



PM steps in to ensure smooth food supply

Asks BB to act if any bank faces dollar crunch for food import, hints at subsidy cut for LNG, electricity

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday instructed Bangladesh Bank to intervene if any bank faced a dollar shortage while opening letters of credit for importing food, fertiliser and other agricultural inputs to ensure uninterrupted food supply.

The directive came at a meeting at the Gono Bhaban with secretaries and other top government officials to review the overall situation of the economy, which is under strain.

Disruptions in global supply chain due to coronavirus pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have resulted in increased prices of goods, causing Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves to deplete.

As of November 3, the central bank has foreign currency reserves of \$35.7 billion, which is enough to meet about four months' import bills.

This has prompted the BB to cut back on its open market sales of the dollar, which, in turn, put banks in a tight spot when it comes to opening new LCs.

To ensure that importers of food, fertiliser and other agricultural inputs are not turned away by the banks, the PM gave the directive.

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Shakib Al Hasan spreads his arms in disbelief following his controversial dismissal against Pakistan during Bangladesh's five-wicket defeat over Pakistan in their T20 World Cup Super 12 fixture in Adelaide yesterday. The Bangladesh skipper clearly edged one to the pad which was given LBW by the on-field umpire and the decision stood on referral. PHOTO: AFP

Tigers exit amid huge controversy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The intention of incorporating technology into modern day cricket was to minimise human error and to provide an even opportunity for teams to play the game with transparency.

But even with the benefit of technology, Bangladesh became a victim of a controversial decision as skipper Shakib Al Hasan was dismissed for nought in their crucial Super 12 fixture of the T20 World Cup yesterday.

In an unexpected turn of events in the group 2, Netherlands had beaten South Africa in the first game of the morning, turning the equation upside down as the game between Bangladesh and Pakistan emerged as a virtual quarterfinal.

But the Tigers were unable to grab the opportunity to re-write history as Shakib's LBW decision from the on-field umpire, controversially upheld on referral by third umpire Langton Rusere, followed by some erratic batting from the Tigers

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BNP leader stabbed to death on busy Sylhet road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Criminals stabbed a BNP leader to death on a busy road in Sylhet city's Barabazar area last night.

The victim, AFM Kamal, 42, of Subidbazar area, was the former health affairs secretary of Sylhet district BNP and publicity secretary of Sylhet district Chhatra Dal.



Kamal

Azbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner (north) of Sylhet Metropolitan Police, said, "When his car entered Barabazar area from Chowkidekhi, three youths on two motorcycles following him blocked his way in front of a house and stabbed him around 9:30pm.

"He was rushed to MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead. We are looking for the attackers with the help of CCTV footage."

Emran Ahmed Chowdhury, general secretary of Sylhet district BNP, said, "We cannot be sure whether the attack was political or not. But around two weeks ago, Kamal had a serious altercation with some Chhatra League activists."

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200 BNP men sued after Barishal rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

More than 200 BNP men were sued in two cases filed over the violence in Barishal on Saturday.

Of the cases, one was filed under the Explosive Substance Act by a local Jubo League leader with Gournadi Model Police Station on Saturday night.

BNP's International Affairs Secretary Ishraque Hossain was made the prime accused in the case, said Afzal Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Besides, 70 other named BNP men and some 50 to 60 unnamed persons were made accused in the case, he said.

Rasel Rari, president of Gournadi's Mahilara union unit Jubo League, the youth front of the ruling Awami League, filed the case.

At least seven BNP men were arrested in connection with this case till last evening, said the OC.

According to the case statement, a motorcade of some 70 to 75 cars led by Ishraque Hossain reached Mahilara Bazar on

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Automated fuel pricing likely from next quarter

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government is likely to introduce dynamic fuel pricing next quarter – a development that will dramatically lessen the subsidy burden and pave the way for enhanced social spending.

Under dynamic fuel pricing, which is followed by most countries, local prices are synced with international ones, reflecting the fluctuations in the global market. To put it simply, if the prices go up in the international market, they will automatically increase in the local market and vice versa.

The pricing system, which was introduced in neighbouring India in 2017 with great success, has long been a demand of economists and multilateral lenders due to the inefficiency of the existing subsidy-reliant administered pricing mechanism.

Other than distorting the prices, the artificially low price at the cost of taxpayers' money benefits the rich and poor alike, and it is largely the well-off who are vehicle owners. That money could instead be used in the health and education sectors and for making the social safety net schemes meaningful.

Keeping populism in mind, the government has so far resisted a shift away from administered pricing and continued to bear progressively larger subsidy bills.

For instance, a record Tk 82,745 crore has been earmarked in this fiscal year's budget

for subsidy, up 53.7 percent from the previous year's original budget.

It has now softened its stance in the face of extended periods of elevated prices in the global market and the strain on the balance of payment and foreign currency reserves. The Daily Star has learnt from people familiar with the discussions, who requested anonymity to disclose sensitive deliberations.

Besides, the automated pricing mechanism is tipped to be one of the conditions for the \$4.5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund.

The loan proposal is expected to be placed before the IMF board in early January and the government needs to commit to prior actions before then.

While the visiting IMF staff mission has called for dynamic pricing for fuel, gas, electricity and fertiliser, the government has intimated that it would be willing to adopt the system for just the fuel prices for now, according to two people involved with the proceedings.

However, the subsidy for gas, electricity and fertiliser will be brought down gradually.

"They have given us a formula and we are looking into it – it is nothing binding," Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for the ministry of power, energy and mineral resources, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He would not elaborate on the matter.

The power, energy and mineral resources

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“They have given us a formula and we are looking into it.”
Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources

FOREIGN TRIPS

Wrong picks at wrong time

6 govt high-ups among 8 flying to Germany amid austerity calls

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Senior government officials are set to go to Germany for a training exercise that could have benefited field-level officials who are implementing a groundwater monitoring project.

The training is scheduled to be held between November 20 and 24 and the project is called Strengthening Hydrological Information Services and Early Warning Systems (SHEWS).

The project has been implemented and is in the stage of technology transfer, from a German company to Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). The Tk 40 crore project is funded by World Bank's credit.

But the training will be given to the wrong people, according to water resources ministry officials and field-level personnel.

"The training is basically needed for field-level officials to learn about troubleshooting and maintenance [of automated systems]," a ministry official told The Daily Star, wishing not to be named.

But the tour party of eight includes heavyweights like two joint secretaries, one deputy secretary and BWDB's additional engineer, executive engineer and project director (PD).

One senior official with groundwater expertise was selected for the trip, but he declined to go, recommending that field-level officials be included for the sake of the project.

"The GO [government order] was issued on October 30. A day later the official expressed his desire to us," confirmed a ministry source.

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1971 GENOCIDE

US resolution a new journey towards truth

PORIMOL PALMA

The introduction of the resolution to the US House of Representatives urging recognition of Pakistan's genocide against the Bangalees marks the start of a new journey towards truth, justice, and correcting global narratives on Bangladesh's Liberation War, according to researchers.

They said the 1971 genocide has remained in the shadows for a long time now, and all this time it has been wrongly defined by many as a Pakistani civil war or the third Indo-Pak war.

Once recognised, the resolution will help the US administration, which sided with Pakistan in 1971, rectify its mistake and take the US-Bangladesh relations to a new height, said the researchers.

On October 15, Republican Congressman Steve Chabot and Democrat Congressman Ro Khanna introduced the historic bipartisan resolution.

They called on Congress to condemn the atrocities and Pakistan to apologise to the people of Bangladesh for its role in the genocide, and prosecute, in accordance with international law, any perpetrators who are still living.

Liberation War Museum Trustee Mofidul Hoque said

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A student doing some last minute revisions while waiting for the exam halls to open in the capital's Siddheswari Girls' College. Higher Secondary Certificate and its equivalent exams began across the country yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

