



RUNAWAY FOOD INFLATION Govt at last springs into action

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The government is set to take a flurry of measures to increase the supply of basic commodities in the market as it looks to wrest the runaway inflation back to tolerable levels ahead of the polls.

The steps come following instructions from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for immediate measures to bring down inflation.

The Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, the commerce ministry wing responsible for market stabilisation, would be taking on a more proactive role, as per the discussions of the 7th meeting of the taskforce on reviewing the prices of essentials and the market situation yesterday.

From next month, TCB would be distributing 5 kilograms of rice to the 1 crore family cardholders, in addition to the 2 litres of edible oil, 1kg of sugar and 2 kgs of lentils that it currently distributes, said sources in the commerce ministry.

"While this activity plays an important role in the government's social safety net agenda, its role in market intervention is very insignificant," said Commerce Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh, who chaired the meeting at his ministry.

Subsequently, the state agency is also exploring the logistics of directly importing commodities for selling to the market, sources in the ministry told The Daily Star.

"There is a lack of proper competition in the market," the meeting attendants said quoting Ghosh.

Referring to a question about the price hike of ginger, Ghosh, during his formal briefing, replied that since ginger imports from China are suspended, there are some crises in the market.

The commerce secretary said the government remains committed to ensuring a balanced and affordable market for essential goods and products.

While TCB does not have the institutional capacity to carry out this role, the move, which would be outside of the government's social safety net schemes, can help cool down the overheated kitchen markets, said ministry sources.

For instance, the price of onions soared 93.33 percent in the local market over the past year, whereas it dropped by 63 percent in the global market.

Similarly, garlic is 92.86 percent dearer in the local market now than a year ago. Garlic price dropped 16 percent in the global market.

The price of whole wheat increased by 12.63 percent, whereas it dropped 35 percent in the global market over the past year, according to a report presented at the meeting on the current supply situation of consumer goods.

Similarly, the price increase of all commodities was found to be

STEPS TO CUSHION POOR FROM FOOD INFLATION

- TCB family cardholders to also get 5kg rice at subsidised rates from next month
- Reduced tax incidence on sugar and edible oil imports sought
- BB to ensure smooth LC opening for essentials
- Ginger to be imported from Myanmar
- Special quota sought from India for six items
- TCB mulling direct import and retailing of commodities

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WHY AREN'T PRICES OF ESSENTIALS FALLING LOCALLY? B1



Election materials being taken to the Baptist Mission Boys' High School polling centre in Barishal city yesterday. The Barishal City Corporation goes to polls today.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

All eyes on Barishal, Khulna out of focus

STAR REPORT

Barishal and Khulna cities go to polls today. In Barishal, competition will be tough between Awami League mayor nominee Abul Khair Abdullah and Islami Andolon Bangladesh's Mufti Syed Faizul, city dwellers said.

But in Khulna, no one is likely to come close to AL mayoral candidate Talukder Abdul Khaleque. However, those running for the post of councillors will face fierce competition, locals said.

Even though the election campaign ended on Saturday, large numbers of ruling AL activists were seen on the streets and some of them were asking people for votes yesterday.

Interestingly, the 18 expelled local BNP leaders running for councillors and several others known as BNP and Jatiya Party men have also been asking people to vote for the AL mayor nominee.

Locals said people of other parties were campaigning for the AL because they wanted to be elected as councillors without crossing the ruling party activists before the polls.

Mortuza Abedin, general secretary of Barishal City JP, who is running for councillor in ward-2, requested people to vote for the AL mayor nominee, they added.

Contacted, Mortuza said no such thing happened.

Locals said expelled BNP leader Shah Aminul Islam from ward-19 also sought vote for "boat", the AL electoral symbol.

Aminul said, "If anyone votes for 'boat', what can I do?"

Nevertheless, internal feud and mistrust among AL supporters remain a concern for the party.

The lack of genuine cooperation from Mayor Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah and his father Abul Hasnat Abdullah is worrying the AL camp, said insiders.

There is an allegation that at least 15 of Sadiq's followers, who are councillor aspirants, have worked against AL mayoral candidate Khair.

Khair kept some of his party men, who are followers of Sadiq, out of his campaign trail.

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BARISHAL CITY

Voters: 276,298

Polling stations: 126

Mayor candidates: 7

Councillor candidates: 116

Councillor candidates (reserved): 42



KHULNA CITY

Voters: 535,529

Polling stations: 289

Mayor candidates: 5

Councillor candidates: 136

Councillor candidates (reserved): 39

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