB officers put Rupa and Diganta on a white microbus and left the premises.

"Boudi could not even walk to the vehicle without help because of the severe torture," said Shyamol.

A few hours later, the microbus returned with them, along with two schoolboys from Dhamrai's Boronalai village, he said.

"Then, the DB officers took Boudi and Diganta to the interrogation room again and tortured them."

He added that the DB released Diganta and the two boys in the afternoon on September 7 and kept Rupa and Kirton in detention.

"We could not get them released despite repeated attempts throughout the night of September 7," said Shyamol.

On September 8, Shyamol and several other family members met Md Asaduzzaman, the superintendent of Dhaka district police, and told him what was happening, he said.

Advised by Asaduzzaman, the family then met Mobashera Habib Khan, additional SP (DB) of Dhaka district.

"Mobashera asked the DB officers to appear at her office with Rupa. When they did, Mobashera scolded the DB officers for torturing Boudi."

But Mobashera later asked Rupa not to withdraw her confessional statement, saying that she could only be released if she did so, Shyamol said.

Later that night, DB officers raided Rupa's in-law's home in Dhamrai and her father's home in Manikganj's Singair in the name of recovering the valuables the robbers took away.

"But they found nothing," said Shyamol, adding that the DB team arrested Rupa's relative Jibon during the raid.

On September 9, Shyamol along with his father Godadhar and Rupa's husband Kamol Halder went to Savar DB office. The DB officers took

signatures from all of them on blank papers, he alleged.

Then, the DB officers forced all of them to say that Rupa was not tortured in custody and filmed their statements, alleged Shyamol.

Around midday, Rupa was released from the DB office. The family had to take her to the Manikganj Sadar Hospital for treatment, he said.

But Kirton and Jibon were sent to jail on September 10, said Shyamol. "Kirton was also tortured in custody," he said, adding that Kirton was released on bail on October 4.

DB Inspector Kamal Hossain said Kirton and Jibon confessed to a court that Rupa masterminded the robbery.

"Rupa and her son were just interrogated. No one tortured them," he claimed.

Dhaka district SP Md Asaduzzaman also refuted the allegations of torture.

Police interrogated Rupa after two accused in their confessions mentioned that she was involved in the robbery, he said.

"There is no question of torturing her. I do not know why she is making the allegations of torture so late," he said.

"She could have come to me. If her allegations were true, I would have taken necessary actions," Asaduzzaman said.

Additional SP Mobashera Habib Khan did not respond to calls and messages.

SSC examinee stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A Secondary School Certificate examinee was stabbed to death by unknown miscreants in Mymensingh's Muktagacha municipal on Wednesday night.

Sarwar Rahman Shanto, 17, son of Muktagacha Councillor Motiur Rahman Moti, went to the Ayman River area with his friends to observe the Bijoya Dashami in the afternoon, said Mahmudul Hasan, OC of Muktagacha Police Station, quoting the victim's family.

He was stabbed around 9:00pm at Natun Bazar's Garurhat area.

Locals rushed Shanto to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, where the doctors declared him dead.

The police yesterday took three of victim's friends into custody for questioning.

The OC said the body was handed over to the family after autopsy. No case has been filed yet.

Man detained for allegedly killing wife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rabha

Police detained a man for allegedly killing his wife in Sirajganj Sadar upazila yesterday.

Marzia Khatun, 25, daughter of Abdul Malek, resident of Chondidasgati village, got married to Ahsan Ullah, 35, a farmer, about a decade ago. Her family had to pay Tk 2.5 lakh as dowry.

According to locals and the victim's family members, the couple used to get into fights frequently.

Malek found his daughter strangled to death when he arrived at the spot after he received a call from Ahsan.

"My daughter was often tortured by her in-laws for more money as dowry," he claimed while talking to journalists.

"Ahsan is a suspect and we have taken him into custody for questioning," said Humayun Kabir, OC of Sirajganj Sadar police.

The body was sent to Sirajganj General Hospital for autopsy.

Meanwhile, a case, filed by the victim's father, is being processed at the station.

Farmer electrocuted to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A farmer was electrocuted to death in Panchagarh's Tentulia upazila yesterday afternoon.

Azizul Haque, 60, resident of Gonagoch village, was cutting bamboo shoots near his home, when an electric wire passing over the bamboo shoots was also mistakenly cut down. The wire fell the cluster, causing his death.

His family members found him unconscious and took him to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

An unnatural death case was filed with the Tentulia Police Station, said Abu Sayed Chowdhury, the OC of the station.

French author

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The first French woman to win the literature prize, Ernaux said winning was "a responsibility".

"I was very surprised... I never thought it would be on my landscape as a writer," Ernaux told Swedish broadcaster SVT. "It is a great responsibility... to testify, not necessarily in terms of my writing, but to testify with accuracy and justice in relation to the world."

She has previously said that writing is a political act, opening our eyes for social inequality. "And for this purpose she uses language as 'a knife', as she calls it, to tear apart the veils of imagination," the academy said.

Her debut novel was *Les Armoires Vides* in 1974 but she gained international recognition following the publication of *Les Années* in 2008, translated into *The Years* in 2017.

"It is her most ambitious project, which has given her an international reputation and a raft of followers and literary disciples," the academy said of that book.

Born to a modest family of grocers from Normandy in northern France, Ernaux wrote about class and how she struggled to adopt the codes and habits of the French bourgeoisie while staying true to her working class background.

An adaptation of Ernaux' 2000 novel *Happening*, about her experiences of having an abortion when it was still illegal in France in the 1960s, won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 2021.

The academy said her "clinically restrained narrative" about a 23-year-old narrator's illegal abortion in the book remained a masterpiece among her works.

"It is a ruthlessly honest text, where in parentheses she adds reflections in a vitally lucid voice, addressing herself and the reader in one and the same flow," the academy said.

Former French culture minister Roselyne Bachelot wrote on Twitter that Ernaux was "a writer who has put the autobiographical mode in its cold analytical way at the heart of her career. One may not agree with her political options but one must salute a powerful and moving work".

The prizes for achievements in science, literature and peace were established in the will of Swedish chemist and engineer Alfred Nobel, whose invention of dynamite made him rich and famous, and have been awarded since 1901.

The prize is worth 10 million Swedish crowns (\$915,000).

While many previous literature winners were already widely read before landing the prize, the award generates huge media attention and can catapult lesser known authors to global fame while spurring book sales even for literary superstars.

Govt wants all parties to join nat'l polls: PM

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Hasina said the Awami League along with its allies made all improvements and reforms to the country's electoral system. "If anyone doesn't join even after that, what can we do?"

She said the AL will never take power by rigging votes and it didn't do so in the past.

Referring to BNP, she said they blamed the government when they lost the national election in 2018 after nominating 700 MP hopefuls in 300 constituencies.

Hasina, also the AL president, said her party came to power time and again working for the people and winning their hearts.

She said her party's triennial council will be held in December and the party started preparing for the 12th parliamentary elections, scheduled to be held late 2023 or early 2024.

The PM said the AL is now perhaps the only party in the country that always abides by its charter.

Replying to a query about any possible surprise in picking the AL leadership in the party's next council, she said, "I would no longer be the president of the Awami League if a single councillor does not want it."

The PM said she has been following this principle since the AL made her the

president in 1981. "It's true it has been a long time. I expect that the party will have a new leadership," she said.

Talking about the US sanctions on Rab, Hasina questioned the motive behind Washington's move.

She lauded the elite force's role in curbing terrorism in the country.

"We've curbed terrorism with them in this country. What does the imposition of sanction on them mean? [Is it] to support the terrorists? My question is whether the USA is unhappy about curbing terrorism," she said.

The PM said the Rab was formed at the US's recommendation. The US provides them with everything including training, arms, helicopters, and even digital and ICT systems.

"Whenever the US imposes sanctions or raises any allegation, I would like to say that they [Rab] have conducted their activities as per the training they received."

She said if any member of the law enforcement agencies, including Rab and police, commits any offence, the person is put on trial in Bangladesh. But if US police members kill anyone as per whom, they are not always tried, the PM added.

Trial was held in connection with

only one incident in the US after people had waged a movement against it, she said.

The premier said some people provide false and fabricated information about the human rights violations to the US, and some of them, who left Bangladesh, are misguiding the US after committing crimes at home.

The US sanctioned Rab and seven of its serving and former officials in December last year accusing the force of grave violation of human rights, an allegation Dhaka has vehemently denied.

Talking about Rohingya repatriation, she said Bangladesh has conveyed its concern over Rohingya repatriation to the UN as not a single Rohingya was sent back to Myanmar though five years have already passed after their mass exodus from Rakhine State.

Hasina said the UN is sincere in resolving the issue, but the military junta of Myanmar does not pay heed to it.

Responding to another query, the AL president said BNP was rushing to foreigners as they did not have confidence in the people. "If they have confidence, they don't need to rush to the foreigners."

About the allegations of enforced