



## Of OMS queues and desperation

Soaring prices of essentials force more and more people to rely on subsidised goods

SUKANTA HALDER and ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Eighty-year-old Renu Bibi left home in the capital's Lalbagh before daybreak to queue up for subsidised rice and flour sold at a truck under the government's Open Market Sale programme.

Suffering from old-age complications, the frail woman trudged to the spot near Azimpur Agrani School, fearing that the line would be too long and the goods would be sold out before her turn.

"I had to return home empty-handed the last time. I cannot afford to miss it again, because rice price is too much in the market," she said.

By 7:00am, there were at least 150 people in the queue and Renu was somewhere in the middle. The mobile shop started selling the goods at 9:00pm and she was able to score a five-kg sack of rice and a two-kg pack of flour at Tk 198, about Tk 228 less than those at the regular grocery stores.

"These will last for five days and then I might have to come again. It's nothing but my misfortune that I had to come here at this age," said the widow.

Like Renu, thousands of low-income people in Dhaka scramble for essentials at OMS mobile shops as the prices continue to soar. Many return home empty-handed

because the shops run out of goods fast.

The Directorate General of Food runs the OMS programme through its trucks and designated shops in 200 places across the capital.

Rice sells at Tk 30 a kg and flour at Tk 18 a kg. An individual can buy a maximum of 5 kg rice and 4 kg flour for Tk 222, which is less than half the price at the grocery stores.

**"I had to return home empty-handed the last time. I cannot afford to miss it again, because rice price is too much in the market."**

Eighty-year-old **Renu Bibi** of Lalbagh

From July 1 to November 10, the food ministry sold 2.92 lakh tonnes of rice and flour at subsidised prices.

According to a World Food Programme survey, 68 percent of the people in Bangladesh were struggling to buy food in August while 10 percent said they spent all of their savings buying food.

Compared to November last year, the prices of coarse rice rose by 7 percent and flour by 76 percent, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Argentina thrived under pressure in their final group-stage match against Poland yesterday, with Julian Alvarez (C) scoring the second goal in 2-0 win at Stadium 974 in Doha. Argentina will face Australia in the round of 16 while Poland, who scraped by into the last 16 despite the loss, will take on reigning world champions France.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## DECEMBER 10 RALLY BNP to meet IGP today over venue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP will meet the inspector general of police today to press again for permission to hold its December 10 rally in front of its Nayapaltan office.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police had earlier given the party permission to hold the rally at Suhrawardy Udyan, but the party remains adamant on holding it in front of its headquarters in the capital.

Expressing firm resolve, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said, "We want to clearly say that please change your [IGP's] decision, try to understand people's pulse and take initiative so that we can hold our rally at Nayapaltan."

"... Take all the necessary steps so we can conduct the rally peacefully."

He was speaking at a rally in Nayapaltan. Dhaka North and South City BNP organised it to protest the "false cases" filed against the party leaders and activists.

A BNP delegation, led by its Vice-chairman Barkatullah Bulu, will meet Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun at 1:00pm at the police headquarters.

The BNP on Tuesday was given permission to hold its rally at Suhrawardy Udyan on 26 conditions.

About why the party cannot hold the rally there, Fakhrul said, "We are not comfortable there. It is surrounded by walls and people can enter through only one gate."

"Now, it is your [the government's] responsibility to take steps and ensure we can hold our rally at Nayapaltan. Otherwise, you will have to shoulder the responsibility [for any untoward situation]."

The BNP leader said they had sent a letter to the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

## 4TH COVID SHOTS Campaign to start soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to start administering fourth Covid-19 vaccine shots, Shamsul Hoque, member secretary of the vaccine deployment committee of Directorate General of Health Services, said yesterday.

"I can say firmly that we have enough vaccines in the pipeline ... we will start administering the fourth dose shortly," he said at a press briefing at his office.

He said the World Health Organisation earlier recommended vaccinating people with the fourth dose and the National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group endorsed it.

Shamsul also said they would launch a week-long Covid vaccination campaign countrywide from today with a target to inoculate 90 lakh people.

"Those who have been waiting for their second shots and those for booster shots will receive their jabs during this campaign that ends on December 7."

The campaign has been

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## With observer's departure, Islami Bank's health worsened

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Despite being among the best-run and the most profitable bank in Bangladesh in the past decade, Islami Bank had an observer in its board the entire time.

The central bank usually appoints observers in banks whose financial health is fragile. The observer takes part in the board meetings and keeps watch on the bank's operations. The observer is withdrawn once the financial health improves.

But in the case of Islami Bank, the reverse happened: the observer was withdrawn in March 2020 without any reason and the country's largest private sector bank tumbled into chaos.

For instance, the central bank is now carrying out an investigation into Islami Bank for authorising Tk 7,246 crore in loans to nine companies in recent weeks on allegations of violating banking rules. Most of the companies used fake addresses in their loan application forms.

BB has asked not to disburse any loan to the companies until prior instruction is given to the bank.

"The central bank might have withdrawn the observer on political grounds, thinking that it was taken over by its own people," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

S Alam Group, a Chattogram-based business entity, took over the bank in January 2017. The group had appointed some representatives of "companies" under its umbrella as directors of the bank. The

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

## Kamal doesn't know what is wrong with the banking sector

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank and First Security Islami Bank lent about Tk 9,500 crore under suspicious circumstances, as reported by different media. Of the sum, Tk 7,246 crore has been taken from Islami Bank alone.

When quizzed on this and the delicate state of the banking sector on Tuesday, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told journalists: "How is the state of the banking sector reach? Let us know in writing and we will look into it."

Is this an appropriate response at a time when the banking sector's defaulted loans keep scaling new heights? Does this mean the finance minister truly does not know where the banks are failing?

"By making such an irresponsible comment, he made the problem and its solution more complicated," said Muinul Islam, a former professor of the economics department of Chittagong University.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Argentina sail into last 16

Poland pip Mexico on goal difference

AFP, Doha

Lionel Messi had a penalty saved but Argentina still advanced to the last 16 of the World Cup as Group C winners after a 2-0 victory over Poland on Wednesday.

Poland also went through as runners-up although a 2-1 win for Mexico over Saudi Arabia in the group's other game meant Czeslaw Michniewicz's side advanced only on goal difference.

Alexis Mac Allister's 46th-minute goal settled Argentina's nerves after a tense first half, before Julian Alvarez doubled their lead just over 20 minutes later.

Argentina had been unable to find a way past Wojciech Szczesny in an opening 45 minutes in which the Poland goalkeeper saved his second penalty of the tournament.

Szczesny was adjudged to have fouled Messi while stretching to reach a cross, but he dived to his left to beat away the resulting spot-kick. It was the 31st penalty Messi had failed to convert in his career.

Poland offered little attacking threat, with star striker Robert Lewandowski virtually anonymous throughout.

Instead it was left to Szczesny

to take centre stage for the Poles, denying Messi with two crucial early stops.

First Messi wriggled clear of a pack of defenders before producing a shot that flew straight at the keeper.

Then he found space to charge into the Polish box down the left, forcing Szczesny to make a save at his near post.

EARLIER YESTERDAY

TUNISIA 1 - 0 FRANCE

AUSTRALIA 1 - 0 DENMARK

Argentina continued to create the better chances in the first half and Marcos Acuna flashed a shot wide after Alvarez had also gone close to breaking the deadlock.

Szczesny had to scramble to stop Angel di Maria scoring direct from a corner, before the goalkeeper was again called into action to deny Alvarez.

Szczesny outdid himself when he dived to his left to stop Messi's penalty in the 39th minute.

He still had more to do before the half-time whistle, punching away a shot from Alvarez before

saving the follow-up from Rodrigo de Paul.

There was nothing he could do when Mac Allister broke the deadlock less than a minute after the interval.

Nahuel Molina charged down the right, then cut the ball back for Mac Allister to drill just beyond Szczesny's reach.

The goal forced Poland to show some belated attacking ambition and Kamil Glik headed just wide from a free-kick almost immediately after the restart.

Argentina continued to go in search of more goals and Alvarez scored their second after combining well with Enzo Fernandez.

Fernandez, making his first start for Argentina, picked out his team-mate, who held off a defender before lashing the ball past Szczesny.

Poland were still walking a tightrope with yellow cards potentially crucial to their chances of reaching the last 16.

Grzegorz Krychowiak went into the book in the 83rd minute but a late goal for Saudi Arabia against Mexico saw the Poles safely through on goal difference.

## DESERT FEST New tech, immediate impact



SAMAMA RAHMAN

As the minutes ticked by for another video assistant referee (VAR) review after Vinicius Jr. had scored to put Brazil ahead against Switzerland on Monday, apprehension began to

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

TODAY'S MATCHES	
Croatia v Belgium	9:00pm
Canada v Morocco	9:00pm
Japan v Spain	1:00am
Costa Rica v Germany	1:00am

সেবা ও দক্ষতার মান ক্রমাগত উন্নত থেকে উন্নততর করায়  
নন-লাইফ বীমা জগতে পাইওনিয়ার ইন্স্যুরেন্স কোম্পানী লিমিটেড  
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AAA

কোম্পানীর পরিচালনা পর্ষদ এবং সকল স্তরের কর্মকর্তা-কর্মচারীগণ এ ধারা অব্যাহত রাখতে দৃঢ় প্রতিজ্ঞ। দাবি পরিশোধের ক্ষেত্রে ব্যতিক্রমী শক্তিশালী ক্ষমতা (exceptionally strong capacity) থাকায় আজই আপনার সম্পদ পাইওনিয়ার ইন্স্যুরেন্স কোম্পানী লিমিটেড-এর সঙ্গে বীমা করে অর্থনৈতিক নিরাপত্তা ও স্বাচ্ছন্দ্য নিশ্চিত করুন।

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