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## Unemployment, rich-poor gap two major MDG challenges

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and SAJJADUR RAHMAN

Rising unemployment and declining share of the poorer populace in national income are two major challenges for the country in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), says a government report.

"Appropriate interventions are required so that benefits of economic growth reach the poorest quintile," observes the report prepared by Planning Commission on progress towards MDGs.

### Mid-term progress report

In 1992, the poor's share in national income was 6.5 percent. But it dropped to 5.3 percent in 2005, marking a decline of 18.46 percent in 13 years.

A steady annual growth around 5 percent on average in the 1990s and 6 percent in the 2000s helped the country to draw nearer to implementation of many of the MDGs, eight goals that the United Nations member states have

pledged to accomplish by the year 2015.

Halving the number of people living in extreme poverty, ensuring universal access to primary education, eliminating gender disparities, reducing child mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio, and combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases are among the targets officially adopted in 2000.

One of the shortcomings in

Bangladesh's efforts to attain MDGs is failure to make growth process sufficiently pro-poor, says the report, adding that depleting share of the poorer segments of the society in national income and consumption shows that the poor are not benefiting from the growth.

It said youth unemployment has shot up to 13 percent in 2003 from 3 percent in 1990. Nearly 64 percent of those unemployed have secondary or post secondary and higher education.

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## Chicken, egg prices up after weeks of slump

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and WASIM BIN HABIB

The sales of eggs and chickens started getting normal in the capital and elsewhere in the country in the last few days after the poultry sector experienced miserable trade for more than two months following an outbreak of avian influenza.

Preventive initiatives and awareness publicity by different government and non-

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## Non-stop price spiral

Traders continue the blame game

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prices of different essentials continued to soar, at both wholesale and retail markets in the capital and elsewhere in the country over the past week, intensifying sufferings of people belonging to all strata.

Retailers and wholesalers blamed shortage of supply and price hike in the international market for the increase of prices of essentials like edible oil, pulses, sugar, flour, onion, chicken, egg, powdered milk and vegetables.

They also alleged that import-

ers and a section of unscrupulous traders are contributing to the price hike.

The unabated increase of prices of essentials has left a large section of city dwellers utterly frustrated.

"The prices are going beyond our reach. House rent, children's education expenses and the overall living cost have been increasing while our incomes remain unchanged. How will we afford all these essentials?" said a frustrated customer, Anwar Hossain, at Hatirpul market yesterday.

The price of non-brand soybean oil leapt by Tk 10-12 per kilogram (kg) in the last week and stood at Tk 115-120 per kg at different retail markets yesterday.

The prices of palm and super palm oil also registered a fresh hike at wholesale and retail markets.

The price of non-brand mustard oil jumped Tk 25 per kg, reaching Tk 140-150 per kg at the retail markets. The oil sold at Tk 115-125 a kg two weeks back.

Traders blamed the increased price of mustard oil on the price

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## Hold parliamentary election first, set Hasina free

AL demands at discussion on historic March 7

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) yesterday said it would not accept local government polls before the general election, and reiterated its call for the Election Commission (EC) to set an election date without delay.

It also observed that a caretaker government does not have the authority to hold elections to local government bodies.

Speaking at a discussion marking the historic March 7 at the Institute of Diploma Engineers, AL leaders demanded that the government release their detained chief, Sheikh Hasina within a week and send her to the US for ear treatment.

They said there's no question that if released for treatment abroad she would return to lead the party and the nation.

Acting AL president Zillur Rahman presided over the meeting.

He urged the leaders and work-

ers to stay united and prepared to join any movement that the party might need to launch to free Hasina. "We hope the government will set her free and we'll contest the election under her leadership," he said.

Addressing the government, AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu said, "You release Hasina and we will ensure her better treatment."

Another member of the Presidium, Abdur Razzak, said a conspiracy is on to foil the polls, and demanded that the Election Commission (EC) announce a date for the national election without delay.

He said the responsibility to hold local government polls does not rest with the caretaker government. Rather, their only duty is to have the parliamentary election held in a free and fair manner.

He called for the EC to hold the national election first.

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A woman wearing tyre-made gloves crushes bricks at Lalbagh in the city to earn Tk 60 a day. She does not know today is International Women's Day as the event makes little difference to her.

COMING POLLS

## Elect honest, dedicated persons: CA

UNB, Galachipa, Patuakhali

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday urged the people to elect honest, dedicated and active persons in the next elections for development and welfare of the country.

The CA made the call while exchanging views with upazila level officers, local elite and people belonging to different professions on Galachipa Degree College premises.

He said the government is trying to prepare a flawless voter list with photographs, which is one of the prerequisites for holding a free, fair, neutral and acceptable election.

The head of the caretaker government stayed overnight at Barisal after he chaired the Council of Advisers meeting at Barisal Circuit House on Thursday.

From Barisal, he flew into Galachipa yesterday morning and returned to the capital in the afternoon.

Earlier, on way from Barisal Circuit House to airport, the CA got down from the car at Gariarpar and talked with locals about prices of essentials, agricultural production and voter listing.

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Ishaq Ali, left, and Sanjidul Islam Emon, middle, being handed over to CID officials at the Benapole Land Port yesterday.

## India hands over two more top criminals

KAILASH SARKAR and MOHSIN MILON

India yesterday handed over two more top criminals to Bangladesh at Benapole land port.

The Criminal Investigation Department of West Bengal handed over the two listed Bangladeshi criminals--Sanjidul Islam Emon and Ishaq Ali--to its Bangladesh counterpart at about 2:15pm.

India has so far repatriated seven Bangladeshi criminals in three phases while over 400 other criminals and political leaders have been staying in that country.

A CID team led by Abdullah Aref, additional superintendent of Bangladesh CID, went to Benapole to take back the criminals. Kolkata CID in-charge Shatanu Chowdhury handed over the two to the

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## 'Doctrine of necessity' wasn't my brainchild

Says CEC

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said the doctrine of necessity that had guided the commission to invite BNP acting Secretary General Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed to dialogue on electoral reforms was not his brainchild.

"The doctrine of necessity was not my brainchild. Some people said the CEC had decided to send the letter to Hafiz. But the fact is that the EC has a law section and it had scrutinized the party's constitution and decided to send the letter to Hafiz," CEC told private TV Channel 1.

He said the electoral roadmap is being hampered due to conflict within the BNP.

"We cannot sit for the dialogue with BNP until the dispute over their leadership is resolved by the court. We are supposed to submit the final report on the dialogue by this March. However, we are determined to hold the election as per the roadmap," the CEC said.

He hoped that the legal dispute over the BNP's leadership would be resolved within next two to three days.

## Power projects at Ctg EPZs uncertain for gas crisis

SHARIER KHAN

Persistent gas crisis in Chittagong region has created uncertainty over two upcoming power projects in two of the port city's export processing zones (EPZs).

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) last year initiated the process of having exclusive gas-fired power plants at the EPZs as service industry investment and thus cut down the lengthy tendering process. This is the first time the country has opted for power plants as service industry investment mainly to end investors' sufferings and attract new investment.

As part of it, Bepza signed two deals with Malancha Holdings Ltd (MHL)--an enterprise of United Group--to set up a 40 megawatt (MW) plant in Chittagong EPZ and another 40MW in Dhaka EPZ. The Bepza earlier this week signed a deal with Korean EPZ in Chittagong to set up another 50MW power plant.

Sources said, of these three deals--the two power plants by the MHL are expected to come into operation by August-September this year. The Korean EPZ plant may come into operation next year.

Each of the Dhaka and Chittagong EPZs consume around 30MW power during production

peak hours and the consumption drops down to 10MW. "We can supply the surplus power to the national grid easily and minimize Chittagong's power crisis to some extent," said a Bepza official.

As Chittagong's gas supplies lag by around 100 million cubic feet a day (mmcf), the port city cannot generate enough gas-fired power to meet its own demands.

Meanwhile, amid the gas crisis, MHL has arranged five high-efficiency gas engines from Wärtsilä of Finland, and started developing the plant site on the Chittagong EPZ premises.

"The plant shall need gas from

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

## No bar to holding local polls first

Says Dr Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said holding local government elections before national elections has neither legal nor constitutional bar.

He said, "The elections have to be held in normal situation [with the state of emergency withdrawn]." He hoped the government decides in this regard after discussions with political parties.

He was talking to reporters after a meeting between leaders of Gono Forum and Ganatantra Party at his Bailey Road home in the capital.

"The matter could be discussed in the dialogues between the government, Election Commission and political parties... there is no bar to it in the constitution," Kamal, an eminent jurist, said when asked about the government's plan to hold local government elections.

Urging all to unite for accommodating a corruption- and terrorism-free governing system in the country, he said their struggle is for a free and fair election so that people can elect honest people as their representatives.

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