

New power law on cards to curb theft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to enact a law replacing the existing Electricity Act, 1910 in a bid to curb power theft and systems loss.

"In the proposed law, we will suggest inclusion of the provision that all offences including power theft will be considered as a non-bailable offence. The persons involved in such crimes must get stern punishment," said Iqbal Hasan Mahmood, state minister for energy and mineral resources at

a briefing at his secretariat office yesterday.

"It is about time we replaced the over 90-year-old act for sound distribution and customer service," he said.

He however said the ministry would solicit opinion from all sections of society before making the final draft of the law, which will help establish a better management and distribution system.

"If people feel such a move will hamper their fundamental rights,

we will scrap the provision," he said.

The state minister said a high-powered committee will be formed by this week to make a draft of the proposed act.

"Provisions will also be there to ensure punishment for corrupt employees and reward for high-performing staff in the power sector."

The ministry took the initiative after a committee put forward suggestions after visiting India

recently. The ministerial committee examined the law there and learnt about the experiences of West Bengal, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in eliminating pilferage in power sector.

The state minister said the committee proposed a jail term of five years in place of three years and maximum fine of Tk 25,000 instead of Tk 10,000 for illegal use of power.

"It also suggested formation of a special court or tribunal for trying

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Pizza Hut kicks off its service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pizza Hut, world's most popular and largest pizza chain, formally opened its first franchise in Dhaka yesterday.

The chain restaurant on South Avenue of Gulshan-1, the first and only of its kind in Bangladesh on a spacious 7,000 sq ft area, can host 220 persons.

Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury inaugurated Pizza Hut as chief and special guests in the afternoon.

Distinguished personalities including diplomats were, among others, present at the function where they relished signature pizza

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PHOTO: STAR

Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, centre, and Commerce and Industries Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury attend the opening of a Pizza Hut branch yesterday in Gulshan.

Commonwealth haggles over Zimbabwe

REUTERS, Abuja, Nigeria

A summit of the Commonwealth is haggling over whether to readmit Zimbabwe, a row that has split the 54-nation body along racial lines.

Prime ministers, presidents and kings attending the summit in Nigeria set up a six-nation committee on Friday to seek a consensus and allow the main body of the conference to discuss global trade, AIDS and terrorism.

"These people are very experienced political leaders," re-elected

Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon told BBC radio yesterday.

"They are all people who are capable of coming to a resolution that I believe, given the breadth of thinking of those six people, will be largely accepted by the rest of the Commonwealth."

The group suspended Zimbabwe last year, saying President Robert Mugabe had rigged his re-election and harassed opponents.

The task force is made up of

Rejoinder

Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday contradicted a report headlined 'Mahi, Babar squabble on Biman flight' which The Daily Star ran on Thursday.

In a rejoinder, it said the alleged downgrading of seats of Mahi Chowdhury's sister Muna Chowdhury and her husband in Biman's Dhaka-bound flight from Bangkok on December 1 is not true.

"The fact is that Muna Chowdhury and her husband holding business class tickets were downgraded to economy class as they reported late and business class was already filled," Biman claimed.

State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar had no role in the seating arrangements on the

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PHOTO: STAR

People sheltering on the Bijoy embankment in Gangachhara, Rangpur face an uncertain future after the Teesta River devoured their homesteads.

Harvest brings no smiles for them

AKM MOHSIN and ASHFAQ WARES KHAN, back from Rangpur

Although the harvesting season is well underway, most people living on the Bijoy barrage in Rangpur's Gangachhara area are still under the grip of the mona or near-famine situation.

The harvest has largely benefited landowners, while most of the 20,000 people on the Bijoy barrage, who took shelter on the flood protection embankment after losing their land to the Teesta, face starvation due to continued unemployment.

Sources said only young men able to endure the rigours of harvesting managed to get jobs in the rice fields, while women, children and old people remain malnourished with no jobs.

The remoteness of the barrage from the villages also contributes to the lack of job opportunities for these land-less, ultra-poor sections of the society.

Asgar Ali, a 70-year-old man who barely subsisted as a seasonal labourer in his younger days,

is now facing starvation after remaining unemployed for years on end.

Many others like Asgar said they received food relief from the government only twice during Ramadan.

The desperate poor ran expectantly towards these correspondents thinking they were government relief workers, only to be left heart-broken once they came to know they were visiting journalists.

"My sons work in far-off Comilla, so there is no-one to feed me," explained Asgar. "I am sick and can't work. What am I going to do?"

Some others like Hajeron and Shaheron have taken to scavenging through the paddy fields looking for sheaves of paddy falling from vans and trucks during transportation.

Sulaiman, a seasonal worker supporting a large family on the barrage, was found sitting hopelessly by the roadside after getting only Tk 30 from the sale of fish he caught in the Teesta during the day.

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Bodo rebels lay down arms

AFP, Guwahati

Tribal guerrillas lowered the rebel flag yesterday before Indian officials to symbolically end a seven-year insurgency that left some 2,000 people dead in the northeastern state of Assam.

The 2,641 militants of the Bodo Liberation Tigers swapped their emblem for a white flag and laid down AK-47 rifles, rocket-launchers and explosives as part of a peace deal that will grant auton-

omy to the Bodo tribe.

"We shall provide all help and support for rehabilitating the BLT militants who decided to join the mainstream," India's junior home minister Swami Chinmayanand told them.

Tiger leader Hagrama Basumatry led the rebels in surrender in the ceremony in Kokrajhar district, 235km west of Assam's capital Guwahati.

"From today onwards we shall

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Speaker, his deputy sit to bury hatchet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Both the speaker and deputy speaker held a closed-door meeting yesterday in a bid to thrash out differences between them, six days after the prime minister intervened in the matter.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid

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Correction

In our report published on December 6 under the headline "Govt takes hard line on contractual service" it was mistakenly mentioned that the contract of Director General of NGO Affairs Bureau Shahjahan Majumder would expire this month.

He is not on contract service and due to go on the leave preparatory retirement (LPR) from December 30 on completion of his 57 years in service. We regret the error.

Prayer Timings

December 7

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-16	5-21
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

A year gone, Mymensingh cinema blasts probe sees no headway yet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police have made no headway in the probe into the cinema bomb blasts in the town even after a year.

On December 7 last year, 18 were killed and more than 100 were injured in a string of bomb blasts at Ajanta, Chhayabani, Aloka and Purobi cinemas. Of the injured, eight including a woman have become disabled.

Mymensingh Bomb Blast Tragedy Day Celebration Committee (MBBTDC) in a press release yesterday said police on suspicion arrested 30 including 15

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Cricket for rights of poor

AFP, Dhaka

The United Nations yesterday turned to cricket and leaflets to draw Bangladesh's attention to a study calling for an overhaul of the judiciary and police force to better serve the poor.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) staff brought out cricketers, film stars, politicians and themselves for a friendly cricket match to mark the launch of a report on human security in Bangladesh.

"This is definitely an important report," Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said as he opened the match.

Elsewhere on the field, Jorgen Lissner, the UNDP resident representative in Dhaka, said everyone from politicians to the private sector to civil society needed to work

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