



DHAKA: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government would continue the dragnet against those involved in corruption and irregularities irrespective of their political affiliation. "We have been trying our best to check corruption and irregularities since the Awami League assumed office. The drives against the menaces would be continued in the days to come as we cannot tolerate those anymore," she said in parliament. The Leader of the House said it is not a big matter who belongs to which party, adding that her government makes arrests of the corrupt elements irrespective of their political identities. The prime minister said these in her valedictory speech at the Jatiya Sangsad when her attention was drawn to corruption and irregularities in various sectors, particularly in health and financial sectors, by some opposition lawmakers, including Deputy Leader of the Opposition GM Quader. The sitting of the eighth session which was also a budget session of the 11th parliament for the fiscal year (FY) 2020-'21 that started at 11 this morning with Speaker Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair was prorogued in the afternoon. The premier said her government is taking actions whenever any news relating to irregularities is surfacing. She, however, expressed her dismay that some people have been making attempts to brand her government a corrupt one as the authorities are capturing the corrupt elements. The premier added that the character of the people had been destroyed by the military government which came to the power at the dark of night using firearms after the August 15, 1975 bloody carnage. "Military dictators have taught the people from top to bottom how to be corrupt, earn black money and be loan defaulters just to give their illegally grabbed power a strong footing," she continued. The Prime Minister said that it would be tougher to eliminate corruption and irregularities completely from the society as the military dictators gave an institutional shape to those staying in power years after years. The premier said that her government has passed the national budget of Tk 5,68,000 crore so that Bangladesh can cope with the pace of the world's progress once the stability is resumed after the COVID-19 pandemic. She added: "We know there is a question whether we can implement the budget fully because of this coronavirus.... If the situation turns normal (soon), we'll be able to do so. If this instability (arising out of Covid-19) continues across the world, we may not achieve our target, but we place it so that our economic activities continue." The premier greeted all concerned relating to the formulation of the budget, saying that her government has been able to place the budget when many developed countries could not do so as the Covid-19 has been rattling the world. The Prime Minister said the government will increase the humanitarian assistances alongside expanding the coverage of the social safety net programmes as many people lost their works amid the pandemic. She said she would not bother whether the government expenditure would go up due to taking the humanitarian measures to minimise the plight of people. In this context, she said that the government has announced 19 stimulus packages so that everyone can continue running his or her economic activities. The premier also said that her government has taken the decision of closing down the state-run jute mills across the country with paying all the dues of 25,000 workers as the government is set to restart those after making them time-befitting and technology-enriched to meet the demand of the

international markets. She added that the jute mills are age-old established in 50s and 60s and for this, they could not make profit and incurred losses to the public exchequer years after years and the government had to pay salaries of the regular and irregular workers. Now the government would pay all the dues (including retirement benefit) of the workers – 50 percent in cash and 50 percent in saving certificates – so that they could get an amount in every three months which will help them run their families properly, she said. She mentioned that it would require Taka 5000 crore to pay the dues of the workers. Of the workers, the interested ones would be given proper training and they would get priority in jobs in case of restarting the jute mills as those would require efficient workers, she said. The Prime Minister said that the jute and jute goods are the products of agriculture and industry and therefore, the refurbished jute mills would be the assets of the country. Jute could be an alternative to synthetic products to prevent environment pollution, she added. Coming down heavily on some political parties particularly BNP without mentioning its name, Sheikh Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League said that there are many political parties in the country but none of those was seen standing beside the people in the crisis arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. “My question is that how many political parties or NGOs and voluntary organisations stand by the people at this moment,” she said. In this context, the premier said that it was very easy to criticise others and find out flaws in the budget staying at home, adding it was the Awami League which had achieved the country’s independence under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and it stands beside the people.

The Awami League and its front and associate bodies such as the Juba League, Chhatra League, Swechchhasebak League, Krishok League and Jatiya Shramik League, alongside the government, have been working to mitigate the plight of the coronavirus-hit people in their every need of relief materials and personnel protection equipment, burials of those died of COVID-19, harvesting paddy, making the people aware about maintaining social distancing and health code. About the preparation to offset the impact of flood on the people, she said that the government has taken initiatives in advance to help the flood-hit people immediately after any disaster in the country. She said her government takes prior preparations to face any disaster as it knows natural disasters hit Bangladesh routinely due to its geographical location. The premier said her government has already sent dry foods, rice and cash money allocated for the flood-hit people in different districts and allocated money and rice for remaining districts so that they could take prompt measures. Noting that the entire world has become stagnant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she said Bangladesh likewise other countries of the world would turnaround again after fighting the lethal virus.

The premier called upon all to abide by the health guidelines and social distancing in a proper manner instead of being panicked out of corona phobia, saying, “We’ll have to win against the fear.”