

Boost food production to avert crisis: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated her call to increase food production to save the country from any possible crisis amid the global economic recession due to the pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war.

The premier was speaking at the programme marking the 25th founding anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU) and inauguration of a Technology Exhibition.

The programme was held at the Begum Sufia Kamal Auditorium while the PM joined it virtually from her official residence Gono Bhaban.

Hasina said the world is witnessing an economic recession as an impact of coronavirus and war-related sanctions and counter-sanctions by the US-led Western block and Russia.

"As a result, the prices of food items have soared beyond the purchasing capacity of all. Besides, prices of everything including power, fuel and transportation have been increased," she said.

She said the government is focusing on the food processing industries in the 100 economic zones that are being set up in different parts of the country by the government.

The PM also put emphasis on research on food



Though this little one started his day on a foggy winter morning, he was seen to be enjoying the comfort of warm clothes and an embrace. The photo was taken in Mohammadpur Beribadh area yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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Scholarship exam unnecessary, harmful Say eminent citizens about test for fifth-graders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty eminent citizens have demanded the withdrawal of the government's hurried decision to hold scholarship exams for fifth-graders, because this will put mental pressure on students and may increase disparity between well-off and disadvantaged pupils.

In a joint statement yesterday, they said such exams would also make coaching-centre and guidebook businesses boom and intensify negative competition among schools.

"In such a situation, we are concerned about the rationale and negative impact of the sudden decision of the government to take the primary scholarship examination following the old system," said the statement, signed by Executive Director of Campaign for Popular Education of Rasheda K Choudhury, also former adviser to a caretaker government.

Among others, Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, economist and co-chair

"The 'Creative Talent Hunt' competition, at the initiative of the education ministry, is highly commendable. Despite such a system of verifying the merit of all students, we do not understand why a 'scholarship test' is suddenly being introduced for only 20 percent of the students.

of National Educational Policy-2010 formulation committee; Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, former election commissioner; Brig Gen (ret) M Sakhawat Hossain; rights activist Sultana Kamal, also former adviser to a caretaker government; educationists Brac University Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed, Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, Prof MM Akash and Prof Mahfuza Khanom; National Educational Policy-2010 formulation committee member Quazi Faruque Ahmed; cultural activists Ramendu Majumdar, Mamunur Rashid, Ferdousi Majumdar and Nasiruddin Yousuff; Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation Shaheen Anam; Brac Executive Director Asif Saleh; and DU professors Mohammad Tariq Ahsan and Robaet Ferdous, signed the statement.

The government, during the first half of this month, decided that the Directorate of Primary Education will hold a scholarship exam for fifth-graders.

The 100-mark exam will take place in each upazila, and

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Make sexual, reproductive services accessible to teens

Speakers tell roundtable



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Preventing unintended pregnancy is essential to improving adolescents' health and their social and economic well-being, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

Ensuring access to family planning methods and proper information about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) would dramatically reduce deaths and complications from unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions, they added.

They made the remarks at a discussion, titled "Policy Actions to SRH Services for Adolescents and Youth beyond Gaps and Challenges", jointly organised by The Daily Star and Network for Ensuring Adolescents Reproductive Health Rights and Services (NEARS), and supported by Marie Stopes Bangladesh.

"Between 2015 and 2019, there were an estimated 5,330,000 pregnancies annually in Bangladesh, and of these, 2,630,000 were unintended and 1,580,000 ended in mostly unsafe abortions," mentioned Dr Md Jaynul Haque, former programme manager of Directorate General of

Family Planning (DGFP).

He also recommended a national and political commitment to include and implement SRHR and family planning services for all adolescents and youths, irrespective of marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity.

In her speech, Farhana Ahmed, director of external relations and new business development at Marie Stopes Bangladesh, said young people deserve SRHR services that meet their needs respectfully and without any judgement, no matter how young.

"Appropriate SRHR services, including contraception, should be available and accessible to all adolescents without authorisation by law, policy or practice," she added.

Md Mahbulul Alam, country director of Pathfinder International, recommended preventing unintended pregnancies of those who are married at an early age and reforming the adolescent corner-based interventions.

"Family planning services must be rights-based, to reduce unintended pregnancies, instead of total fertility rate."

Population Council Country Director Ubaidur Rob said, "As long

as the number of child marriages remains unchanged, adolescent pregnancies will not decrease."

Abdul Latif Mollah, line director of IEM, DGFP, suggested that coordination between ministries, the role of religious leaders and media, and mandatory premarital counselling can go a long way to prevent child marriage and adolescent pregnancies.

Shale Ahmed, executive director of Bandhu Social Welfare Society, urged the inclusion of trans and Hijra adolescents and youths in the existing programmes.

Mushfiqia Zaman Satiar, senior policy adviser of the Netherlands embassy, highlighted the need for including men in SRHR programmes. "The use of long-term contraceptives is not women's responsibility only."

Sohanur Rahman, executive coordinator of YouthNet for Climate Change, said, "Based on my experience of working with adolescent groups, boys are less likely to receive services from the centres, and their inclusion is a crucial need."

He also urged focusing on the hard-to-reach areas in terms of

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No concert on roads, bars to remain closed for 24hrs from Dec 31

UNB, Dhaka

Bars across the country will remain closed for 24 hours from 6:00pm on December 31, and no concerts will be allowed on roads and flyovers on that night.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said this yesterday after a meeting on law and order for Christmas Day and 31st night celebrations at the ministry.

This year Christmas Day will be celebrated in 5,682 churches across the country and security measures will be taken for all, said the minister.

"In large churches, we have requested to provide volunteers from the Christian community along with our security forces. Special security and intelligence forces will be deployed in the diplomatic zones. CCTV cameras will be installed and important churches will be checked as done during the VIP movement. Dog squads will also be deployed," added the minister.

He said a special anti-narcotic drive will also be conducted from December 28 to 31.

The minister urged people to not use fireworks, crackers and vuvuzela during the celebrations of 31st night, creating panic among people.

When asked whether concerts can be arranged

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A list of disappeared people during the BNP regime from 2001 to 2006 is being made.

ASADUZAMAN KHAN
Home Minister

An effort to revive United Airways

Board of directors to hold meeting after seven years

RASHIDUL HASAN

As part of its move to revive the private airline, the board of directors of now defunct United Airways is going to hold a meeting after seven years.

The annual general meeting (AGM) is set to be held on January 3, 2023.

After 2015, no AGM of the board has been held, ATM Nazrul Islam, managing director of United Airways, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We will hold the AGM -- which will cover seven consecutive years, 2016 to 2022 -- to comply with the joint-stock company rules, as United Airlines is a registered company with the stock exchange," Nazrul said.

"We want to revive the airline, and holding the AGM is part of this initiative," he also said.

The AGM's agenda is to receive, consider and adopt the directors' and auditors' reports, accompanied by audited financial statements for 2016 to 2022.

Earlier on November 10, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina instructed relevant authorities to waive the huge amounts of surcharge the airline owes to Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), creating a ray of hope for reviving the business.

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Dengue death toll 271

Total number of patients 61,521

645 still undergoing treatment

Number of recovered patients 60,605

113 more hospitalised yesterday

SOURCE: DGHS

PRAYER TIMING
DECEMBER 20

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:25 12:45 3:45 5:24 7:00
JAMAAT 6:00 1:15 4:00 5:27 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Taking advantage of an empty space between the dividers, buses speed through the wrong side to cross this section of the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Kachpur, putting vehicles and passengers at risk. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Parliament's winter session begins on January 5

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Abdul Hamid yesterday convened the 21st session (also the first session of 2023) of the 11th parliament.

The parliament session will begin at 4:00pm on January 5, 2023, according to a parliament secretariat press release.

The president convened the first session of 2023, exercising the power bestowed upon him as per the Clause (I) of Article 72 of the constitution.

Earlier, the 20th session of the current parliament was prorogued on November 6 only after six sittings. So, the House is going into session after a recess of 59 days.