



No need to worry about reserves: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Bangladesh is experiencing some difficulties due to the global economic recession and high inflation.

"Today, many say many things about the reserve. I said that there is no need to worry about the reserve. We'll cultivate crops and produce our own food. If needed, we'll spend and purchase less [reduce import] to some extent," she said.

While addressing the certificate-awarding and concluding ceremony of the 75th foundation training course for BCS officers in the city's Osmani Memorial Auditorium, they premier also asked the public servants to grow a mindset to serve the people, reaching the services to the doorsteps of the masses.

"You'll have to create a mentality to reach the services to the doorsteps of the people, engaging the people [in this process] for the people," she said.

Sheikh Hasina asked the government staff to always work for the country,

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A locomotive goes past Sreenagar Railway Station during a trial run. Today, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is set to inaugurate railway link between Dhaka and Faridpur's Bhanga through Padma Bridge.

PHOTO: TANJIL HASAN

ENSURING FAIR POLLS US assessment team enquires about govt steps

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The pre-election assessment delegation from the US has wanted to know what steps the government had taken to hold free and fair elections.

The mission neither mentioned participatory elections nor the polls-time government, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told reporters after meeting the six-member delegation at his office yesterday.

The delegates arrived in Dhaka on Saturday on a six-day visit.

Today, the mission is scheduled to meet representatives from the Awami League, BNP and Jatiya Party.

Earlier, the EU announced it would not send a fully-fledged election observation mission to Bangladesh.

At yesterday's meeting with the delegates, Foreign Minister Momen talked about Awami League's role in the Liberation War and its struggles for democracy.

"We have said we want a free and fair election that is free of violence. But we cannot guarantee that it will be free of violence because all [political] parties need to be committed to that," he said.

An election can be considered

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Politics now an instrument of material gains

Rehman Sobhan tells seminar on 'broken' politics and the way out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People in politics now consider it an instrument of their advancement, eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said yesterday.

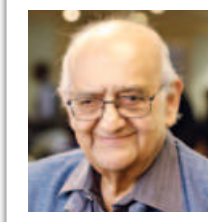
"When politics itself and parliament itself become instrumental in perpetuating someone's business fortune, the whole dynamic of politics then becomes not public service but material advancement and this is what led to a major breakdown in the system," he said, speaking in English.

Prof Rehman made the remarks at a seminar titled "Politics is broken: How do we fix it" organised by English daily Dhaka Tribune in association with the Royal Norwegian Embassy at a city hotel yesterday.

Talking about the politicisation of the administration, he said, "Now, here this has been a continuous process, which began long ago, but became worse with each successive period.

"And even after you moved into a system of relatively free and fair elections, the politicisation process continued The compulsion of a particular regime when it comes into power not to reverse the wrongs of what its predecessors did by institutionally correcting it, but by perpetuating that system. The way in which the psychology actually works is that this regime came and

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Govt couldn't control onion, potato prices

Admits agri minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque has admitted that the government has failed to control the prices of onions and potatoes despite taking measures.

The minister, also a presidium member of the Awami League, made the remark to reporters after a Food Planning and Monitoring Committee meeting at the Secretariat yesterday.

"We couldn't control the price of onions and potatoes. So, we'll accept the criticism, this is our weak point. But please also highlight our strong points in the media," the minister said.

When asked if the government has given up on controlling the price of potatoes and onions, Razzaque said, "We've not given up at all. We're working on it. The production part falls to our agricultural ministry, but the commerce ministry is

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Death toll from Afghan quakes doubles to 2,000

Nearly 10,000 injured; rescue workers dig through razed villages for signs of life

AFP, Herat

The death toll from a series of earthquakes in western Afghanistan yesterday rose sharply again to more than 2,000, with nearly 10,000 injured, as rescue workers dug through razed villages for vanishing signs of life.

More than 1,300 homes were toppled when Saturday's magnitude 6.3 quake -- followed by eight strong aftershocks -- jolted hard-to-reach areas 30 kilometres (19 miles) northwest of the provincial capital of Herat, according to officials.

In rural Zinda Jan district, dozens of households were reduced to jumbles of broken masonry, where makeshift rescue teams dug trenches in the hope of unearthing survivors.

"Our people witnessed an unprecedented earthquake," said disaster management ministry spokesman Mullah Janan Sayeq,

putting the number of dead at 2,053 and injured at 9,240 across 13 villages.

"For the treatment of the victims of the incident we are doing our best," he told reporters in Kabul. "On-site search operations in the affected area are ongoing," he added, warning the fatality figures would likely rise higher still.

One further aftershock of magnitude 4.2 hit the same area around 7:00 am (0230 GMT) yesterday morning, according to the United States Geological Survey.

In Sarboland village of Zinda Jan district, an AFP reporter saw homes ruined near the epicentre of the quakes, which shook the area for more than five hours.

Gutted homes showed personal belongings flapping in the harsh wind, as women and children lingered out in the open preparing to spend the night under an open sky.

More than 1,300 homes were toppled when Saturday's magnitude 6.3 quake jolted hard-to-reach areas of the provincial capital of Herat.

HOLDING NAT'L POLLS EC draws up Tk 1,445cr budget

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

To organise the upcoming national polls, the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat has prepared a draft budget of Tk 1,445 crore, which is twice as large as the previous budget and also the most expensive one prepared to date.

The dramatic increase in the budget has been attributed to the sharp rise in the cost of fuel and other necessary materials.

"A draft proposal of the election budget has been prepared, and we are hopeful that it will be finalised by next week," EC Secretariat Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath told this newspaper.

The budget for the 12th parliamentary election, likely to be held in the first week of January, might increase by another Tk 200 crore as the commission is considering a two-day allowance for polling officials this time instead of the current practice of paying them allowance only for the election day.

Presiding officers, assistant presiding officers, and polling officers need to work on the eve of the election when they collect polling materials from the returning officers and safely deliver them to the polling centres, say EC officials.

Presently, a presiding officer gets Tk 4,000, an assistant presiding officer gets Tk 3,000 and a polling official gets Tk 2,000 as allowance for performing election duties on the polling day.

EC officials said that there will be one presiding officer for each polling centre; and one assistant presiding officer and two polling officers for each polling booth.

They said around 42,000 polling centres with about 260,000 polling booths will be required for the election.

EC officials also said around 60 percent of the total budget will be spent on law enforcement agencies to be deployed to maintain law and order during the polls.

Previously, EC allocated Tk 700 crore for the 11th national polls.

Research suggests the planet Mercury continues to shrink

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

New research strongly suggests that the planet Mercury is continuing to shrink.

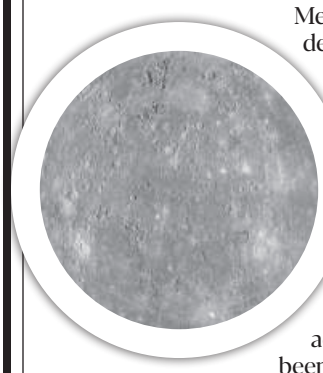
The smallest planet in the solar system began to contract at least three billion years ago, and experts suggest it is likely that the rate of contraction has been decreasing since then.

Mercury's radius may have decreased by as much as 7km, models and observations indicate. The contracting of the planet has produced lobate scarps, which are long, tectonic structures on its surface.

But until now, evidence of tectonic activity on Mercury has been lacking.

While undertaking a global survey of Mercury using data from Nasa's Messenger mission (2011-2015), Open University (OU) research student Benjamin Man, who led the study, discovered small, fresh landforms called grabens.

Man said: "The discovery of small grabens associated with larger tectonic structures was serendipitous. As part of my doctoral studies, I have made the first geological map of a region of the planet and whilst doing so, I came across some of the most impressive examples of these.



Rows of boats in Khatunganj, Chattogram, are being loaded with goods and supplies meant for Hatiya, Maheshkhali and other islands. Shipping to the islands is almost entirely dependent on these boats.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

BUSINESS

CPD for Tk 17,568 RMG wage

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) yesterday proposed Tk 17,568 as the minimum monthly wage for garment workers in Bangladesh.

Of the amount, Tk 9,662 or 55 percent is basic wage, Tk 1,230 or 7 percent is food allowance and Tk 4,831 or 50 percent of the basic is house rent.

CPD Research Director Khondaker Golam Moazzem and Senior Research Associate Tamim Ahmed jointly shared the proposal at a discussion at Lakeshore Hotel in Dhaka.

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