

Onion prices drop a little

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

The prices of onions have come down in the country's markets despite India's indefinite ban on the export of the vegetable.

The onion prices have fallen by Tk 5-8 in wholesale and retail markets over the last two days.

On March 23, the neighbouring country extended its ban on onion exports indefinitely -- a surprise move that comes ahead of a general election for which the prices of onions increased here and remained high for two days.

Two days later, the prices started falling. Per kg onions are now being sold at Tk 52-60, down from Tk 60-65 in the retail markets, while per kg onions are being sold at Tk 42-52, down from Tk 47-53 in the wholesale markets, reports our correspondents after visiting the capital's Karwan Bazar, Kochukhet, Ibrahimpur, Shewrapara, and Mirpur 11 kitchen markets.

Most traders say the supply has increased while others cite a decrease in demand as the reason behind the price drop.

Sajib Sheikh, proprietor of M/s Matribhandar at Karwan Bazar, said that onion prices fell as people brought large quantities of onions following the extension of the export ban by India.

"As people brought large numbers of onions, the demand for the onions has now decreased, resulting in the fall in prices," he said.

Sajib used to sell 800 to 900 sacks of onions every day before three days ago; now he is selling 150 to 200 sacks.

Meanwhile, Ashraf Sarkar, an onion grower in Pabna's Sathia upazila, said three days ago he sold per kg of onion at Tk 42, but now he is selling per kg onion at Tk 37.

"I used to sell onions at Pabna's Sathia local market. But as customers were asking for low prices, I took the onion to Karwan Bazar. I had to spend additional money for transportation but I could not make a profit," he added.

Sultanan Nasira, assistant director (Market Link-1) (Additional Duties) at the Directorate of Agricultural Marketing, said the prices of onions increased after the announcement of the export ban by India and remained high for two days.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hugs Gyalsey Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck, son of the Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. PM's sister Sheikh Rehana plays with Gyalsey Ugyen Wangchuck, another son of the king, at the Jamuna State Guest House on Independence Day.

PHOTO: ROYAL OFFICE FOR MEDIA, BHUTAN

FACEBOOK PAGES

Myanmar army behind hate speech against Rohingyas

Finds UN probe

AFP, Geneva

Myanmar's military was behind dozens of seemingly unrelated Facebook pages spewing hate speech against the Rohingyas prior to its dramatic 2017 crackdown against the mostly Muslim minority, a UN probe found yesterday.

Facebook has long been accused of helping spread vast amounts of hate speech against the Rohingyas before hundreds of thousands of them were driven into neighbouring Bangladesh in a crackdown now subject to a UN genocide investigation.

In late 2021, Rohingya refugees sued Facebook for \$150 billion, claiming the social network failed to stem the hate speech directed against them.

Now, the United Nations' Independent

Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) says there is clear evidence that Myanmar's military secretly orchestrated the hate speech campaign.

The military had in a "systematic and coordinated" manner "spread material designed to instil fear and hatred of the Rohingya minority", the investigators said in a fresh report.

"It accomplished this by creating a clandestine network of pages on a social media site with the potential to reach an audience of millions."

The IIMM was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 to collect evidence of the most serious international crimes and prepare files for criminal prosecution.

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REMARKS ON DELHI CM

India summons US diplomat

Delhi HC to hear on April 3
Kejriwal's plea against his arrest

AGENCIES

India yesterday summoned a top United States diplomat after Washington said it was "closely watching" events following the jailing of a senior opposition leader weeks ahead of parliamentary elections.

The US State Department had urged India to ensure a "fair, transparent, and timely legal process" for Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of the capital Delhi, who was arrested last week in connection with a long running corruption probe.

"We take strong objection to the remarks," India's foreign ministry said in a statement. "In diplomacy, states are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others".

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MOULVIBAZAR ELECTROCUTION

8-year-old lone survivor also dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The eight-year-old girl who lost five of her family members in an electrocution incident in their Moulvibazar home just a day ago, died with burn injuries in Dhaka early yesterday.

Sonia Sultana, a student of class two at Goalbari North Government Primary School in Juri upazila, died at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery around 4:00am, her uncle Abdul Aziz said.

She was the lone member of the family to survive.

"I brought the electrocuted child Sonia Sultana to Dhaka from Sylhet for advanced treatment. She died today [Tuesday] around 4:00am. I could not save her."

Her uncle Abdul Aziz said Sonia was first admitted to Osmani Medical College Hospital in Sylhet. Doctors there said 25 percent of her body was burnt. She was taken to Dhaka last night for better treatment and died shortly after reaching there, Abdul Aziz said.

In Tuesday's incident in Goalbari village, Sonia's father Foizur Rahman, 52, mother Siri Begum, 45, brother Sayem, 10, and sisters Samia Begum, 16, and Sabina, 13, died of electrocution.

Police said a live electric wire fell on the tin-roofed house of Foizur during a storm around 5:00am. A fire broke out there afterwards.

As the victims were trying to get out, they were electrocuted to death, said police.

Hit by bus, on-duty traffic cop dies in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

An on-duty traffic police constable was killed and his colleague injured after a speedy bus hit them on the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway in Narayanganj's Arahazar upazila yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Abdul Gafur and the injured Abdul Mannan, both constables of the Narayanganj district traffic police.

The incident occurred in the Chhanpara area around 12:30pm when the two constables were performing duties on the highway, said Ahsan Ullah, officer-in-charge of Arahazar Police Station.

They were rushed to a private hospital in Ruppang upazila where Gafur was pronounced dead on arrival. The injured Mannan was given treatment and is out of danger, the OC added.

Police seized the bus of Shohag Paribahan but its driver and staff managed to flee the scene.

Legal action would be taken in this connection, said the police official.

Pirates bring

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He said they had information that the crew were being well treated by the pirates and that they were allowing the crew to stay in their cabins.

A source said KSRM Group officials are holding talks with the pirates through a third party and that the talks were progressing positively. Efforts were being made to end the crisis before Eid, the source said.

According to experts who have experience in merchant marine service, the pirates have now anchored the ship very close to the Somali coast and they are under pressure as European Union Naval Forces recently deployed warships in the vicinity, keeping MV Abdullah under close watch. Somali security forces have also conducted raids to isolate the pirates.

They believe that the parties engaged by the ship's owner would try to take advantage of this situation and if the negotiation went smoothly, the release of the crew members may happen very soon.

Captain Anam Chowdhury, president of BMMOA, said the pirates and the ship's owner have engaged parties who are well experienced in dealing with such negotiations.

If the talks continue, the crisis may end soon, he hoped.

Fakhrul slams govt

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The BNP leader said the incidents once again proved that the citizens of Bangladesh have no security, and the country's independence and sovereignty are now in grave danger.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has held Bangladesh hostage to stay in power," the statement said.

Patient dies

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demand, including a rise in their allowances and safety at workplaces.

Attendants of several other patients also alleged that they were being deprived of proper services.

Contacted, RMCH Director Brig Gen FM Shamim Ahmed refuted the allegation that Mahmudul died because there were no doctors.

"The allegation is not true. A doctor attended him during his admission, then senior staffers looked after him," he said.

He added that mid-level and senior doctors were working round the clock in the absence of interns.

"At least 35 to 40 patients die every 24 hours at the hospital," the director said.

Mahmudul was among at least 24 patients who died at the hospital until 4:00pm yesterday, he said.

'Why don't they burn Indian saris of their wives?'

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Talking about import of spices, onion, garlic and ginger from India, she said these Indian items should not be in the kitchens of those BNP leaders.

"They should cook food without using Indian spices... They will have to answer whether they will be able to eat that food," the PM said.

About the Liberation War, Hasina questioned BNP founder Ziaur Rahman's loyalty during the war, reports UNB.

"[Mirza] Aslam Beg [then an army officer in Bangladesh] wrote a letter to Ziaur Rahman during the Liberation War expressing satisfaction at his activities. This raised the question whether Zia had fought for Bangladesh or for Pakistan."

Aslam Beg in that letter also said that Zia's wife and sons were fine at Dhaka Cantonment, the PM added.

"The question is if that person had proclaimed the country's independence, then why the Pakistanis took care of his wife and sons in the cantonment, and wrote a letter expressing satisfaction at his activities," she said.

The AL chief said the Liberation War was fought in 11 sectors of the

country, but the sector led by Zia saw the highest number of killings of freedom fighters.

General Beg served as the chief of army staff of the Pakistan Army from 1988 until his retirement in 1991.

Regarding the proclamation of the independence on the night of March 25, 1971, Hasina said Bangabandhu's proclamation was relayed through wireless, but the history was distorted after his assassination.

She said that nowadays BNP leaders are searching for democracy, and one of its leaders claimed that AL leaders fled Bangladesh on March 25, 1971. "If that is true, then who fought the fight and who earned the victory?"

The premier said that the elected public representatives of the 1970 elections formed the first ever government of independent Bangladesh with Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as president, Syed Nazrul Islam as vice-president and Tajuddin Ahmad as prime minister.

She said after the formation of the first-ever government of independent Bangladesh on April 17, 1971, it carried out the Liberation War.

Ziaur Rahman was a sector

commander as a salaried person under that AL government, the PM added.

"They [BNP leaders] must not forget this fact. They must not forget that Ziaur Rahman was promoted from major to major general rank after independence."

Hasina said people rejected BNP for committing arson and killing.

"Those who were rejected by the people could not win elections in a democratic system. Now they are searching for democracy," she said.

Awami League advisory council member Amir Hossain Amu, presidium members Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Mosharraf Hossain, Abdur Razaque and Shajahan Khan, and Health Affairs Secretary Rokeya Sultana, among others, were present.

On March 20, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi at a press conference expressed solidarity with the campaign for boycotting Indian products. He threw his Indian shawl on the road in front of the BNP's Nayapalton central office that day.

Some people, including online activists, called for the campaign in late January out of their grievances against India over the January 7 national polls.

Defying UNSC, Israel steps up assault on Gaza

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The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said 66 people were killed in the bombardment and combat in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

Israel's offensive has so far killed at least 32,490 Palestinians in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry.

Israeli forces also intensified their assault in and around three Gaza hospitals, raising fears for patients, medical staff and displaced people inside them.

Fighting has raged for nine days around Gaza City's Al Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest, and more recently near two hospitals in the main southern city of Khan Yunis - Al Amal and Nasser.

The Israeli army and Shin Bet security service said they were "continuing to conduct precise operational activities" in both cities "while preventing harm to civilians, patients, medical teams and medical equipment".

Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles have also massed around the Nasser Hospital, the Gaza health ministry said, adding that shots were fired but no raid had yet been launched.

The Palestinian Red Crescent warned that thousands were trapped inside and "their lives are in danger".

In Rafah, one of the airstrikes killed 11 people from a family, health officials said.

Mussa Dhaheer, looking on from below as neighbours helped an

emergency worker lower a victim in a black body bag from an upper storey, said he had awakened to the blast, kissed his terrified daughter, and rushed outside to find the destruction. His father, 75, and mother, 62, were among the dead.

"I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I can't make sense of what happened. My parents. My father was with his displaced friends who came from Gaza City," he told Reuters. "They were all together when suddenly they were all gone like dust."

At another bomb site, one Jamil Abu Hourri said the intensification of air strikes was Israel's way of showing its disdain for a UN Security Council resolution last week demanding an immediate ceasefire.

Next up, he fears a ground assault on Rafah, which Israel has threatened to carry out despite pleas from its closest ally Washington that this would cause too much harm to civilians.

"The bombing has increased, and they have threatened us with an incursion, and they say that they have been given the green light for the Rafah incursion. Where is the Security Council?" Abu Hourri said.

However, in a sign that the incursion might not be imminent, Israel has asked to reschedule a meeting with US officials to discuss its military plans in Rafah, a US official said yesterday, days after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu abruptly scrapped the planned talks.

Netanyahu called off a planned visit to Washington by a senior Israeli delegation after the US allowed passage of a Gaza ceasefire resolution at the United Nations on Monday.

Separately, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which has seen worsening bloodshed in parallel with the Gaza war, three Palestinians were killed and four others wounded by Israeli fire during a raid in Jenin overnight, the Palestinian health ministry said yesterday.

Meanwhile, Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin, during a meeting with Israel Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, said it was a moral and strategic imperative to protect Palestinian civilians.

"In Gaza today, the number of civilian casualties is far too high and the amount of humanitarian aid is far too low," Austin said, sitting across from Gallant.

"Gaza is suffering a humanitarian catastrophe and the situation is getting even worse," Austin said, using some of his most forceful language so far.

The Israeli defence minister also met for a second day with US national security adviser Jake Sullivan, who told Gallant that Israel needs to increase the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said.

Gallant later held talks with CIA Director William Burns, who recently returned from talks in Qatar seeking an elusive deal for Hamas' release of more than 130 hostages still held in Gaza.

An alarming

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birth to children is 73.

The number was 70 according to the survey conducted in the previous year.

This indicates that more children are being married off and they are becoming pregnant in their teens. Teen pregnancies compromise their health and wellbeing.

The BSVS-2023 found that more than 25 percent of all pregnant women were aged between 15 and 19.

About increasing teen pregnancies, Shaheen Anam said, "Girls married in their teens have no decision-making power in the family and they cannot even access contraception. How can she decide the time and number of pregnancies?"

On teen pregnancies in rural areas, Raunak Jahan, an assistant professor at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital's Gynecology & Obstetrics department, said, "We often see girls under 16 coming to us with their second pregnancy, which means they gave birth to their first

baby by the age of 15.

"When we ask why they became pregnant, many say that having a baby secures their marriage or strengthens their position with their in-laws," she noted.

But this is very risky because adolescent mothers' bodies are still developing, and their organs are not fully matured, she said.

Raunak emphasised the need to change societal perceptions towards girls and to take appropriate action to address the challenges of child marriage and teenage pregnancies, particularly in rural areas.

Shaheen Anam said, "The Child Marriage Restraint Act needs to be properly enforced and the committees should be functional."

Emphasising awareness, she said, "We need to change our social perception towards girls. Instead of marrying them off at an early age, we should advocate girls' education and make parents understand the benefits of educating a girl."

Lack of inheritance law worsens it for Hindu brides

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Tk 32 lakhs to get their daughter, a nursing student, married to a sub-inspector.

"In another case, an SI also demanded Tk 1 crore but the bride's family was able to pay Tk 60 lakh. Another time, a government official demanded Tk 20 lakh to marry a degree-holder girl. They had to settle for Tk 18 lakh after negotiation."

Kamrul Islam Rubayet, a lecturer at Thakurgaon's Abdur Rashid Degree College, said Hindu families in the region often prioritise administrative job holders to marry off their daughters to for the sake of "security".

Mahbubur Rahman, the district's deputy commissioner, said, "At all our meetings, we take measures to create awareness and curb incidents of demanding dowry. However, there may still be many such cases occurring that I'm not aware of."

According to Pulok Ghatak, general secretary of Hindu Law Reform Parishad, the concept of dowry remains largely prevalent in almost all Hindu marriages and is recognised under the Hindu law.

"However, the 2018 law criminalises it, creating

contradiction."

He added, "In the Hindu law, the term 'Joutuk Streedhon' is mentioned as women's property, but in reality, women don't have any authority over it.

Pulok said, "Unfortunately, as per the archaic Hindu law, the woman does not possess autonomy; instead, she is regarded as her husband's possession.

"After the former law related to 'streedhon' was repealed, no other provision exists for a woman to inherit property from her parents. We have a few initiatives aimed to establish inheritance rights for Hindu women as a means to address their property rights."

Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said, "Religious traditions historically positioned Hindu women as subordinates, leading to the absence of rights to divorce and inheritance, while ensuring the prevalence of the dowry system.

"To address these disparities, we are calling for the implementation of a uniform family law for all religions." (Our Thakurgaon correspondent contributed to this report.)