#### Belgium queen commends Bangladesh's progress Calls on Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said her government is making all-out efforts to implement the agendas of the Sustainable Development Goals in

The PM said this when the visiting Queen of Belgium, Mathilde Marie Christine, paid a courtesy call on her at her office yesterday.

Christine lauded the progress of Bangladesh, attained under the leadership of Hasina, in different

PM's Speechwriter Md Nazrul Islam briefed reporters after the meeting.

The targets of the 2030 global agenda, SDGs, were aligned in the country's current 8th five-year plan and the perspective plan 2021-2041, the PM told Christine, one of the UN SDG advocates for 2021-2023.

At the meeting, different other issues, including the Russia-Ukraine war, displaced Rohingyas, women empowerment, girl education, health, social safety net, disaster management and climate change, also came up for

Hasina said the Russia-Ukraine war created instability and high inflation throughout the world. "The people are suffering. This should immediately be stopped."

The queen of Belgium appreciated the development of women and children particularly in education. She also said she was very happy to see the progress of Bangladesh.

Hasina informed the queen about her government's steps for women empowerment in various sectors, including politics, defence, the judiciary and other fields.

She said women and children are mainly getting primary healthcare

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina welcomes Queen of Belgium Mathilde Marie Christine to her office in the capital yesterday. The queen, also a UN SDG advocate, paid a courtesy call on the PM on the last day of her three-day visit to Bangladesh.

#### Modi hits back at opposition after Adani furore

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vesterday defended his record after criticism of his close association with tycoon Gautam Adani, whose business empire has been rocked by corporate fraud allegations.

Investors wiped out around \$120 billion in value from Adani Group after claims of accounting short-seller US investment group Hindenburg Research last month.

Political opponents accuse Modi of abetting Adani's rapid allowing the billionaire to unfairly win contracts and avoid proper regulatory oversight.

#### SCHOOLCHILDREN ACROSS THE GLOBE

### One in 3 lacks access to drinking water: UN

AFP, Paris

One in three children worldwide does not have access to clean drinking water while at school, impacting their health and ability to learn, the United Nations said yesterday.

"Globally, almost one in three schools has no drinking water from an improved source," the UN cultural agency Unesco said in a new report.

"One in three schools worldwide has no basic sanitation," meaning a toilet and sewage system, the agency found,

while "almost half of schools do not have a major challenge for girls who "cannot go nandwashing facilities with water and soap".

Clean drinking water and handwashing facilities are key to protecting children against the likes of Covid-19, parasites, respiratory illnesses and diarrhea, said school health and nutrition expert Emilie Sidaner, who oversaw the report.

Schools without clean drinking water cannot prepare meals for students, contributing to child malnutrition, she told

Lack of running water and soap is also

to school during their period", she added. For example, one in four girls did not go to school in Bhutan during that time of the

month, Sidaner said. And one in five had to skip classes

during menstruation in Ivory Coast, while one in seven missed school for the same reason in Burkina Faso. "There needs to be more investment

in water and sanitation as well as all other infrastructure that enables quality learning," Sidaner said.

#### Hanging body of SI recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The body of a sub-inspector was found hanging from a ceiling fan in his room at Bhaluka Model Police Station barracks in Mymensingh yesterday

The deceased, Homayun Kabir, 42, hailed from Tangail's Madhupur upazila, said Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station.

"We are looking into the matter. Humayun might have committed suicide over family-related issues," the OC added.

An unnatural death case was lodged with the police station and the body was sent to Mymensingh Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

#### Body of a woman recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Police yesterday recovered the body of a woman in Jamalpur's Melandah upazila.

The deceased was identified as Suraiya Begum, 56, wife of Azizul Haque of Jhawgar union in the same upazila.

Quoting family members of the deceased, Delower Hossain, OC of Melandah Police Station, said Suraiya went to sleep with her daughter on Tuesday night. She was found dead inside a cow shed at her home in the morning yesterday. Her

"According to Suraiya's family, she had no enmity with anyone. We are yet to establish the motive for the killing," the OC added.

The body was sent to Jamalpur Medical College for an autopsy. A case was filed with Melandah Police Station in connection with the incident in

#### Man run down by train in Kawran Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man died after being run down by a train in the capital's Kawran Bazar on Tuesday night.

Shah Alam, 26, of Cumilla's Monohargan upazila, died on the spot after being hit by Lalmoni Express around 11:30pm, said Sekender Ali, subinspector of Dhaka Railway Police Station.

Police recovered the body from Shutki Patti area around 1:00am and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

#### No scope

seat in one of the by-polls. A BNP lawmaker who had resigned from parliament also got reelected as an independent candidate.

These have proved that fair elections were held under the Awami League rule," she said while participating in the discussion on the thanksgiving motion on the president's speech in parliament.

Apart from the by-polls, the PM said the Rangpur mayoral election was also held in a free and fair manner. "No one raised any complaints

about the Rangpur mayoral election. Jatiya Party won that election defeating Awami League," she said. 'I hope, after these |by-elections

and mayoral election], no one will get a chance to raise any question about elections under the Awami League." In her speech, the premier said the government has built the Padma Bridge with its own funding, which

was challenging. "This one decision has changed the image of Bangladesh internationally. She further said digital services were being spread to every corner of the country. People now can get access to

land documents from home, while any bill can be paid online. Thanking President Abdul Hamid for delivering speech in the first session of parliament this year, the PM said this was probably his last speech. "Because, according to our constitution, no one can become president for more than

two consecutive terms. He has performed his duties successfully and efficiently as a "very lively president", she said.

Hamid, who started his political life when he was a student, was also successful as Speaker and deputy speaker of the House, added the PM. LNG TO BE IMPORTED

FROM SPOT MARKET Responding to a question from JP MP Fakhrul Imam, Hasina said the government has taken measures to import LNG from the spot market to meet the demand for gas in power generation during the current agricultural irrigation season and the

coming Ramadan and summer season. The PM's answers to lawmakers' queries were placed on the table during yesterday's parliament sitting, with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in

The premier said the government has to import LNG from the spot market at a high price to meet the increased demand for gas, to keep production in the industrial sector uninterrupted, and to continue the production of captive power by

different export-oriented factories. That's why the government has decided to increase the price of gas used only in power, industry, captive power and commercial sectors, keeping the gas price for other consumer groups

unchanged," she said. In response to another question from AL MP Kazim Uddin Ahmed, Hasina said the unprecedented success in increasing agricultural production in Bangladesh and attaining food selfsufficiency during the tenure of the AL government has attracted the attention of the world.

### Record subsidy allocation not enough

Some Tk 16,000 crore has been given to subsidise fertilisers. But that fell way short of the requirement: another Tk 10,247 crore is needed.

The budget has a Tk 5,965 crore allocation for food subsidy, but there is a request for a further Tk 4,000 crore.

Similarly, Tk 11,300 crore has been given to run open-market sales by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, but another Tk 9,000 crore is needed.

The finance ministry is now scoping out the actual requirement for subsidies from the ministries as the prices of fuel, gas, fertilisers and commodities have stabilised in the global market and there have been gas and electricity price hikes in January

"BPC is now making a profit on petroleum prices, but they have some subsidy arrears -- they have requested that sum. But, we will not release it," said another finance ministry official.

The letter of intent to the IMF suggests as much.

Effective steps are being taken to contain the budget pressures stemming from exceptionally high global energy prices, it said.

"As a result, we do not expect to provide budget support to BPC.

Although budget subsidies for natural gas and electricity are expected to rise significantly in fiscal 2022-23, they should remain relatively contained at 0.9 percent of GDP.

However, increased subsidies to the order of 0.7 percent of GDP will be required for fertiliser and food this fiscal year amid large increases in

import prices, the letter said. "Going forward, we plan to eliminate all structural subsidies for petroleum products and, to this end, will move to a periodic formula-based price adjustment mechanism by the end of 2023. Furthermore, we will aim at adjusting electricity prices further to reduce subsidies," it added.

In January, the electricity price was hiked twice by 5 percent each time and them to bear." Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, monthly incremental tariff hikes are to be expected from now on. In the same month, the retail price of

gas price was increased by 14.5 percent to 178.9 percent for industries, power plants and commercial establishments, who together account for 78 percent of gas use in Bangladesh. The finance ministry officials said

the subsidy for gas and electricity will be increased by Tk 17,000 crore. So in the revised budget, a total of Tk 40,000 crore will be allocated for the two overheads. But from next fiscal year, subsidy for

the two would be gradually pared back, they said. For food and fertiliser, another Tk

8,000 crore will be made available. Zahid Hussain, a former lead

economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, called for a reassessment of the government's subsidy plan.

"We have to be clear about who we subsidise," he said.

government's impending switch to an automated fuel pricing mechanism is a good plan.

"But it will have an impact on the lower income people. What is the government doing for them? This needs to be addressed simultaneously. The additional financial burden amid the high inflation is not possible for

Similarly, he called for the reassessment of fertiliser subsidy.

"If the intention of fertiliser subsidy is to attain national food security, then the general subsidy can never be lifted. If we want to subsidise just the poor and the marginal farmers and not the well-off ones, then subsidy needs to be targeted."

He went on to suggest a card system to channel fertiliser subsidies to poor farmers.

Hussain also questioned the rationale for subsidising urea fertiliser, which is harmful to the environment.

Not just that, given the low prices, the other sectors benefit from the low

"Is it justifiable to subsides all fertiliser? Fertiliser subsidy should be equitable and environmentally friendly."

# HSC pass rate falls

He added that the success rate varies from one board to another because of

Cumilla scored the best with a 90.72 percent pass rate, while Dinajpur was at the bottom with 79.08 percent.

were more difficult. That's why fewer students did well in these subjects," Kamal said. Dinajpur Education Board

students enrolled in colleges during the pandemic in 2020 and they had to attend online classes. "Many students in my board did

Students of his boards performed poorly in English this year and that

Data from the education boards shows that 85 percent of the students passed in English in Dinajpur, 82 percent in Mymensingh, 95 in

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, more girls have passed

the HSC exams since 2010 when the total pass rate was 71.72 percent, and for girls, it was 71.88.

COMBINED RESULTS Counting the Alim exams and HSC

vocational tests, the combined pass VEAR | PASS RATE | GIRLS PASS E

TEAR	PASS NAIE	GINLS PASS NAI E
2018	64.55	68.18
2019	71.85	74.84
2020	100*	100*
2021	95.57	96.67
2022	84.31	86.34

\*No exams held due to Covid-19; results prepared on the basis of JSC, SSC results

rate was 85.96 percent in 2022, down

In 2022, about 93 percent of percent of 1.11 lakh vocational candidates came out successful.

A total of 9,423 madrasa students and 7,104 vocational students got

students who took the exams at eight foreign centres passed the exams.

### LPG sellers indulging in profiteering

FROM PAGE 1

Tk 1,600-Tk 1,800 in the market," he said, adding that the companies were selling the bottle for Tk 1,520-1,532 at their mill gates.

DNCRP conducted at least 70 to 80 drives all over the country and found the cylinders of Bashundhara LP Gas, Beximco LPG, Laugfs Gas Bangladesh, Omera LPG, Fresh LP Gas and Sena LPG were selling at inflated prices. These companies are the key players in the private sector-dominated LPG

market. The BERC-fixed rate is mandatory for LPG retailers. "People are not getting LPG at that rate," Shafiquzzaman

At the meeting, representatives of LPG importers, operators, dealers and retailers blamed each other.

"Yes, we sold each cylinder at Tk 1.520... but we didn't tell the retailers and distributors to sell the products at Tk 1,700 to 1,800. Where is the extra money going?" said Jakaria Jalal, representative of the market leader Bashundhara LP Gas.

The dollar rate, the diesel price, the gas price and the electricity price have increased, but BERC did not factor that into the formula even after the companies sent it several letters, he said, while urging BERC to hold a public hearing to refix the pricing formula.

In response, BERC Secretary Khalilur Rahman said they will hold

month if all the companies send documents to support their claim.

"We will not hold a hearing in response to your verbal statement. The retail price for LPG will be fixed based on the Saudi contract price,

this month. "But those consignments are yet to reach the port.' This means all the available cylinders in the market were bought at the Saudi

which rose to \$790 at the beginning of

CP of \$599, which they were supposed to sell at Tk 1,232. "But they hiked the price by themselves [before this month]."

The exchange rate, the diesel price and all other variables were readjusted in the pricing, Rahman said. Two retailers from the capital's Khigaon and Agargaon areas shared

their experiences in the discussion. They said they need to purchase a 12kg cylinder at Tk 1,550 from different distributors. "We have another Tk 100 expense at least per cylinder in shop rent,

how can we sell the product at Tk 1,498?" asked a retailer. A distributor said that his pick-up vans are waiting at the factory gate for four to five days but are still not getting

they have only Tk 37 to Tk 38 in profit

margin as per the BERC pricing, which

transport fee and staff's salary. Then

the cylinders. Dealers and distributors said that

a public hearing within 15 days to is not enough as their cost is upwards of Tk 60-Tk 70 a cylinder.

The shipping cost and premium are higher than last year, said Md Mehedi Hasan, representative of Beximco.

pricing formula." The shipping fare was \$95 per metric tonne earlier, which is now at

\$120, he added.

"But it was not adjusted in the

"The LC [letter of credit opening]

crisis is very deep," said Mohammed Nurul Alam, the chief executive officer of Meghna Group's Fresh LPG. Ships are all set to come but due to the banks' delay, the products are not

coming for now. 'One-third of the month is gone and there is no product here. The crisis is absolute," he added.

In response, Shafiquzzaman said: "You went to a non-transparent process. You are twisting the price on a small scale, but the impact on the consumers is two-three-fold. There is no scope to sell LPG at an inflated rate."

Shafiquzzaman said companies should have been banned for what they have done, but that is not a solution. "LPG is being used all over the country and it is a basic need." Bangladesh's annual

metric tonnes, with households

accounting for about 84 percent of the

consumption. Around 99 percent of the market is dominated by 29 private companies.

the question patterns.

"I heard that questions for English and higher maths in Mymensingh

Chairman Prof Kamrul Islam said the

not have devices to attend the online classes. This can be the reason behind the decline," Kamrul said.

brought down the pass rate, he added.

Cumilla, and 92 percent in Dhaka.

from 2021's 95.26 percent. 90,266 alim examinees and 94.41

Ninety-seven percent of the 224

### Poritosh gets 5 years in jail

classes or communities of the society, or destroys communal harmony". Sessions Judge of the Rangpur Cyber Tribunal Abdul Mojid handed the

The verdict against Poritosh is also the first instance where the Rangpur Cyber Tribunal handed down a conviction, that too, against someone whose own cowshed was burnt down in the mayhem.

In addition to being the only one related to the communal violence being punished, Poritosh was put into solitary confinement for eight months while he underwent trial. The prison authorities had told

Poritosh's lawyer and his family that he was being kept there "for his safety". Solitary confinement that lasts longer than 15 consecutive days is recognised by the United Nations as Bangladesh "torture". Poritosh was denied bail three

times by the Rangpur Cyber Tribunal.

He was finally released on bail on May

9, 2022, after a High Court order was issued in this regard. But on February 5, Judge Abdul Mojid sent him to jail again to await consumption is about 14.28 lakh

the verdict. At the moment, not only is Poritosh the only one convicted, but

also the only one behind bars. The others accused for the

communal violence include the village mosque's moazzem Rabiul Islam, who made the calls for people to gather; Saikat Mandal, the mastermind of the incident; and Ujjal Hasan, who had first taken a screenshot of the social media post allegedly made by Poritosh and

accused of attacking and burning down the village, while 72 others are on the run. "We will take the case to the High Court," said Poritosh's lawyer

Also out on bail are 74 people

spread it. They are all out on bail.

Shamim al Mamun. Ismail Hossain, a sub-inspector of Pirganj Police Station, filed a case under the DSA accusing Paritosh Sarkar and he was taken into custody

### on October 19.

A special flight, C-130J aircraft of the Bangladesh Air Force, will operate on the Dhaka-Ankara-Dhaka route to carry the post-earthquake emergency relief and medical supplies to Turkey.

declared one day of state mourning for today marking the deaths in the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

The Cabinet Division issued a gazette notification in this regard yesterday.

## Meanwhile, the government has