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SHAH CEMENT

Onion price soars even in peak season

Potato, egg also get pricier

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

It is peak harvest season, but the price of onion has soared by Tk 10 per kilogram at the capital's kitchen markets over the last three days.

Retailers at Karwan Bazar and Shewrapara kitchen markets in Dhaka sold onion for Tk 90-100 a kg yesterday, up from Tk 80-90 three days ago.

Sajib Sheikh, a wholesaler at Karwan Bazar, said he sold onions to retailers for Tk 82 per kg yesterday, an increase by Tk 10 from three days ago.

The general secretary of Shyambazar Onion Traders' Association, Abdul Mazed, blamed India's ban on onion export since December 8 for the rise in price.

Md Tarikul Islam, a senior agricultural marketing officer in Pabna, said farmers had harvested premature crops just to maximise profits. This has led to a supply shortage, causing the price to go up, he added.

"Traders are visiting farmers' houses to buy onion, but the growers don't have enough stock. The competition among the traders is driving onion prices up," the official said.

The price of potato has gone up as well during peak harvest season.

	YESTERDAY	A WEEK AGO
ONION (PER KG)	Tk 90-100	Tk 80-90
POTATO (PER KG)	Tk 45-50	Tk 40-45
BROWN EGG (DOZEN)	Tk 140	Tk 135

Retailers at the capital's kitchen markets yesterday sold the tuber for Tk 45-50 per kg, an increase by Tk 5 from about a week ago.

Mohammad Sabuj, a wholesaler at Karwan Bazar, said he sold potato for Tk 38 per kg to retailers yesterday, up from Tk 34 a week ago.

Consumers yesterday had to spend Tk 140 for buying a dozen of brown eggs, up from Tk 135 last week.

On October 28 last year, India imposed a minimum export price of \$800 per tonne for onions – much higher than the prices at which importers were buying – to curb export and increase domestic availability and to keep prices in check until December 31.

On December 8, the country extended the ban on onion exports till March 31 with the same purpose.

RICE PRICES UNCHANGED

Prices of rice remained unchanged at Dhaka's kitchen markets yesterday compared to the last three weeks despite the government's deadline for traders to cut prices within four days.

On January 17, rice traders and millers pledged to reduce prices after Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder set the deadline for price cuts.

Retail prices of the staple went up by Tk 2-8 per kg three weeks ago, placing a further burden on the low- and middle-income people already grappling with increased prices of essentials.

In wholesale markets, the prices dropped by Tk 1 to 1.5 per kg over the last few days, but this has yet to have an impact on the retail prices.

Traders think it will take at least a week for retail prices to drop because the retailers are still selling from their previous stock purchased at higher prices.

Nirod Boron Saha, president of the Rice and Paddy Stockists and Wholesalers Association in Naogaon, a major rice wholesale hub in the north, said they cut rice prices by Tk 1-1.5 a kg due to pressure from the government.

He, however, pointed out that paddy prices are high this season.

"There is no scope for reducing the rice prices if the paddy prices do not drop," he added.



Fatema Begum returns home with her child by a boat after fetching water for her family from a tube well at Chakgona village of Bagerhat's Rampal upazila on Thursday. Several thousand residents of four villages, affected by salinity for many years, depend on this tube well for safe water. Fatema goes to Chakgona, about two kilometres away from her home, once a week to collect water. Villagers rely on fishing and other manual works to earn a living as crops cannot be grown on their land.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

CLUSTER ENTRY TEST

24 univs halt application process

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The application process of undergraduate admission test for the 2023-24 academic year at 24 public universities, which are under GST (general, science, and technology) cluster, has been halted due to "unavoidable" circumstances, said the admission committee.

Prof Md Anwar Hossain, vice-chancellor of Jessore University of Science and Technology and also convener of GST admission committee, told The Daily Star yesterday that the process slated to begin on Monday has been halted temporarily and a new schedule will be announced after a meeting of the committee on January 31.

He said, based on discussions on specific

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Suez traffic drops 42pc after Houthi attacks: UN

AFP, United Nations

The volume of commercial traffic passing through the Suez Canal has fallen more than 40 percent in the last two months after attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels, according to the United Nations, raising concerns for global trade.

The Iran-backed Houthi say they are targeting what they consider Israeli-linked commercial and military shipping in the region in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, pushing some cargo carriers to take longer and more expensive routes to avoid attack.

"We are very concerned that the attacks on Red Sea shipping are adding tensions to global trade, exacerbating (existing) trade disruptions due to geopolitics and climate change," UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) head Jan Hoffman told reporters Thursday.

According to the UNCTAD, ships diverting from the Red Sea – sailing instead around South Africa's Cape of Good Hope – has led to a 42 percent drop in transit through the Suez Canal in the last two months.

TORTURE OF 4 MEN IN CUSTODY

Police probe finds addl SP, OC guilty

Report submitted to Shariatpur magistrate's court that'll hear the case March 10

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

An investigation has found evidence that an additional superintendent of police and an inspector had physically tortured four men in custody at a police station in Shariatpur last year.

According to the investigation report submitted to a Shariatpur court, police officers Rasel Monir and Sheikh Md Mostafizur Rahman tortured the men with a stick, hammer, and pliers at Padma Bridge South Police Station.

"There is evidence that the injuries on the victims' bodies were received while they were in police custody," reads the 19-page report written by Mahbul Alam, superintendent of police in Shariatpur.

According to medical reports by government doctors, there were numerous injury marks on the four men's bodies, including face and fingers and toes.

In May last year when the incident took place, Rasel was an additional SP in the district and Mostafizur was the OC of Padma Bridge South Police Station.

According to the probe report, police officers Rasel Monir and Sheikh Md Mostafizur Rahman tortured the men with a stick, hammer, and pliers at Padma Bridge South Police Station.

Even though SP Alam submitted the 19-page report to the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court of Shariatpur in October, the court has yet to take it into cognizance.

Moreover, a letter mentioning that the accused officers and the four men are willing to settle the matter was recently submitted to the court by the victims, said Mejbah Uddin Ahmed, a court inspector.

The court may issue an order in this regard at the next hearing of the case on March 10.

A family member of the victims, three of whom are related, said they were facing pressure to settle the matter.

Contacted, SP Alam said, "We submitted the probe report to the court, and it is up to the court to decide what happens next."

Without disclosing further details, he said, "I have found that the complaints against the officers are true to some extent."

This newspaper has seen a part of the probe report.

The victims, Bakul Chowkdar, Saddam

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CHATTOGRAM AIRPORT

Gold bars worth Tk 1.4cr found in cigarette packet



STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

National Security Intelligence (NSI) seized 14 gold bars worth Tk 1.4 crore at Shah Amanat International Airport last morning.

NSI members found the smuggled gold inside a cigarette packet that was placed on the baggage carousel, confirmed Airport Director Group Captain Taslim Ahmad.

Sources at the airport said there was a tip off about smuggled gold arriving in Chattogram on flight G9-526 of Air Arabia.

When the flight landed at 9:26am, a team of intelligence agencies, took position near a luggage conveyor belt and noticed a cigarette packet wrapped in tape on the belt at 9:55am.

After searching the packet, the gold bars weighing 1.63kg were recovered.

The gold was later handed over to the customs officials of the airport for further legal procedure, said Taslim.

Aliss leaves Sylhet baffled



STAR CORRESPONDENT

Comilla Victorians off-spinner Aliss Al Islam bamboozled Sylhet Strikers to claim a four-wicket haul that handed the hosts their third straight defeat in this year's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Sent in to bat, Comilla mustered a modest 130-8 with Imrul Kayes top-scoring with a 28-ball 30. Left arm spinner Samit Patel took three wickets for 16 runs in his four overs.

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Comilla Victorians spinner Aliss Al Islam runs off in celebration of one of his four wickets against Sylhet Strikers in their Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Hubble finds water vapour in small planet's atmosphere



AFP, Washington

The Hubble Space Telescope has observed the smallest planet outside our solar system to contain water vapour in its atmosphere, a "landmark discovery" that brings astronomy a step closer to characterizing Earth-like worlds.

At around twice Earth's diameter, planet GJ 9827d orbits a red dwarf star 97 light-years away in the constellation Pisces, Nasa and the European Space Agency (ESA) said in statements on Thursday.

The team behind the finding are examining two scenarios: either the planet is a "mini-Neptune" with a hydrogen-rich atmosphere laced with water, or it's a warmer version of Jupiter's moon Europa, which contains twice as much water as Earth under its crust.

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