

World food prices fall for sixth straight month: FAO

AFP, Paris

World food prices fell for a sixth month in a row in September, UN data showed yesterday, as the prices continued to decline since they reached a record high following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said its price index, which tracks the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities, averaged 136.3 points in September, a 1.1 percent drop from August.

The index, however, was 5.5 percent higher than in September 2021.

The monthly decline was driven by a "sharp fall" in the prices of vegetable oils, the United Nations agency said.

There were also moderate decreases in the prices of sugar, meat and dairy products.

The declines more than offset a rebound in cereal prices.

The FAO said wheat prices jumped due to "heightened uncertainty" about the continuation beyond November of a UN-brokered deal that has allowed Ukraine to ship its grains via the Black Sea.

The deal lifted a Russian blockade that has raised fears of triggering famine in nations reliant on grains from Ukraine, one of the world's breadbaskets. Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24.

Dry conditions in Argentina and the United States have also contributed to the increase in global cereal prices.

The FAO lowered its world cereal production forecast for this year again, with a decline of 1.7 percent expected.

The agency said 45 countries, including 33 in Africa, nine in Asia, two in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one in Europe "are in need of external assistance for food".

The UN warned in September that more than one million people are at risk of famine and death without humanitarian aid.



With the partial launch of the country's first ever metro rail just about two and a half months away, workers are carrying out final works at the Agargaon station in the capital. Trains will start running from Uttara to Agargaon in December. The project entails the construction of a 20.10km metro rail from Uttara to Motijheel, officially known as Mass Rapid Transit Line-6. It will be fully operational in December next year. The photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Putin's nuclear threat brings world closer to 'Armageddon'

Says Biden; hundreds of bodies found in Ukraine's Kharkiv after Russian retreat

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine has brought the world closer to "Armageddon" than at any time since the Cold-War Cuban Missile Crisis, US President Joe Biden has said.

With his seven-month invasion unravelling, Putin celebrated his 70th birthday yesterday with fawning praise from some officials but little public fuss. That was a contrast to just a week ago when he staged a huge concert on Red Square to proclaim the annexation of nearly a fifth of Ukrainian land.

In a clear repudiation of Putin's record, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to

Russia's most prominent human rights group, Memorial, which Moscow shut down over the past year. A Ukrainian human rights group and a jailed campaigner against abuses by the pro-Russian government in Belarus were also awarded.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv's forces were swiftly recapturing more territory, including more than 500 sq km in the south where they burst through a second major front this week.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov yesterday called on Russian troops to lay down their arms, promising them "life and safety."

Biden said the prospect of defeat could

make Putin desperate enough to use nuclear weapons, the biggest risk since US President John Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev faced off over missiles in Cuba in 1962, reports Reuters.

"We have not faced the prospect of Armageddon since Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis," Biden said in New York late on Thursday.

In the northeastern Kharkiv region where Ukrainian forces regained a large swathe of ground in September, the bodies of 534 civilians including 19 children were found after Russian troops left, Serhiy Bolvinov of the National Police in Kharkiv told a briefing posted online Thursday.

Smoother link not so soon

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So, most of the vehicles bound for Benapole, Jashore, Jhenaidah -- even many heading to Satkhira -- take Bhanga-Faridpur-Magura road avoiding the ferry route while some vehicles use the ferry service.

With the opening of the Madhumati Bridge at the Kalna point, which will establish a direct road link between Bhanga and Benapole, there will be a major shift in the movement of vehicles, including those for cross-border trade.

And most of the vehicles will use Bhanga-Narail-Jashore-Benapole road, experts and RHD officials said.

According to an RHD official, the distance from Dhaka to Jashore via Gabtoli-Paturia-Daulatdia-Magura-Jashore is 218km. It will be only 160km via Jatrabari-Padma Bridge-Madhumati Bridge.

Prof Moazzem said the feasibility study carried out for the Padma Bridge in 2003-2005 gave a clear picture of the possible changes in the road sector after the opening of the Padma Bridge.

"So, the authorities should have

made plans considering all these things," he said.

The Madhumati Bridge would be the first six-lane bridge in the country.

"Can you imagine how weird it is if a six-lane bridge is connected with the two-lane road on both sides? The authorities should have opened a four-lane road along with the bridge," he told this correspondent on Thursday.

"But nothing happens here in a planned way. Besides, we have a fund crisis too," he added.

He, however, said if the two-lane road can be kept operational properly, it can deal with the growing traffic for two-three years at best.

"But if the road can't be expanded within two-three years, there will be a major problem," he said.

WHY DELAY?

Bangladesh in October 2017 signed a \$4.5 billion line of credit agreement with India, which is the third LoC deal between the two countries.

The Bhanga-Jashore-Benapole road expansion is among the projects that will be financed from the third

LoC, RHD officials said.

RHD in July 2019 submitted a DPP to the Road Transport and Highways Division for acquiring land and moving the utility services lines as part of preparations for starting the physical work.

But the Planning Commission asked RHD to recast the DPP and when RHD, re-submitted it to the division again after necessary changes, the division in February this year once again asked for its recast.

RHD recently resubmitted the DPP, as per which the cost for acquiring land and moving the utility services lines would be Tk 4,236.60 crore. The full amount will come from the government fund.

On the other hand, RHD in December 2020 placed a DPP for the main project. But the division in June 2021 asked RHD to recast it.

When the DPP was resubmitted, the division, holding a meeting around two months ago, asked RHD to recast it again and ensure funding for the project before moving forward with it, official sources said.

No room for talks with AL

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leave office after handing over power to a caretaker government."

Asked whether the BNP would join talks with the AL if it was invited, he said, "There is no scope for talks until the demand of holding the national election under a non-partisan interim government is met."

Enquired when the party would wage a concerted anti-government movement, Fakhrul said, "We are now holding talks with the opposition parties. So, we cannot say the exact time right now."

He alleged that the AL, like the other authoritarian governments in the world, has turned election into a farce to cling on to power.

The BNP leader said the ruling party wants to score goals in an empty field in the next general election without the participation of the opposition parties.

"She [Sheikh Hasina] wants the opposition parties not to join the election. They are used to scoring goals in empty fields and getting walkovers. We have said people will no longer accept this type of an election."

Fakhrul said BNP, as a liberal democratic party, wants to join the election but it has to be a "genuine

one, not a farce".

He said a fair and credible election cannot be held under those who stuff ballots the night before the polling day, get 154 candidates elected without voting, bar the opposition candidates from campaigning and arrest opposition leaders and activists to make the electoral field empty.

"It cannot be accepted that an election will be held by creating a reign of terror...this is how military dictators prolong their stay in power as they are afraid to go to people and seek votes. This is the reality."

Under the present circumstances, the BNP leader said there is no alternative to ousting the current government through waging a united movement by the opposition parties.

He said Hasina has been staying in power by deceiving and intimidating the country's people and resorting to falsehood.

Fakhrul said there is no reason for the BNP to be afraid of participating in fair elections. "Rather, they [Awami League] are worried that they will not be able to retain power if the election is held in a credible manner. That is the bottom line. That's why they are completely depriving people of voting rights by using various techniques and deceptions."

Only 1.5pc see conviction

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Instead of justice for his ordeal, Sabuj got nothing but frustration. "I did not get my money back, nor did the accused get punishment. I did not get justice."

This is not an isolated case of trafficking accused escaping justice. The conviction rate in human trafficking cases in Bangladesh is dismally low.

Anti-Human Trafficking Offence Tribunal of Dhaka, which started operation in March 2020, only deals with cases filed in different police stations in Dhaka Division.

Analysing its data, The Daily Star found that only around 1.5 percent of human trafficking cases it dealt with resulted in convictions.

According to the data, around 858 cases were disposed of from March 2020 to August this year and only 13 ended in convictions with 20 accused handed different jail terms.

In 2020, 37 cases were disposed of in the tribunal, and 22 were settled before the cases went to trial. In 2021, 475 cases were disposed of, of which 76 were settled before they reached the trial stage. Till August this year, 346 cases were disposed of by the tribunal in Dhaka, with 36 being settled before trial.

Bangladesh enacted the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking

Act-2012 to combat trafficking and protect victims. But it took the government nearly eight years to set up special tribunals -- as mandated by the law -- to exclusively deal with trafficking cases.

In 2020, the government also set up these special tribunals in Chattogram, Barishal, Rangpur, Khulna, Sylhet, Rajshahi for ensuring speedy trials in human trafficking cases.

However, some 5,781 cases involving 29,181 accused were still pending in all seven courts as of June, according to the home ministry's database.

WHY SUCH A LOW CONVICTION RATE?

Experts and rights activists blamed the low conviction rate on the absence of proper evidence in the charge sheet, non-appearance of witnesses, out-of-court settlements, the accused reaching a compromise with victims, and lack of expertise in dealing with the cases.

KM Sazzadul Hoque Shihab, a state lawyer of the tribunal in Dhaka, said although courts send summons to respective police stations, the law enforcers fail to produce witnesses.

"This non-appearance of witnesses is the major reason behind low convictions," he told The Daily Star.

Another major reason for low convictions is out-of-court settlements,

he said. The victims often give in to the pressure exerted by the accused.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac's Migration Program, said the absence of proper evidence and information in charge sheets resulted in low conviction rates.

"Political will is necessary for trafficking case convictions. At present, police do not treat trafficking cases as their major focus," said Shariful.

Md Nazrul Islam, special superintendent (human trafficking wing) of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), however, said there is no scope for neglecting any case.

"Sometimes it becomes difficult to prove every case beyond reasonable doubt as we cannot spend a long time on a single case. In many cases, victims do not cooperate, and so we become involved with another case."

He, however, said the compromise of the victim or the victim's family with the accused is one of the major reasons for the low conviction rate. Sometimes, the accused threaten victims and witnesses and tell them not to appear in court, while at other times victims stop the proceedings after getting back some of the money they paid to traffickers, Nazrul added.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Sources in the law enforcement agencies said a major loophole found

in the charge sheets was that the police often fail to provide clear information about the place of occurrences as they took place in foreign countries.

But SS Nazrul said that they are working to overcome the problem.

"We are now taking support and information from different international NGOs like IOM and collecting data from them. We also seek assistance from Interpol," he said.

Nazrul, however, said victims need to come to the police and speak out about problems and stop making negotiations with the accused.

"We are now trying to create awareness in this regard. Even, we have a small team from the serious crime unit of CID at the airport to give support to trafficking victims," he added.

Shariful Hasan thinks that the public prosecutors have a major role to play.

"Victims often told us that the prosecutors did not inform properly about the case hearing or when the witness needed to be produced," he said, suggesting continuous training for all stakeholders involved with the trafficking case.

Besides, special attention needs to be given at those places where a huge number of trafficking cases are registered like Dhaka, Cox's Bazar, Satkhira and Jhenaidah.

Five more die from Covid

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh reported five Covid-linked deaths with 491 fresh cases in 24 hours till yesterday morning.

The country's total fatalities rose to 29,380 with the new deaths.

The new cases raised the country's total caseload to 2,029,015, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The daily case test positivity rate declined to 10 percent from Thursday's 10.76 percent as 4,912 samples were tested.

Among the latest deceased, four were women and another was man from Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions.

The mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.45 percent and recovery rate rose slightly to 97.03 percent.

Woman killed in train accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A woman was cut under the wheels of a train on Joydevpur-Bangabandhu Bridge rail track in Tangail's Mirzapur upazila yesterday.

Komola Rani Rajbongshi, 70, of Trimohon Jelepura area, died on the spot, said Kamrul Hasan, station master of Mirzapur Railway Station.

She used to collect garbage on the rail track. Like other days, she went there yesterday, said locals.

The body was handed over to her family members, said police.

2 bodies recovered in N'ganj

A CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Police recovered the bodies of two men in Narayanganj yesterday.

The dead are Sujan Miah, 45, driver of a battery-run three-wheeler in Siddhirganj, and Momen Mollah, 33, vegetable vendor in Araihaazar, said police.

Sujan Miah did not return home after he went out with his three-wheeler on Thursday night. His slit-throat body was found around 7:30am in the city's Wapda Colony area, said Moshir Rahman, officer-in-charge of Siddhirganj Police Station.

He might have been killed by robbers, he added. Meanwhile, Momen Mollah's body was recovered from Jhaugara Murir Mill area in Araihaazar upazila.

He was hacked by a group of unidentified criminals, said Azizul Haque, officer-in-charge of Araihaazar Police Station, quoting witnesses.