

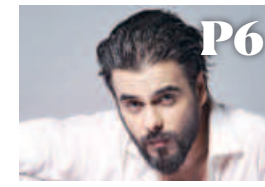
B1 Adani loses Asia's richest crown



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Sattar sails through with AL backing

Voters' apathy marks all 6 by-polls; Hero Alam loses by 834 votes in Bogura-4

STAR REPORT

With overt blessings from the ruling Awami League, expelled BNP leader Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan won as an independent by a wide margin in Brahmanbaria-2 by-polls, which saw a voter turnout of less than 16 percent.

By-elections to five more constituencies were held yesterday, but the turn of events in Brahmanbaria leading up to the polls grabbed headlines: One of the candidates has been traceless for six days, and Sattar, known as a veteran BNP leader, chose to run as an independent at the cost of his membership in the party.

AL's support for Sattar has been public knowledge since it refrained from nominating anyone to participate in the by-election. AL leaders often joined him in the campaign trail and secured what many said was an easy win for him.

According to unofficial results, Sattar, who was an adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, bagged 40,817 votes and Jatiya Party candidate Abdul Hamid Bhasani 9,580.

Sattar was elected with BNP nomination from constituencies in Brahmanbaria and Cumilla five times, including in the 2018 national election.

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The polling station in Annada Government High School in Brahmanbaria's Sarail upazila was almost empty even half an hour after voting had begun for the Brahmanbaria-2 by-polls. The photo was taken around 9:00am. Apart from this, five other constituencies in different districts went to by-elections yesterday.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDYO

B'BARIA-2 BY-POLLS Missing candidate's family seeks PM's help

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

The family members of Brahmanbaria-2 candidate Abu Asif Ahmed, who has been missing for six days, have sought Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's help in finding him.

Asif's wife Meherunnesa Meherin made the appeal while talking to reporters at their house yesterday afternoon.

Former BNP president, Asif went missing on January 27. He was contesting in the election with the "motorcar" symbol.

In the Brahmanbaria-2 by-polls, he is the main opponent of expelled BNP leader and five-time member of parliament Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan.

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BOTTLED LPG PRICE

BERC rate just on paper

Wholesalers hike prices on pretext of supply crunch

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Retailers are not following the fixed price of bottled liquefied petroleum gas using the excuse of a supply crunch and a dated pricing method.

For January, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission fixed the price of a 12kg cylinder, the most common form of marketing the fuel, at Tk 1,232.

But The Daily Star found that consumers are not getting LPG at that price.

In different areas of Dhaka city, 12 kg LPG cylinders are selling for Tk 1,500 to Tk 1,750.

But Md Khorsed, an LPG retailer in the capital's Moghbazar area, was found asking Tk 1,800 for the 12kg LPG cylinder yesterday.

Asked why he was selling at a premium he mentioned a supply crisis: the company is not providing LPG as per demand.

"We sold at that [government-fixed] rate 15 days earlier. After that, we had to purchase LPG at higher costs," he added.

The Daily Star talked to at least 10 LPG users who bought a bottle in the last two weeks from Banasree, Eskaton, Moghbazar and Dhanmondi. All of them said they got a 12kg bottle at Tk 1,400 to Tk 1,700.

"The LPG price is skyrocketing -- we are in a hostage situation," said Abu Younus, a resident of Gendaria.

This has also impacted small businesses like Jarina Begum's tea stall in the Eskaton area, which are unable to pass on the burden of higher production costs to customers.

"We are struggling to sell a cup of tea at Tk 10. If I increase the price more, no one would buy tea from me," said Begum, who purchased a 12 kg cylinder yesterday for Tk 1,750.

The situation is the same outside of Dhaka. The Daily Star spoke with several LPG consumers in Chattogram, Mymensingh, Netrokona, Rajshahi and Khulna. They said they had to spend Tk 1,350 to 1,600 to get a 12kg cylinder.

After 15-20 days, Shamsur Rahman

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PM warns of plot to stir instability

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday blasted those who argued for an unelected government and said that there were conspiracies in motion to destabilise the country.

"But I believe in the people. Our goal is to serve the country," she added.

The premier made the remarks while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the month-long Amar Ekushey Book Fair 2023, the annual event of book lovers and publishers in the capital.

She opened the country's biggest book fair in the afternoon, joining the ceremony in person on the Bangla Academy premises after a three-year break due to Covid.

Hasina said there were some "wise persons" in the country who argued in favour of an unelected government.

"But this goes against the constitution." The PM said her government took steps to uphold the overall democratic process. "Bangladesh has witnessed development thanks to the continuation of democracy."

She said her government has been able to keep the wheels of the country's economy moving against all odds.

She also mentioned that the transparent ballot box and preparing electoral rolls with photographs had been introduced in accordance with the proposal of the Awami League-led grand alliance to hold elections in a free and fair manner.

The party gained public support through its work, she added.

Three hit by bullets as AL factions clash 25 houses set afire in Narsingdi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

At least three people suffered gunshot wounds in a factional clash between two groups of the ruling Awami League in Narsingdi's Raipura upazila yesterday.

Some 25 houses had been burnt and over 100 crude bombs detonated since the clash started, said police sources.

The clash took place between supporters of Rajib Ahmed, former executive member of the district AL, and Ismaili Siraji, president of Nilaksha union AL.

Rajib claimed, "Ismaili Siraji's supporters, led by Siddiqur Rahman, a member of ward I, set 20-25 houses of my people on fire."

Siraji, however, could not be reached for comments

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VIDEO RELEASED BY RAB Families trace missing ones

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Abu Jafar's family was sure that he had been living in the Maldives for the last three years. He last visited Bangladesh in 2019 and left home saying he was going to the Maldives.

Each time they contacted Jafar, he gave them the same answer: he was in the country on the Indian Ocean.

They knew something was wrong only when Rab officials visited Jafar's house in Faridpur's Charbhadrason two months back and asked about him.

On January 30, Jafar's brother-in-law Md Shahjahan identified him in a video released by Rab on January 24. Jafar was seen cooking while some others were receiving firearms training.

Rab got the video from the mobile phone of Masukur Rahman alias Ranbir, the military commander of banned outfit Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya, who was arrested with an associate in Cox's Bazar on January 23.

This correspondent talked to at least nine other families that have identified their missing relatives in the video.

Abul Kalam, father of Raihan who went missing 15 months ago, is one of them.

He told The Daily Star that he contacted Rab on January 27 seeing his son in the video sent by a relative. Before this, some Rab members came to his house two months back and took information about Raihan.

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Spot purchase of LNG resumes after 7 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has resumed the purchase of liquefied natural gas from the international spot market after a pause of seven months as the government looks to ensure adequate supply for energy-starved industries.

Last week, state-owned Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL) sought one LNG cargo to be delivered in late February, reports Reuters.

While the tender has not been awarded, the lowest offer was made at \$19.74 per Million British Thermal Units (MMBtu) by the European Total Energies among four participants who competed, it said.

Bangladesh last bought LNG from the spot market in June last year at \$24.25 per MMBtu.

The offer from TotalEnergies was approved by the cabinet committee on purchase yesterday. The LNG cargo would have 33,600 MMBtu, according to meeting minutes.

From now onwards, Petrobangla, which is in charge of LNG imports, would be purchasing cargo regularly from the spot market, said one of its officials on the condition of anonymity.

The resumption of LNG purchase

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina enquires about newly published books while her sister Sheikh Rehana poses with a book authored by President Abdul Hamid while visiting a stall at the Ekushey Boi Mela in the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday. After inaugurating the fair, the PM, also accompanied by Bangla Academy President and novelist Selina Hossain, made rounds and visited the stalls of various publishing houses.

PHOTO: PTD

Hajj package cost rises by over a quarter

Appreciation of Saudi riyal against taka, high airfare cited as reasons

RASHIDUL HASAN

A Bangladeshi pilgrim will have to spend Tk 6.83 lakh to perform hajj this year under government management, up by around Tk 1.61 lakh on the previous year.

Hajj under private management will cost a pilgrim a minimum of Tk 6.57 lakh this year, around Tk 1.36 lakh more than in 2022.

This was decided in a meeting of the executive committee on hajj management at the secretariat yesterday, with State Minister for Religious Affairs Md Faridul Haque Khan in the chair.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the state minister said the government announced two hajj packages of Tk 5,86,340 and Tk 5,21,150 last year, but the number of packages has come down to one this year.

The Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab), a platform of private hajj tour operators, would formally declare its hajj package rates at a press conference at a city hotel today, Haab

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