

Sanctions on Russia hurting people elsewhere: PM

UNB, London

Prime Minister Sheikh underscored the need for a negotiated settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to protect common people around the world from food, energy and financial insecurities.

She suggested reviewing whether the sanctions imposed in the wake of the war were having otherwise implications for people in developing countries.

She said this during her meeting with UK Leader of the Opposition and Head of the Labour Party Sir Keir Starmer at her place of residence in London.

The two sides exchanged views on the possible impacts on bilateral trade relations due to the ongoing inflationary pressures and cost-of-living crisis.

The prime minister is in London on a four day visit to attend the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II.

According to a press release, Hasina reiterated her profound condolences at the Queen's demise.

Starmer thanked the prime minister for her tribute in memory of the Queen.

They also recalled Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's meeting and personal rapport with the former Labour prime minister Harold Wilson.

Hasina thanked the Labour leader for his messages on the occasions of Bangabandhu's birth centenary and the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence.

He recalled his visit to Bangladesh in 2016 and his meeting with the prime minister at the time.

Starmer yesterday said Bangladesh and the UK are bound by excellent ties and further reinforced by the British-Bangladesh diaspora.

He expressed satisfaction at the growing number of people of Bangladesh origin being elected to offices from the Labour Party around the UK.

He said that the Labour Party was working on promoting and nurturing young generation leaders that should attract more British-Bangladeshi youth.

The Labour Party leader said they would continue to advocate for the big retailers in the UK and the West to share the costs with the readymade garment manufacturers.

Starmer appreciated Bangladesh's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic under the prime minister's leadership. He reiterated the Labour Party's commitment to work with vulnerable countries like Bangladesh

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition and leader of the Labour Party, during a meeting at a hotel in the UK yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

Queen's grandchildren mount vigil around coffin

Security tightened as world leaders start arriving in London for funeral

REUTERS, LONDON

Princes William and Harry stood vigil at either end of the coffin of their grandmother Queen Elizabeth yesterday, heads bowed as a line of mourners streamed past the late monarch's lying-in-state.

The two sons of King Charles, attired in military uniforms, stood in silence at a 15-minute vigil in the vast Westminster Hall where the coffin has been lying since Wednesday, draped in the Royal Standard and with the bejewelled Imperial State Crown on top.

William and Harry were joined by their six cousins, including Princess Beatrice and Eugenie who earlier paid tribute to Britain's longest-reigning monarch.

The queen died on Sept. 8 at her summer estate in the Scottish highlands, aged 96.

"You were our matriarch, our guide, our loving hand on our backs leading us through this world," said the sisters, daughters of Prince Andrew. "You taught us so much and we will cherish those lessons and memories forever. For now dear grannie, all we want to say is thank you."

Hundreds of thousands of people

have lined up for long hours in a queue stretching along the River Thames, waiting to file past the coffin and honour the queen - a testimony to the affection in which she was held.

The other cousins at yesterday's vigil were Peter Phillips and Zara Tindall, the children of Princess Anne, and Louise and James, the children of Prince Edward.

Earlier yesterday, Charles and his heir William shook hands and greeted well-wishers in the queue, asking people how long they had been there and whether they were warm enough.

To cheers of "hip, hip, hurrah" and shouts of "God save the King", Charles and William spoke to mourners near Lambeth Bridge, as they neared the end of the massive line to see the lying-in-state in the historic Westminster Hall.

On Friday night, Charles joined his three siblings - Princess Anne and Princes Andrew and Edward - in a silent vigil at the coffin.

"She wouldn't believe all this, she really wouldn't," William was heard telling one man of the late queen, who came to the throne in 1952. "It's amazing."

One woman told Charles it had been

"worth the wait" and others wished him well and cheered as he moved down the line.

Ahead of tomorrow's state funeral at Westminster Abbey, world leaders also started arriving in the British capital.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese were among the dignitaries to pay their respects on Saturday while New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was seen curtsying to the coffin on Friday.

US President Joe Biden was expected to go to the lying-in-state today.

Yesterday, Charles met leaders of the 14 countries where he is head of state such as Canada, Australia, and Jamaica after meeting the governors-general - the people who represent the monarch in overseas realms - at Buckingham Palace.

London's police force has described the funeral as the biggest security operation it has ever undertaken as prime ministers, presidents and royals come together and huge crowds throng the streets. The king visited police headquarters to thank emergency services workers involved in the planning.

2 Dakhil examinees killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two Dakhil examinees were killed and a college student was injured in a road accident in Tangail's Ghatail upazila.

The deceased are Nayeem Khan and Shakil Khan - both aged 15, residents of Sangrampur Union's Egarokahonia village and students of Mulbario Darus Sunnah Dakhil Madrasa.

Critically injured Rana Miah, 17, of the same village, is currently under treatment at Tangail General Hospital.

Azaharul Islam, OC of Ghatail police, said the three were travelling on a motorbike from Deojana to Chhokhola Bazar around 8:00pm on Friday. Their speeding bike collided with a battery-run rickshaw van at Amuabaid, leaving the boys injured.

Locals took them to the Ghatail Upazila Health Complex from where Nayeem and Shakil were referred to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Shakil passed away at 12:45am yesterday while undergoing treatment, while Nayeem died on his way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

3 of family electrocuted to death in Barguna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Three people were electrocuted to death while one was injured in Barguna's Sadar upazila at 2:00pm yesterday.

The dead are Malaysian expat Helal, 35, Belayet Pahlan, 25, and Rabiul Islam, 14.

Mehdi Hasan, additional superintendent of Barguna Police confirmed that it was an accident. The bodies will be handed over to the families without post-mortem upon their request, he added.

According to locals, Helal was shifting to his new house with the help of his cousin Belayet, and neighbours Rabiul and Arif. The accident occurred after an uninsulated electric wire had touched the tin roof of their house.

All of them were rushed to the Barguna General Hospital, where doctors declared Belayet, Helal and Rabiul dead. Injured Arif, 20, was admitted to the hospital for treatment.

Habibur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Barguna, said Tk 25,000 will be given to each family for the burials.

'Smuggler' caught with 20 gold bars

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

The Border Guard Bangladesh arrested one person on charges of smuggling gold from Putkhali border in Benapole Port yesterday.

The arrestee Riday Hossain, 25, son of Rezaul Islam of Benapole municipality's Kagajpukur village, was found with 20 gold bars, weighing 2.333 kg and worth Tk 2 crore.

According to the BGB, they raided the area based on a tip regarding a huge amount of gold being smuggled to India. Riday was arrested and handed over to Benapole port police after interrogation.

State coffers robbed of Tk 4,697cr by Petrobangla, BPC

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the gas distribution companies in VAT and SD. The sums were not deposited to the state coffers.

When probed on the matter by the CAG audit team, Petrobangla said the unpaid amount was used to cover the deficit that arose from the mismatch between its purchase and selling price of gas.

But in practice, the CAG found a separate fund created in March 2017 called "Support for Shortfall Margin" for this end.

Petrobangla acknowledged the anomaly pointed out by the CAG audit team and admitted that the VAT and SD were not duly forwarded to the state coffers.

There has been no action, the report added.

There has been a financial loss of Tk 14.3 crore in fiscal 2016-17 alone for not including the wheeling charge in the contract signed with the multinational oil and gas exploration company Tullow for gas purchased, the CAG found. The wheeling charge is the fee paid for the use of transmission lines to transport gas.

As per the laws of the land, Petrobangla deducts 4 percent from the payment to gas producers as wheeling charge.

But in the agreement signed with Tullow on June 6, 2018, there was no clause on the collection of wheeling charge for using Bangladesh's transmission system and territory for delivering its product.

When the CAG audit team enquired about the anomaly, no response was received, according to the report.

Another Tk 22.9 crore was lost for payment of distribution charge to Titas Gas that included the system loss occurred during the import of gas from international oil companies.

A certain portion of the gas is lost in transit during the import to Bangladesh. But there is no such loss when the imported gas is distributed

to the end users.

But Titas Gas claims otherwise and has been charging for the system loss that occurs during its distribution.

The CAG audit team sought an explanation for the irregularity but no response was received.

Titas Gas also has a deficit of Tk 26.4 crore for non-adjustment of Everest Power Generation Company's bills.

Although Everest Power the BERC obtained licence to operate as a commercial independent power

finance ministry's orders but BAPEX gave the bonus on a wholesale basis.

Subsequently, the CAG called for collecting the impugned amount from the officers/employees and depositing the sum in the company fund.

The state-owned petroleum exploration and production company also reimbursed the electricity and water bills of its employees, which came to Tk 1.9 crore.

As per their pay scale, the employees are not entitled to such benefits. Permission from the

FINANCIAL LOSSES FROM PETROBANGLA'S IRREGULARITIES (IN TK CR)	
Faulty agreement with Tullow	14.3
Excessive distribution charge to Titas	22.8
Non-desposit of VAT and SD	4,597
Additional benefit to staff breaching orders	10.2
Connection maintained despite non-payment of bills	2.37
Non-adjustment of outstanding dues	26.4

producer (CIPP) on June 21, 2016, it did not sign a deal with Rural Electrification Board for another five months.

Its gas sales agreement with Titas was signed on January 4, 2017, meaning it was not entitled to the tariff for CIPP until this.

Its tariff was for small power producers but it paid the gas bill as a CIPP. Subsequently, Everest has Tk 26.4 crore outstanding.

The CAG audit team called for collection of the sum at the earliest.

In fiscal 2016-17, the Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company (BAPEX) paid Tk 8.3 crore to its officers and employees in special bonuses and honorarium, which went against the instructions of the finance ministry.

The one-off pay was supposed to be performance based as per the

finance ministry is needed for such payments, which was not taken, according to the report.

When asked about the indiscretion, BAPEX said that its employees are underpaid in comparison to the foreign companies, so the management thought of reimbursing the utility bills as an add-on to their remuneration.

The CAG did not accept this rationale as it goes against the decision of the standing committee on the ministry of power, energy and mineral resources.

Subsequently, it asked BAPEX to collect the sum from its employees and officers and deposit it in the state coffers.

Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company, a Petrobangla-owned company, was deprived of Tk 2.4

crore in fiscal 2015-16 and 2016-17 for not disconnecting the gas line of a customer - Sitalpur Steel Mills - despite finding evidence of tampering with the meter reading four times.

As per the Gas Sales Rules 2004 and 2014 and the Bangladesh Gas Act 2010, the connection should have been snapped when tampering was caught for the third time and the dues collected at the earliest.

When prodded on its non action, Karnaphuli Gas pinned it on the pending legal case.

The answer was not accepted by the CAG audit team, which called for action against the employees concerned.

The company also has dues of Tk 1.89 crore from SA Oil Refinery, a concern of SA Group.

The refinery consumed more gas than its contracted volume from April 2009 to June 2017. But Karnaphuli Gas has not collected the dues due to the SA Oil Refinery's financial hardship.

Subsequently, the CAG called for the recovery of the outstanding sum and action against the officials responsible for the lapse in collection.

Jalalabad Gas suffered a financial loss of Tk 1.91 crore for collection of gas bills from Lafarge Surma Cement at a lower rate than the government fixed rate, found the CAG audit team.

The state coffers were deprived of Tk 6.83 crore due to Bangladesh Gas Fields Company's failure to deduct the income tax from the contractor's bill for the supply of mining materials and all mining-related services.

Another Tk 3.38 crore was lost for Pashchimanchal Gas Company Ltd's failure to collect dues from Bablu CNG and Refuelling Station in Bogura, which had set up an illegal line after its connection was severed by a mobile court.

PGCL is supposed to take legal action to collect the dues. No case was filed, the report said, while calling for actions to retrieve the sum.

UN group records

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held forcibly and arbitrarily when the communication was sent to the government.

Although the cases remain unsolved, it is not clear whether the two were released or still remain forcibly disappeared.

A discussion on all the cases will begin at the 128th UN Working Group session tomorrow. It will continue till September 28.

The UN Working Group annual report states that it sent four letters to Bangladesh on various grounds.

One was an urgent appeal to ensure that an unidentified detained person's rights, life and liberty be maintained, and that they be allowed fair proceedings before an independent and impartial tribunal.

Another was a prompt intervention letter addressing allegations of harassment of and threats to human rights defenders and relatives of the disappeared persons in Bangladesh.

The group also sent a "joint allegation letter" written with other special procedure mandate holders, and a general allegation letter relating to obstacles to the implementation of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

According to the documents made public, some of the letters sent by the Working Group include one expressing concerns over the allegations that police were harassing the families of the victims of enforced disappearance, while one sought information about the judicial harassment of the NGO Odhikar.

The documents show that the government had responded to the letter, denying police harassment wholly.

"The Working Group urges the authorities to redouble efforts to provide additional information, including replying to its related general allegation transmitted after its 125th session, with a view to clarifying all outstanding cases, and to launch independent and impartial

investigations into the conduct of the Rapid Action Battalion, particularly as it concerns allegations of enforced disappearances perpetrated by its agents," said the report.

"The Working Group further emphasises that the Government of Bangladesh must ensure that relatives of disappeared persons and human rights defenders and civil society organizations working on their behalf are protected from any threat, intimidation or reprisals.

"In this respect, the Working Group is particularly concerned that the Government has decided not to renew the registration of Odhikar, a prominent human rights organisation, which documents cases of human rights violations, including enforced disappearances," stated the annual report.

It reminded that all persons involved in the investigation, including the complainant, counsel, witnesses and those conducting the investigation, must be protected against ill-treatment, intimidation or reprisal.

The group reiterated its interest in undertaking a visit to Bangladesh and said that it had sent several communications in this regard since 2013.

Government representatives from Bangladesh attended the 126th session of the Working Group held last February, said the report.

The annual report will be presented to the Human Rights council on September 20.

16 school children die in S Africa crash

AFP, JOHANNESBURG

At least 16 school children were killed died Friday when a minibus collided with a truck along a South African highway around 300 kilometres north of Durban, a regional government said.