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Veggies too pricey even in mid-winter

Low-income people forced to buy less; traders pin blame on inadequate supply

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

Prices of almost all vegetables have gone up in Dhaka's kitchen markets over the last two weeks, hitting the consumers hard, though it is the peak season for winter vegetables.

This is unusual because the vegetable prices remain low at this time of the year.

The Daily Star yesterday went to different kitchen markets and found each kg of brinjal was being sold for Tk 70-100, beans for Tk 60-100, tomatoes for Tk 50-60, bitter gourd for Tk 80-120, potatoes for Tk 55-60, and onions (local) for Tk 80-100. A cauliflower was available for Tk 40-60, a cabbage for Tk 40-50 and a bottle gourd for Tk 70-100.

These markets are in Shewrapara, Kazipara, Ibrahimpur, Kochukhet, and Karwan Bazar.

Prices of these items have increased by at least Tk 10-20 per kg from two weeks ago.

Quoting farmers, traders said vegetable production and harvesting were affected due to dense fog, which caused the price

hike.

Mofizur Rahman, a trader at Karwan Bazar, said the supply of vegetables is inadequate.

A field-level agriculture officer in Sherpur of Bogura, famous for vegetable production, attributed this situation to increased costs of production and transport.

Seeking anonymity as he is not authorised to talk about this, the official said labour cost and prices of agri-inputs, including fertilisers and seeds, have gone up, impacting the production cost.

Vegetable prices are two to three times higher compared to the previous year, said Jamal Uddin, a trader at Ibrahimpur kitchen market in Dhaka.

"At this time last year, potatoes were sold for Tk 20 a kg, but now I have to sell the item for Tk 60. Onions were sold for Tk 30-35 a kg, but it is now selling for Tk 90," he told The Daily Star.

Prices of live chickens and eggs have also gone up. Customers were yesterday buying broiler chicken for Tk 200-210 a kg

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PHOTO: REUTERS

A relative mourns next to the body of a Palestinian killed in an Israeli strike in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

'Polls neither genuine nor competitive'

Say 6 civil society bodies, call for fresh elections

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six international civil society organisations (CSO) voiced their deep concern regarding the January 7 national polls saying that the elections were neither genuine nor competitive and raised serious questions about its adherence to democratic principles and international election standards.

In a press statement yesterday, they said numerous reports and evidence point to widespread irregularities in the lead-up to and on election day, including voter suppression and manipulation of results, which severely undermine the fundamental principles of democracy.

The civil society platforms appealed to the international community to push for a fresh election in Bangladesh that embodies the principles of freedom, fairness, participation, and inclusivity, resonating with the genuine will of the Bangladeshi people.

They also called upon the Bangladesh government to release all political prisoners, who have been put behind bars in fabricated cases simply for political dissent, to foster a civic space that allows individuals and groups to freely exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

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Fears of wider war grow as US, UK strike Yemen

Houthis vow retaliation after dozens of strikes hit Iran-backed forces

AGENCIES

US and British warplanes, ships and submarines launched dozens of air strikes across Yemen overnight in retaliation against Iran-backed Houthi forces for attacks on Red Sea shipping.

The air strikes add to escalating fears of wider conflict in the region, where violence involving Tehran-aligned groups in Yemen as well as in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria has surged since the Israel-Hamas conflict began in early October.

Hamas said it will hold Britain and the United States "responsible for the repercussions on regional security."

The US, Britain and eight other allies said the strikes aimed to "de-escalate tensions". But Iran and numerous other countries in the region and beyond condemned the Western action or voiced concern that unrest could worsen.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan described the strikes as disproportionate and said: "It is as if they aspire to turn the Red Sea into a bloodbath."

News of the air strikes sent oil prices up four percent. Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB bank, cited

market fears that "the region is on an unpredictable escalating path".

The Huthis have carried out a growing number of attacks on what they deem to be Israeli-linked shipping in the key Red Sea international trade route since the Israeli offensive on Gaza Strip began.

- US says 60 targets hit with more than 100 precision strikes
- Iran, Russia, Turkey, Arab states condemn strike; US defends 'defensive action'
- Oil prices up four percent

Some 12 percent of global maritime trade normally passes through the Bab al-Mandeb strait, but since mid-November the amount of shipping containers has dropped by 70 percent, according to maritime experts.

The rebels have controlled a major part of Yemen since a civil war erupted there in 2014

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Attempts made to meddle in polls here

Says Russia

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said there were external attempts to influence the outcome of Bangladesh's election.

At a regular briefing, she said Moscow made similar statements on November 22 and December 15 last year, according to a verified Facebook post of the Russian embassy in Dhaka yesterday.

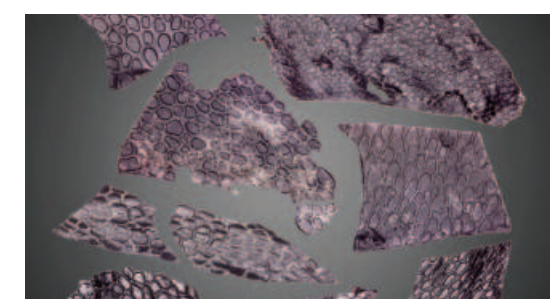
Zakharova said results of the parliamentary election held on January 7 in Bangladesh were announced and the ruling Awami League secured 222 out of the 300 seats in the parliament, winning the majority of votes.

"We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the people of Bangladesh on the successful outcome of the election," she said.

"Unfortunately, some opposition parties chose not to participate in the election process."

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Rare skin fossil is oldest by 130 million years



CNN ONLINE

The world's oldest known fossilised skin belonged to a species of reptile that lived before dinosaurs roamed the Earth, a new study has found.

The fragment of fossilised reptile skin was found in a limestone cave in Oklahoma, United States, and is at least 130 million years older than the oldest previously known skin fossil.

Researchers from the University of Toronto Mississauga identified a skin fragment with a pebbled surface which is similar to crocodile skin, according to a press release published Thursday.

Dating from around 289 million years ago, it is the oldest known sample of a preserved epidermis, which is the outside layer of skin on terrestrial reptiles, birds and mammals. The epidermis "was an important evolutionary adaptation in the transition to life on land," reads the release.

"Every now and then we get an exceptional opportunity to glimpse back into deep time," said first author Ethan Mooney, a paleontology graduate student at the University of Toronto, in the release.

Mild cold wave to continue

Mercury may rise slightly tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mild cold wave will continue to sweep over Chuadanga, Dinajpur, Kishoreganj and Pabna districts for a few more days, Bangladesh Meteorological Department said yesterday.

However, the temperatures may slightly rise from tomorrow, said meteorologist Shahinul Islam.

The lowest 9.6 degrees Celsius was recorded in Chuadanga and Nikli upazila of Kishoreganj yesterday.

Besides, temperatures will not dip significantly across the country in January, he said, adding that moderate to thick fog may be seen at different places after midnight, and in places the sky will not be clear until midday.

Road, water and air traffic will be disrupted by the fog, he added.

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A small group of homeless people protecting themselves against the cold with blankets and warm clothes in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday morning. A dip in temperatures coupled with cold winds is disrupting the lives of low-income people across the country.

IMF FORECAST FOR 2024 Global economy to be 'resilient' but will grow slowly

REUTERS, Washington

Global economic growth will remain "resilient" this year after a stronger-than-expected 2023, the International Monetary Fund said on Thursday, but work is needed to boost global growth rates above an anemic three percent range in the medium term.

IMF spokesperson Julie Kozack told a news briefing that the global economy appeared headed for a "soft landing" with inflation subsiding and labor markets resilient, but low-income countries could still fall further behind.

The IMF will present its updated World Economic Outlook (WEO) in South Africa on January 30.

The World Bank on Tuesday issued a gloomy 2024 outlook, forecasting that global GDP growth would slow for the third year in a row to 2.4 percent, which will leave poverty reduction goals at risk.

Kozack said dire predictions of recessions in many regions that were prevalent a year ago did not materialize in 2023.

"So, we've had a relatively resilient global economy so far. We expect that resilience to continue into 2024," Kozack said, noting that inflation was coming down.

But the news is "not all good" because recent and near-term growth of about three percent is lower than previous, pre-Covid global average growth rates of around 3.8 percent.

"So we do have work to do to lift global growth, especially over the medium term," Kozack said, adding that the situation pointed to the need for sound policies and reforms that could raise productivity.