

ESSENTIALS IN RAMADAN Dollar crisis, hoarding jack up prices

SUKANTA HALDER and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

With Ramadan less than two months away, the prices of chickpeas, dried peas, dates, and soybean oil have increased in Dhaka and Chattogram.

The sale of these goods peaks in Ramadan, and since these are imported from overseas, the dollar shortage has resulted in a supply crunch, according to importers.

Some traders stockpiling the goods are also responsible for the supply shortage, they added.

According to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, which collects data from 12 kitchen markets in the capital, the prices of 1kg sachets of refined flour rose by 3.57 percent, and unpacked refined flour by 8 percent since mid-December.

The price of moong dal has increased by 2 to 13 percent, depending on the variety, chickpeas and dried peas by 3 percent, and dates by 10 percent.

Last week, the Bangladesh Vegetable Oil Refiners and Vanaspati Manufacturers Association raised the price of soybean oil by Tk 4 a litre without prior notice.

Traders in Chattogram's Khatunganj wholesale market say each kg of chickpeas now sells for Tk 80 to Tk 85, a rise of around Tk 10 in a month. Dried peas now cost Tk 65-70 a kg, a rise of Tk 3-Tk 4.

Abdur Razzak, an importer based in Khatunganj, said compared to last year, the price of dates have increased by 60-90 percent, depending on the variety. This has happened partly because the import duty has almost doubled, he said.

While people in the country are having to pay more for certain everyday essentials, prices in the international market have been stable, said several importers and traders.

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PRICE HIKE YEAR-ON-YEAR	
Sugar	28.38 %
Dates	16.67 %
Moong dal	13.04 %
Lentils	7.50 %
Chickpeas	5.71 %

SOURCE: TRADING CORPORATION OF BANGLADESH



A woman checking a wood-burning stove, made out of cement, outside a shop in Dhaka's Dholaiapar yesterday. Traders say sales of these stoves have gone up recently due to a gas crisis in parts of the city. People, particularly from low-income families, are buying this product for Tk 500 to Tk 700 each.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

IMF'S \$4.7B LOAN

Only one condition missed for third tranche

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh has met all but one quantitative target set for December 2023 by the International Monetary Fund to qualify for the third instalment of the \$4.7 billion loan.

As before, the government failed to keep the minimum net international reserves (NIR), which is a mandatory condition. At the end of 2023, the NIR needed to be at least \$17.78 billion. But the country fell short of the target by \$58 million.

It, however, has met the targets for tax revenue collection, which it missed last time, according to a finance ministry official.

On December 12 last year, the IMF board authorised the disbursement of the second instalment of \$681 million despite the failure to meet the minimum NIR and tax revenue collection targets.

The review mission for the third instalment is expected to arrive in March. The team will review the government's performance against the targets set for

December 2023.

The difference in NIR against the target might narrow in the final calculation, said a central bank official.

"As the gap in reserves is minimal, it will not be an issue for the release of the third instalment," he said, citing the case for the second instalment that saw the IMF staff mission give a waiver for falling short of the NIR target in June last year.

Usually, a waiver is sought from the IMF board if a loan-seeking country

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COVID-19

Infection rate goes up by 5pc in a month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With 13 new cases recorded yesterday, the Covid-19 infection rate has shot up to 5.83 percent from last month's 0.66.

On Friday, the infection rate was 5.12 percent, showing an upward tick in the daily positivity rate.

Health officials are yet to determine whether the new subvariant JN.1 is causing the rise in the infection rate, but they have suggested maintaining hygiene.

The World Health Organization has already named JN.1 as a "variant of interest" or "variant to watch for", as it is spreading fast.

So far, five cases of the variant have been detected in Bangladesh.

Amid the surge of the JN.1 variant globally, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 on January 2 suggested the authorities concerned take

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BUSINESS

Economic ills demand urgent action: analysts

The new government urgently needs to establish the rule of law, end the energy crisis, attract foreign direct investments, and control inflation to restore macroeconomic stability, said speakers yesterday.

Ensuring the safety of capital, reining in default loans and stabilising exchange rate are the other major challenges that need to be taken care of, they said.

STORY ON B1



PHOTO: COLLECTED

The wreckage of the microbus that was hit by a bus on Dashuria-Kushtia highway in Pabna yesterday.

DU student, BCL leaders among 12 dead on roads

STAR REPORT

At least 12 people, including two female tourists and four Chhatra League activists, were killed while scores were injured in separate road accidents in six districts yesterday.

In Bandarban's Ruma upazila, two tourists, including a Dhaka University student, were killed and 11 others injured when an SUV, locally known as chander gari, plunged into a ditch yesterday morning.

The dead were identified as Firoza Khatun, 53, and Zoyanab Khatun, 24, a master's student of DU's criminology department.

The injured are: Firoza's daughter Nusrat Jahan Rizvy, 34; Rafan, 12; Ushasi Nag, 15; Joba Roy, 45; Mahfuza Islam Rupa, 45; Amena Begum, 60; Tahmina Tanjim Talukder, 19; Tannim, 21; Anjuman Haque, 35; Etu, 16; and Swarna, 23.

They were taken to Bandarban Sadar Hospital, according to the local administration.

Bandarban Ruma Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Syed Mahbubul

Haque said a group of 57 tourists from an organisation - "Bhromon Konnya - Travelletes of Bangladesh" - went to Bandarban's Keokradon in five vehicles on Friday and spent the night there.

The accident occurred around 11:00am yesterday when one of the vehicles carrying 13 tourists lost control and fell into a ditch in Darjeeling Para area on the way to Bandarban town.

In Sylhet, four BCL activists were killed after a microbus carrying them plunged into a roadside ditch on the Sylhet-Tamabil Road in Jaintiapur upazila around 11:45pm on Friday.

The dead are Jubayer Ahsan, 26; Nehal Paul, 25; Mehadi Hasan Tomal, 24; and Ali H Sumon, 24, said Mohammad Shahidullah, superintendent of police of Sylhet Highway Region.

All the deceased were activists of Jaintiapur upazila Chhatra League, said the upazila's Chairman Kamal Ahmed.

"They were on their way to the

Tamabil Land Port when the driver of the private car lost control and the vehicle fell into a roadside ditch," Kamal said quoting locals and eyewitnesses.

In Pabna, two officials of Ishwardi EPZ were killed and three others were injured when a bus hit a microbus carrying the officials on the Dashuria-Kushtia highway yesterday morning.

The deceased - Amit Kundu, 40, and Nasim Hossain, 45 - were officials of Renesa Limited.

Ashish Kuman Sanyal, officer-in-charge of Pakshey Highway Police Station, said a Pabna-bound bus from Kushtia hit a microbus in Mirkamari area of Ishwardi around 8:00am.

There was dense fog when the accident occurred, he added.

In Cox's Bazar, a 72-year-old Rohingya man was killed when an autorickshaw ran him over in front of Kutupalong High School in Ukhiya upazila around 1:30pm yesterday, said Shamim Hossain,

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Cold snap may ease from today

All schools to remain closed in Rajshahi dist today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The intensity of cold across the country is likely to lessen from today as the day temperature has started to rise with the clearance of fog.

However, a Bangladesh Meteorological Department forecast says a mild cold wave sweeping over the north and northeast areas of the country may spread to other areas.

Bazlur Rashid, a meteorologist of the Met office, yesterday said the day temperature is likely to increase because of the clearing of the fog.

"As a result, the intensity of the cold would lessen," he told The Daily Star.

He also said rain is likely in different parts of the country after January 25 and another mild cold wave may sweep over the country after January 27.

According to the Met's 72-hour forecast commencing from 6:00pm yesterday, a mild cold wave was sweeping over the districts of Rajshahi, Naogaon, Dinajpur and Moulvibazar and it may spread.

It said moderate to thick fog may occur over the country from midnight to morning and may continue until noon today in certain areas. Day and night temperatures may rise slightly over the country.

SCHOOLS CLOSE IN RAJSHAHI

All schools in Rajshahi district will be closed today due to low temperatures. The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education in Rajshahi and the office of District Primary Education made separate announcements around 10:00pm yesterday.

The secondary schools will remain closed tomorrow as well.

The temperature dipped to 9.8 degrees Celsius in Rajshahi and 9.5 degrees in Sreemangal, Moulvibazar, yesterday.

IMMORTAL MEMORY WITH DEEPEST LOVE



MAHABUB ALAM MRIDUL
(1997-2021)
Director, Walton Group

Today, 21 January is the third death anniversary of Mr. Mahabub Alam Mridul, the Honorable Director of Walton Group. On this day, 2021 at the tender age of only 24, he left us for heavenly abode. With his sudden demise, we have lost a promising young entrepreneur. It was his dream to work on new innovations in the development of the Automobile Industry and devote himself to the welfare of the country and the people.

We pray from the bottom of our hearts that his departed soul be granted Jannah where it finds eternal peace, Ameen.

