

DHAKA THURSDAY JANUARY 12, 2023

SECOND EDITION

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXII No. 352

POUSH 28, 1429 BS

[www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net)

JAMADIUS SANI 18, 1444 HIJRI

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Shakib finds some positive in BPL at last



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## BNP SIT-INS Year's first demo mostly peaceful

Rallies across the country on January 16

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP will hold rallies and demonstrate across the country on January 16 to drum up support for its 10-point demand and to protest the government move to hike power price.

The announcement came at the party's sit-in in the capital yesterday.

The programme passed off peacefully in Dhaka though the ruling Awami League leaders and activists took position in different parts of the city.

The four-hour programme, the BNP's first political programme this year, began at 10:00am in Dhaka and at 11:00am elsewhere in the country.

BNP leaders in Faridpur alleged their sit-in was attacked by police and Juba League and Chhatra League men.

Police, however, said it was the BNP activists who threw brick chunks at them forcing them to retaliate with rubber bullets.

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US OFFICIAL'S VISIT  
Bilateral ties, rights issues on agenda

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT



Donald Lu

US Assistant Secretary for State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu will discuss ways to strengthen bilateral relations and economic engagement during his visit to Bangladesh on January 14-15.

He will also hear perspectives on labour and human rights.

After his two-day India visit, Lu will fly to Dhaka and meet senior officials and civil society leaders.

Foreign ministry officials said he may also raise the issue of security concerns that stemmed from an incident during US Ambassador Peter Haas's meeting with relatives of enforced disappearance victims.

He had earlier discussed the issue with Bangladeshi Ambassador to Washington Muhammad Imran.

According to the US embassy in

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## Furnish proof to support claims

PM says about allegations of corruption in mega projects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rejecting outright the allegations of corruption in different mega projects, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday threw down a challenge to an opposition lawmaker to come up with concrete proof.

The allegations of corruption are baseless, she told parliament while replying to a supplementary question from Gonoforum MP Mokabbir Khan about allegations of graft in various major projects.

Mokabbir said that the Russia-Ukraine war was not solely responsible for the country's current economic crisis; many internal issues were also responsible. Chaos in the financial sector, widespread corruption in mega projects, smuggling of thousands of crores of taka abroad, and massive looting in financial institutions were responsible for the economic crisis, he alleged.

In reply, the leader of the House asked the MP to state clearly where the corruption took place and how much money was involved. "Then I will give the answer."

Hasina said the BNP, which quit the 2018 national election halfway through the voting, was able to make the polls questionable through propaganda.

Responding to a supplementary question from Jatiya Party MP Fakhrul Imam, the premier said the BNP apparently stayed away from



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## RANGPUR CITY POLLS

Slow voting thru EVM prompts EC to launch enquiry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday said the Election Commission was concerned about the slow voting through electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the recently held Rangpur City Corporation polls.

He also said the commission was looking for the reason behind the delay in voting.

"We will review these allegations and try to overcome the crisis. At the same time, I am telling you that we didn't face problems to this extent in other elections," Habibul said.

He was talking to reporters after holding a views exchange meeting with a group of journalists and election observers who covered the December 27 RCC polls.

"Slow voting rate was a major complaint, and in some cases fingerprints of voters didn't match. The delay might have occurred due to many reasons. We will think about it," the CEC said.

He said that the commission would talk with technical experts about why the delay occurred, and why fingerprints didn't match.

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## Get rid of 'caretaker ghost'

AL urges BNP, says next polls to be free

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League yesterday called upon the BNP to drop the demand for a polls-time caretaker government and reiterated that Sheikh Hasina will remain the prime minister during the election.

The AL, however, assured the opposition party that the next election will be free and fair and without intervention from the government. The general election will be held the same way polls take place in other democratic countries, it added.

The ruling party staged two separate rallies in the capital yesterday -- one at Mirpur-1 and another at the AL headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue.

Besides, the Juba League held two programmes at Farmgate and Central Shaheed Minar and Chhatra League organised a rally at Shahbagh.

All these programmes were apparently to counter the sit-ins arranged by the BNP and 32 like-minded political parties in the

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Govt to import over 20 lakh tonnes of fuel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is set to import 20.4 lakh tonnes of refined petroleum from five countries, including India and China, for Tk 18,215 crore in the first half of the year to meet the country's annual demand.

The Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase approved the procurement at a meeting chaired by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday.

The BPC will buy the fuel from seven state-owned enterprises in Indonesia, the UAE, India, China and Malaysia.

The meeting also approved the BPC's proposal for importing 60,000 tonnes of diesel at Tk 545 crore from India's Numaligarh Refinery this year.

The cabinet committee also approved the import of 60,000 tonnes of fertiliser at Tk 333.5 crore to ensure uninterrupted agricultural production.

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An elderly couple seeks warmth from a fire they lit using straws and hay in Salapak village of Rangpur's Gangachara upazila. With the cold rippling through the northern districts, people from low-income families usually turn to fire to stay warm yesterday. However, this has already caused major accidents in at least eight districts, as many people have had to suffer serious burns. Two women have recently succumbed to such injuries in Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

## IMF \$4.5B LOAN

## Deputy MD to get a taste of Bangladesh

Monsio Sayeh is expected to arrive on Sunday

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

There would not be any further negotiations on the \$4.5 billion loan programme during International Monetary Fund's deputy managing director Antoinette Monsio Sayeh's forthcoming visit to Bangladesh.

"We wanted to emphasise that it's not the purpose of this visit," a spokesperson for the Washington-based multilateral lender told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sayeh, who is also visiting India, Vietnam and Thailand, is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on Sunday on a four-day tour.

Her visit is to underline the IMF's strong relationship with its Asian member countries, the IMF spokesperson said.

"The visit to Bangladesh will provide an opportunity to strengthen the IMF's engagement and reiterate its continued support to the country," the spokesperson added.

Sayeh's itinerary suggests she wants to get an idea of the economic progress made by Bangladesh over the decades, where the country stands now and what its future potential is -- putting her in good stead to answer all questions that the IMF executive board may have later this month when Bangladesh's loan proposal is placed for approval.

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