

Next budget to be over Tk 5 lakh crore

Says prime minister

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the next national budget would be placed in parliament on June 13 and its size would be over Tk 5 lakh crore.



opportunity to serve people.

"Following this ideology, I have been working for the development of the country and people are getting its outcome," she said.

"Our aim is to reach the fruits of independence to every house so that every person gets a decent life," the prime minister said, mentioning that 93 percent people have already come under the electricity coverage.

Noting that the living standard of the country's people is enhancing, she said, "We have brought down the poverty rate to 21 percent from 41 percent and slash the extreme poverty rate to 11 percent ... there will not be any extreme poor in the country, Insha'Allah."

The prime minister sought cooperation from all in making Bangladesh a developed and prosperous country freeing it from terrorism, militancy, drugs and corruption.

"It is my only expectation that you will pray for the country and people

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"We are making all the arrangements so that everyone can lead a decent life with access to food, clothes, housing, education and medical care," Sheikh Hasina said, adding that her government wants to ensure basic rights for everybody.

Highlighting her government's various steps taken for the country's development, she said the benefits of development are reaching the grassroots level.

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To her, Hasina said, power is not something to enjoy; rather it is an

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Power coverage reaches 93pc people in Bangladesh

Says World Bank

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh has made significant progress in access to electricity as its electrification coverage reached 93 percent, thanks to the stronger political commitment of the Awami League government.

The World Bank in its just-published Energy Progress Report 2019 mentioned that among the countries with the largest population without access to electricity, Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar and

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'BCL men' ruins quota reformists' iftar party

Ducusu VP Nur prevented from joining it

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A group of alleged Chhatra League men yesterday barred Bangladesh Sadharon Chhatra Odhikar Songrakhon Parishad from holding an iftar party in Brahmanbaria town.

Ducusu VP Nurul Haque Nur, who was supposed to attend the programme as chief guest, could not enter the Grand-A-Malek Chinese Restaurant on Mashjid Road as the 'BCL men' padlocked the front door of the venue around 5:00pm, said witnesses.

However, leaders of the pro-Awami League student front claimed that a group of "general students" stopped the iftar party as some Chhatra Shibir men were there.

Talking to this correspondent

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Man lands in jail over rape of a minor

He allegedly forced victim to abort child

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sent a man to jail on charges of raping a minor girl in the district's Bhangura upazila.

The order came after police arrested the accused -- Mojnu Sarkar, 45 -- on the same day and placed him before the court.

The victim's father filed a case with Bhangura Police Station on Friday night after he came to know about the rape.

According to the case statement, Mojnu raped the girl around four months ago and kept it a secret until the girl became pregnant.

Masud Rana, officer-in-charge of Bhangura Police Station, said Mojnu forcibly gave the girl abortion pills on Thursday. As her condition deteriorated because of the medicines, she was sent to Bhangura Upazila Health Complex.

Later, doctors sent her to Pabna Medical College Hospital as her condition was continuously deteriorating, the OC added.

Nargis Sultan, senior consultant of gynecology ward at Pabna Medical College Hospital, said the girl went through different medical tests.

"We will send the reports to the court soon," Nargis said.



The 13th span of the much-anticipated Padma Bridge is being installed on the pillars near Mawa Ghat in Munshiganj yesterday morning. PHOTO: FARHANA MIRZA

Eid won't bring any joy to them

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grow one maund of rice. But they are offering me only Tk 600."

But farmers are bound to sell their crops at such a low price as they have to repay their debt, said the sharecropper.

"I spent Tk 8,000 to cultivate rice in one bigha of land. But now it is getting difficult to get even Tk 6,000 by selling rice. Our situation is so bad we would not survive if the government does not do anything for us."

Mainul, a father of three, thought he would buy new clothes for his children after selling his crops. But the situation is so dire now that they can barely afford to eat after repaying his debt.

"Only Allah knows how we would celebrate Eid. Our main challenge

now is to survive in the coming months."

Azhar Mia, another sharecropper from Debipur village, spent Tk 34,000 to grow rice on five bighas of land. Although he harvested 105 maunds of rice, he had to give away 62 maunds to the land owner and as wages for the day labourers.

He was able to sell 10 maunds of rice at Tk 620 a maund on Friday at Chhatintoli market. "Forget about profits. I cannot even recover my production cost."

He had to sell off his produce though the prices were low as he was left with no choice but to repay his loans. Many farmers were seen taking their rice back, disheartened by the low prices.

Bachchu Mia, a wholesaler from

Chhatantali paddy market, said prices were falling every day as mill owners were not buying from them.

"Mill owners are not offering better prices either. Yesterday [on Friday], I bought paddy at Tk 640 a maund. But mill owners are offering only Tk 620. So today, I am not interested in buying a maund at more than Tk 600," he said.

"We know that farmers are facing losses. But we have to do business and it is the same for us. We cannot buy more rice if we don't get higher prices in return," explained Bachchu.

Saidur Rahman, manager at Sumaiya traders, one of the biggest wholesalers of Mahadebpur upazila, said they are in a fix as they are buying from farmers but are unable to sell to the mill owners.

On such low prices, Nirod Boron Saha Chandan, president of Paddy and Rice Wholesaler and Traders Association, said prices will not go up unless mill owners buy rice.

In addition, there is plenty of rice available in the market at the moment as 39 lakh tonnes of rice was imported last year.

"The mill owners also bought huge quantities of Aman rice last year, so their stocks are full. Most mill owners do not have money to buy Boro from the farmers at the moment either," said Chandan.

The situation will improve if the government buys Aman rice from the mill owners and provides them with bank loans, he added.

"I do not see any other option to ease farmers' sufferings."

Man held for killing his 2 daughters

Tells police he was too poor to raise them properly

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A man was arrested after he allegedly strangled his two daughters to death inside the toilet of a launch terminal in Narsingdi on Friday.

Shafiqul Islam, a guard at a garment factory, told police that he had been struggling to raise the girls, aged 4 and 11, due to poverty and was really worried about having to buy presents for them for the coming Eid.

Miraj Uddin Ahmed, superintendent of police in Narsingdi, told reporters at his office yesterday that the bodies of Tarin Akhter and her younger sister Tayeeba Akhter were recovered by police from the toilet of Kawriapara Launch Terminal on Friday night.

At the scene, Shafiqul, who is a resident of Chalakchar village in Monohardi, approached police and said the girls were his daughters.

As police questioned him, Shafiqul said but had killed them, the SP said.

Shafiqul told police that he took the girls to visit the launch terminal that evening. He became frustrated when the younger daughter wanted to have some litchi as he had no money.

He later killed the girls one after another inside a toilet.

The SP said filing a case was underway.

Charges not framed even in 4 years

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According to the charge sheet, submitted in May 2015, Mannan illegally amassed Tk 74.94 lakh and concealed information about property worth Tk 4.59 lakh. His wife illegally amassed Tk 3.45 crore and concealed information about property worth Tk 1.86 crore.

A Dhaka court granted Mannan bail on August 24, 2014, considering his illness and status as a former state minister in the Awami League government. His bail was later extended in November 2015 after the case was transferred to the Special Judge Court-3 for trial.

Hasina got bail in October 2014, which was later extended in July 2015. The next hearing of the cases is due

tomorrow.

43 TIME PETITIONS

Since August 2015, the couple's lawyers filed at least 40 time petitions, mostly on grounds of sickness, but also for their unavailability because of emergency personal and family affairs. Three petitions were filed by Public Prosecutor Mir Ahmed Ali Salam.

In Mannan's case, 13 petitions were filed because of his "sickness" and his engagements in family matters. His lawyer, Syed Rezaur, filed five petitions seeking time because he was busy with his own personal matters. One petition was filed by Ali Salam, according to the court records.

In his wife's case, eight petitions were filed due to "professional reasons" of Syed Rezaur while two

petitions for the lawyer's "sickness".

Another eight petitions were filed due to "sickness" and family affairs of Hasina and her husband, while four more on various other grounds. Two more petitions were filed by ACC lawyer Ali Salam.

'NOTHING TO DO'

The Daily Star found a similar graft case filed by the ACC where the court framed charges after five hearings.

The then ACC assistant director Mashru Rahman filed that case in January 2013 against Paragon Knit Composite Ltd, a sister concern of Hall-Mark Group, bringing allegations of amassing Tk 1.31 crore.

While delivering a verdict on a writ petition filed in 2016 challenging the legality of earth-filling, encroachment

and construction of structures along the Turag banks, Justice Md Ashraful Kamal of the High Court told the lawyers, "Five lakh cases are still pending. If each judge works day and night or no new case is taken, it will take 30 years to finish the existing cases."

Asked about repeated petitions in the cases against Mannan and his wife, defence lawyer Syed Rezaur Rahman said, "I cannot say anything without seeing the records."

Contacted, Public Prosecutor Ali Salam said, "I have always opposed the defence's repeated time petitions seeking adjournment of the charge hearings, but the court granted the petitions. I have nothing to do if the court allows time."

Govt to give Tk 200cr to pay arrears

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Since 2009, the government gave the BJMC Tk 7,477 crore to bail it out of its financial troubles, according to finance ministry data.

Jute and textiles Secretary Mizanur Rahman said he was yet to get official confirmation, but said he hoped everything would be finalised by today.

"We will not wait a moment to pay the workers after we get the money," he said, adding that the BJMC would need more money soon as the amount was short of its requirement.

Earlier, the government asked the BJMC to send a list of workers, their bank accounts and other details to pay wages through their bank accounts and curb scope of misappropriation by a section of officials by showing "ghost workers," sources said.

The BJMC submitted the list on May 20.

Mizanur said they were yet to decide whether to pay the money directly to the workers or through the BJMC.

"There are issues like provident fund, which the mills authorities deposit in the bank account. If the finance ministry wants to pay the arrears directly, it could create complexities," he said.

Workers of 22 state-owned jute mills had been demonstrating since March 29.

Their demands include clearing retirement benefits of thousands of workers; pay arrears of life insurance policies of deceased workers; reinstate terminated and suspended workers; pay arrears and allowances; implement the new pay

GOVT FUNDING TO BJMC (2009-10 TO 2018-19)

DETAILS	IN CRORE TAKA
Purchase of raw jute	1,100
Salary, wages and Eid bonus	708.7
Gratuity, PF, other benefits of retired workers	629.83
Electricity and other bills	125.05
To reopen 2 closed mills	105.29
Bonds in favour of BJMC for bank payment	2,389.34
To clear Rupali Bank dues	438.26
Funding under govt guarantee to buy raw jute	500
Due payment of wage commission	400
The handover cost of 10.33 Bighas of BJMC's land in Gulshan	1,080.85
TOTAL	7,477.32

structure (2015); make workers' job permanent as per the law; allocate fund to purchase jute on time; undertake BMRE (Balancing, Modernisation, Rehabilitation, and Expansion) scheme to increase productivity; and remove corrupt

officials.

Workers postponed their protest last week on assurance that their wages would be cleared before the Eid.

Sardar Mozahar Uddin, president of Bangladesh Jute Mills Workers League, welcomed the government decision to pay the workers.

The state-run jute mills often fail to pay the workers because of huge losses every year. Their production cost is more than double that in private mills. Also, the production capacity of the mills, set up in the 1950s and 60s, more than halved over the years.

In the first nine months of 2018-19 fiscal year, its losses stand at Tk 495 crore. Last year, the BJMC incurred a loss of Tk 466 crore.

Zahid Hussain, lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the state-run jute enterprises' revenues do not even cover the variable costs. They occupy valuable land that have much better alternative uses.

"Over 32,000 workers depend on these enterprises for their livelihood. The planned Tk 200 crore financial support for their wages through the budget will only partially cover their wage bill and surely this cannot continue year after year," he said.

He recommended finding more sustainable ways of supporting the livelihood needs of the jute workers by creating jobs and self-employment opportunities.

"Keeping the terminally sick enterprises on life support is not a viable way of protecting the jobs," he added.