



## Observers may lend credibility to elections

CEC says in letter to the EU

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local and foreign observers may add credibility to the fairness of an election, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal wrote in a letter sent to the European Union yesterday.

The EU last week informed the Election Commission that it would not send a fully-fledged mission to observe Bangladesh's upcoming national election.



**Habibul Awal**  
Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal wrote in a letter sent to the European Union yesterday.

The CEC sent the letter yesterday in response to that.

"As I appreciate the EU decision on the subject, I feel urged to assure you that with required assistance received from the government, the Election Commission will exert its best to ensure free, fair, participatory and credible elections. The government is also repeatedly making its pledges to achieve this end.

Nevertheless, observation by local and foreign observers may help add credence to the status of fairness of election so as to make that credible

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# Price capping a windfall for syndicates?

Govt move fails for lack of strong oversight on suppliers

THE PRICE MISMATCH					
GOVT-FIXED PRICE			PRICE IN REALITY		
	Tk 64-65 per kg		Tk 12 per piece		Tk 1,284 12kg cylinder
	Tk 70-80 per kg		Tk 12.5-13 per piece		Tk 1,500-1,600 12kg cylinder
	Tk 35-36 per kg		Tk 825 5 litres		Tk 27 per kg
	Tk 42-45 per kg		Tk 780-830 5 litres		Tk 30-32 per kg
	Tk 130 per kg		Tk 100 per piece		Tk 100 per bag
	Tk 135-140 per kg		Tk 140-150 per piece		Tk 130-170 per bag



"Market works at its own pace — it is driven by three things: supply, demand and expectation. So the government cannot control the market if it wants."

Ahsan H Mansur  
Executive director  
Policy Research Institute

PRICE SOURCES:  
TCB, KITCHEN MARKETS, RETAIL SHOPS

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and  
SUKANTA HALDER

Every time the government tried to fix the price of a good or service, it unwittingly ended up offering a financial bonanza to the market syndicates. From potato to rawhide, from LPG to onions, from fertiliser to sugar, from saline to edible oil, there is rarely any success to speak of.

This begs the question: why does the government keep resorting to this measure instead of addressing the root of the problem?

Economists suggest that the government removes all problems in the supply chain instead and monitors whether market players are following competition rules so that the market can perform efficiently.

The government's failure in capping prices was once again exposed after it set the price of eggs, potatoes and onions on September 14.

Eleven days later, none of the three are selling at the set prices.

This in no way is an exception. Take the case

of the price of rawhide that the government fixes every year ahead of Eid-ul-Azha.

But that price is never honoured under the guise of higher transportation costs, a curious price hike of salt, and a significant increase in workers' wages.

It is the same case in the agriculture sector, where the government sets the prices of fertilisers as it provides subsidies. But the farmers almost always have to pay more, bumping up production costs and prices for consumers.

Since last year, the Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers Association and the Association of Association of Bankers, Bangladesh have been fixing the dollar rate on unofficial direction from the central bank. But Bangladesh Bank inspections found banks were not following the rate.

Since 2021, the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, the regulatory body for the energy sector, has been fixing every month the price of liquefied petroleum gas, which is commonly sold in 12kg cylinders.

But that price exists just on paper now in the face of lax oversight on importers, distributors, and retailers.

The government fixed the price of the 12kg LPG cylinder at Tk 1,284 for this month. But it is actually selling at Tk 1,600.

The Daily Star spoke with two LPG distributors and three retailers and all of them said they were buying LPG cylinders at a higher rate than the price fixed by the BERC. And they are passing on the higher costs to the end users.

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid at a programme yesterday admitted that LPG was being sold at higher prices. He also threatened to revoke dealers' licences if need be.

In August, the government slashed the prices of soybean oil and sugar. The prices of soybean oil and sugar were trimmed by Tk 5 to Tk 174 a litre and Tk 135 a kg respectively.

While visiting two kitchen markets in the capital on Friday, it was found that loose

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## DENGUE: DHAKA HOSPITALS

# Still grappling with patients from outside

DGHS directive to not send patients to Dhaka unheeded

DIPAN NANDY

Though the Directorate General of Health Services recently requested health officials outside the capital not to refer patients to Dhaka, the number of patients from outside still remains high.

According to health officials, over 30 percent of dengue patients being treated in Dhaka are from outside the capital.

Currently, at least 3,596 patients are being treated in 20 public and 57 private hospitals in the city, with over half of them in public hospitals, shows DGHS data.

Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general (planning and development) of the DGHS, said, "We have strictly instructed all health officials outside Dhaka to ensure the treatment of critical patients [in their districts or cities] instead of sending them to Dhaka. All public

According to health officials, over 30 percent of dengue patients being treated in Dhaka are from outside the capital.

hospitals, including upazila health complexes, have adequate arrangements to treat dengue patients."

Kabir said that wasting time transporting critical dengue patients to Dhaka was futile. "This puts the patients' lives at risk."

Speaking to this correspondent at the DNCC dengue-dedicated hospital, Panna, a patient's attendant, said she brought her dengue-infected brother to Dhaka from Gazipur due to inadequate treatment there.

Currently, 270 people are being treated for dengue there.

Colonel Dr AKM Johirul Hossain Khan, acting director of the hospital, said the number of dengue patients has been on the rise this month, with around 30 percent being from outside Dhaka.

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Despite several warnings by the city corporations themselves regarding the dangers of stagnant water becoming breeding grounds for mosquitoes, the fountain basins of the Kadam Foara near the High Court premises are filled with rainwater collected over the past few days with no sign of removal as yet. This sheer negligence by the authorities concerned increases the chances of mosquito-borne diseases like dengue spreading further. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Chandpur minister siding with illegal sand lifters

Alleges river commission chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People illegally extracting sand from the Meghna have links with a female minister from Chandpur, said the chief of the National River Conservation Commission yesterday without naming the minister.

The only female minister from Chandpur is the education minister. NRCC Chairman Manjur Ahmed Chowdhury also said river encroachers have political clout behind them.

He was addressing an event titled "Rivers of Bangladesh: Definition and Number" at the Cirdap Auditorium in the capital.

"One person extracted 668 crore cubic feet (cft) of sand from the Meghna. That sand is worth over Tk 6,000 crore. His theft was legitimised when he was asked to pay a royalty of Tk 267 crore," said Manjur.

Termining the encroachers "hyenas", the NRCC chief said, "They have attacked the Meghna in packs. Efforts are being made to extract

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## No strains on US-Bangla ties

Momen on US visa restrictions; home boss has no info on individuals facing visa curbs

STAR REPORT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday ruled out any tension between Bangladesh and the US after Washington implemented its visa policy on people deemed "complicit in undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh".

"We have no tension with the US," he told reporters in Manhattan, noting that the US will not grant visas to those who will try to foil the upcoming election in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Momen mentioned that US President Joe Biden wants to strengthen the existing friendly relations with Bangladesh in the next 50 years.

In an interview with Al Jazeera on



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Arrives in Bangladesh

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26.09.2023

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