

Gas supplies fall sharply in Europe

AP, Vienna, Austria

Gas supplies to much of Europe fell sharply yesterday in the fallout of Moscow's pricing dispute with Ukraine while several nations urged energy-hungry industries to switch to oil and rationing began in Serbia.

Serbia was worst affected, with its gas deliveries cut in half. But other nations also reported substantial losses of between 18 and 40 percent. Apart from Serbia, gas was flowing normally to homes and businesses thanks to stored supplies.

Despite the dispute, gas prices rose only marginally on Monday on world markets.

Still, with the 25-nation European Union counting on Russia for a quarter of its natural gas needs mostly through Ukraine concern rose that a prolonged standoff could spell severe problems.

The German government urged Russia and Ukraine to compromise quickly in order to resolve their dispute over natural gas deliveries.

Russia took over the rotating presidency of the Group of Eight most wealthy nations on Sunday, with President Vladimir Putin looking to convert his country's energy wealth into political influence.

East European countries many with a record of decades of energy dependency on Moscow established during a half century of domination by the former Soviet Union were the most hurt Monday.

Hungary reported gas supplies down by 40 percent after Russia's OAO Gazprom cut deliveries to neighboring Ukraine, which acts as a transit country for most of Russia's gas consignment to Europe. Russian gas amounts to about 80 percent of Hungary's needs.

MOL, the country's national wholesaler, said households would not be immediately threatened but joined providers in other nations in urging major industrial consumers to switch to backup oil systems. And MOL official Sandor Kantor said his company was cutting deliveries southward to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Serbia said it was receiving 50 percent less gas than normal.

While the EC Secretariat revealed that persons loyal to the ruling party lawmakers from Chittagong-8 and 9 constituencies were working as the supervisors of the enumeration staff while the ones appointed by the EC appointed kept aloof.

In Dampara Bagmanirum area [city corporation ward No 15], Ranjana Sen, headmistress of a local primary school, was seen collecting information at around 10:00pm while local JCD President Rezual Karim Manik and some others were supervising the process.

When asked, Manik said he was supervising the task on the instructions of a local lawmaker of the ruling alliance. Some JCD activists loyal to a former state minister were also present there.

At Enayet Bazar at around 11:00pm, JCD activist Nezam Uddin was seen dictating to schoolteacher Nepali Das how to go about her job as an EC-appointed enumerator. "I am only helping her do the job properly," he told The Daily Star.

Information collection in Agrabad Pathantuli area is reportedly going on under supervision of local ward BNP Vice-President Abdul Moteleb and his son Didarul Alam.

While visiting the area at around 2:30pm yesterday, no enumerator was found to be in the field.

Abdul Moteleb said the commission's staff would come at 3:00pm as from that time onwards he and his men would be able to accompany them.

"We are overseeing the listing job to make sure none of our men is left out of the list," he told The Daily Star. "We have already prepared a list of voters in the locality on our own and submitted it to Khosru Bhai [local MP]," he added.

However, things seemed different in neighbouring Dayyapara area where Kater Saha, a schoolteacher, was carrying out without any interference the task he was assigned by the EC.

Despite repeated attempts, the persons appointed by the EC to supervise the task in these areas with the above alleged anomalies could not be available for comment.

Meanwhile, some heads of the schools engaged in the enlisting process said collecting information alongside taking care of their schools have become very difficult for them.

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Rab, police mistakenly trade shots

BDNEWS, Natore

A triangular gunfight occurred among the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police and criminals when police opened fire mistakenly on Rab members engaged in a shoot-out with the criminals early yesterday.

However, none was injured during the fight.

The incident took place at around 3:00am when armed miscreants, with a view to committing robbery, put barricade on the Bamihal-Singra road near Dakatari village and attacked a vehicle carrying the Rab members who were returning to Natore from the Bamihal police camp. The elite force retaliated resulting in a gunfight.

According to locals, both sides exchanged at least 10 rounds of bullets creating panic among the villagers.

During this gunfight, a patrol team of police coming from opposite direction opened fire on the Rab members mistaking them for criminals. The Rab also returned fire triggering a triangular gunfight.

However, a couple of minutes later the law enforcers realised their 'friendly fire' and chased the goons. But taking the opportunity of fighting between the police and Rab, the armed hoodlums managed to flee the scene.

After the killing of three Ansar members on December 28, a contingent of Rab was deployed at Bamihal camp to combat the outlaws and avert further attack.

But recently, the government has dismissed the possibility of bringing about any reforms in the electoral system. Law Minister Moudud Ahmed last month made it clear again that the government has no plans for reforms.

The incumbent CEC MA Aziz has refused to pursue the reform proposals placed by his predecessor and declared that he himself would submit some reform proposals. But he has not discussed anything about his intended move for reforms at any of EC meetings, nor with the other two election commissioners though more than seven months have gone since the announcement.

It has rather become uncertain whether he will send any reform proposal to the government at all, when the government has already rejected outright the idea of bringing reforms in the electoral system, sources at the EC said.

"We don't know anything about the CEC's reform proposals, as he never discussed the issue with us," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told The Daily Star.

MA Syed submitted the six-point reform proposal on May 21, his last workday as the CEC. Before placing the proposals to the president, he told journalists, "If the Election Commission is not allowed an independent secretariat with financial autonomy, it would not be possible for it in future to conduct elections freely and fairly."

Visits to some of the areas revealed that persons loyal to the ruling party lawmakers from Chittagong-8 and 9 constituencies were working as the supervisors of the enumeration staff while the ones appointed by the EC appointed kept aloof.

In Dampara Bagmanirum area [city corporation ward No 15], Ranjana Sen, headmistress of a local primary school, was seen collecting information at around 10:00pm while local JCD President Rezual Karim Manik and some others were supervising the process.

When asked, Manik said he was supervising the task on the instructions of a local lawmaker of the ruling alliance. Some JCD activists loyal to a former state minister were also present there.

At Enayet Bazar at around 11:00pm, JCD activist Nezam Uddin was seen dictating to schoolteacher Nepali Das how to go about her job as an EC-appointed enumerator. "I am only helping her do the job properly," he told The Daily Star.

Information collection in Agrabad Pathantuli area is reportedly going on under supervision of local ward BNP Vice-President Abdul Moteleb and his son Didarul Alam.

While visiting the area at around 2:30pm yesterday, no enumerator was found to be in the field.

Abdul Moteleb said the commission's staff would come at 3:00pm as from that time onwards he and his men would be able to accompany them.

"We are overseeing the listing job to make sure none of our men is left out of the list," he told The Daily Star. "We have already prepared a list of voters in the locality on our own and submitted it to Khosru Bhai [local MP]," he added.

However, things seemed different in neighbouring Dayyapara area where Kater Saha, a schoolteacher, was carrying out without any interference the task he was assigned by the EC.

Despite repeated attempts, the persons appointed by the EC to supervise the task in these areas with the above alleged anomalies could not be available for comment.

Meanwhile, some heads of the schools engaged in the enlisting process said collecting information alongside taking care of their schools have become very difficult for them.

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Inflation rate 8yr high

FROM PAGE 1

mainly by a devastating flooding. Since then, until October 2005, the highest inflation rate was marked at 7.93 percent in August 2005.

In line with a recent trend of higher inflation in rural areas, the point-to-point rate of inflation soared from 6.62 percent in June 2005 to as high as 8.70 percent in November. In contrast, the rate in urban areas was 6.14 percent in June, from which it had consistently slid to stand at 4.96 percent in November.

In November, the inflation rate in food items was 8.58 percent, soaring from October's 7.42 percent. On the other hand, the rate in non-food items ebbed slightly from 7.12 percent in October to 7.03 percent in November.

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Research Director Zaid Bakht said the trend of inflation rate hike hits the poor more severely, as "they have little ability to adjust with the increased prices of essentials. It's very difficult for them to expand their income to match the higher commodity prices. The higher inflation rate in food items also affects them more as they are the main consumers."

Bakht said the increased government borrowing from the banking sector is one of the reasons for the persistent upward flight of inflation. "The government has no control over public expenditure that compels it to borrow more money from the banking sector," he remarked, adding, "Deprecia-

tion of taka is another reason for the skyrocketing inflation."

Until mid-December in FY06, the government's bank borrowing was Tk 4,368 crore, of which around Tk 3,500 crore came from the Bangladesh Bank. On the other hand, taka lost about 9 percent of its value against US dollar over the last one year.

Besides, Bakht said, there is no open-way competitive system for import, which has given rise to the hegemony of a particular section of businessmen on import and also creates opportunity for them to manipulate the prices of imported goods. For instance, he mentioned the recent price hike in sugar.

He said the several domestic fuel price hikes last year have had some incremental adverse effects like inflated irrigation and transport costs that ultimately pushed up the prices of food and other essentials.

Bakht's comments agree with what Bangladesh Bank Governor Salehuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star last Tuesday. He said, apart from the tight monetary policy, there are other reasons for the inflation flare-up, "which are beyond our jurisdiction and we have informed the commerce ministry about these issues."

The production of rice has been good, the governor said, and other consumer products have also been imported adequately. "But, for some reasons, these are not coming to the market. Perhaps they are being hoarded," he observed.

The proposals also include introduction of electronic voting machines and electronic voter roll, army deployment in the city corporation and municipality polls, and introduction of electoral enquiry committees for the local government polls.

Syed who oversaw the last parliamentary election and a large number of local government bodies and vacant parliamentary constituencies in his tenure, has acknowledged that he did not always get all-out cooperation from the secretariat and the government in conducting polls in last five years.

A day after assuming office, CEC MA Aziz on May 24 said he too favours an independent EC secretariat.

"I don't know how far the government controls or influences the Election Commission secretariat," he said, replying to a query on reported influence of the government on the EC secretariat. "But I believe it should be independent," the CEC continued.

About reforms, Aziz said reforms are a must to make the rules up-to-date. "Reform is an ongoing process. There are no bindings that rules cannot be amended," he said.

Later he said he would immediately send a set of reform proposals to the government. Those would include, among others, an independent secretariat and an increase in the election expenditure.

More than 100 houses in Kemiri village in the district were swept away those belonging to plantation workers nearby were also submerged, he said.

Heavy rains have inundated the area since Saturday.

The state-run Antara news agency said hundreds of houses in four villages in Jember had been swept away by the floods after the Kaliputih riverburst its banks.

"Many victims have not been found. Many of them may have been buried in the mud," local police chief Soejatmianto was quoted as saying.

Severe flooding, much of it blamed on rampant deforestation and the development of natural water catchments areas, is not unusual during Indonesia's rainy season.

More than 200 people were killed in 2003 when flash floods tore through Bahorok, a popular riverside resort in North Sumatra, destroying more than 450 buildings. The tragedy was blamed largely on illegal logging.

Some government officials and power industry insiders said the cabinet committee's decision proved the PPR 2003 is 'ineffective'. This was the first review panel decision under the PPR and probably this will also be the last one, they added.

"No aggrieved bidder will ever want to file a review case by depositing Tk five lakh to the government under the PPR to see that it has no effect," one official pointed out.

Another official wondered how the cabinet committee has approved such a grossly flawed deal. "This will one day lead to an anti-corruption case against each of the officials and businessmen involved in the power project."

Designed to restrict corruption in public procurement, the PPR was set to become a law last year but it was stopped at the cabinet level as all its members except Saifur Rahman resisted it. The cabinet members fear that once the PPR turns into a law, they will not be able to raise their 'election funds' in the name of development projects, sources said.

A number of bureaucrats involved in shady infrastructure procurement are also against the PPR, officially arguing that this regulation prioritises transparency over procurement.

Back in November, the World Bank, which was hammering on the PPR and its enactment as a law, had said it wanted to see the government abide by the first ever decision of the review panel for the sake of transparency.

GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF HARBIN

Harbin's flawed bid had no technical offer although it had made a price offer of \$41 million, which the PDB termed the lowest bid.

The review panel under the Central Procurement Technical Unit of the Implementation Monitoring Evaluation Department (IMED) found the PDB's acceptance of such a bid highly irregular as the price offer was made against a "phantom technical offer and did not deserve any evaluation."

Official sources said that during the October review of the

Official sources said that during the October review of the

2 JHALAKATI JUDGES Murder case sent to fast trial court

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A case lodged in connection with the killing of the two judges at Jhalakati by the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) suicide bomber has been transferred to the Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal (STT) at Barisal yesterday.

Acknowledging the fact, Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) of Barisal STT Advocate Majibur Rahman Nantu said the transferred case was lodged under sections 3, 4, 5 of Explosive Substances Act by Sultan Ahmed Khan, driver of the microbus carrying the judges on November 14, 2005.

Sohrab Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Jhalakati Sadar Police Station and investigation officer (IO) of the case, filed the chargesheet at Jhalakati Sadar Upazila magistrate court on November 30, 2005 accusingly.

They were: Ishtiaq Hassan Mamun alias Mamun Ali alias Shihab, arrested injured suicide bomber of JMB under treatment at Barisal Medical College Hospital, Sultan Khan, arrested accomplice of Mamun under custody at Jhalakati, Abdul Awal alias Ararat and Aatur Rahman Sunny, two top-ranked arrested leaders of JMB, JMB chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (MJJB) chief Siddique Islam alias Bangla Bhai.

Trial of this case would start at this tribunal tomorrow, the SPP added.

Another case lodged under the Homicide Act in the same incident is still under investigation.

No plan yet to make

FROM PAGE 1

But recently, the government has dismissed the possibility of bringing about any reforms in the electoral system. Law Minister Moudud Ahmed last month made it clear again that the government has no plans for reforms.

The incumbent CEC MA Aziz has refused to pursue the reform proposals placed by his predecessor and declared that he himself would submit some reform proposals. But he has not discussed anything about his intended move for reforms at any of EC meetings, nor with the other two election commissioners though more than seven months have gone since the announcement.

It has rather become uncertain whether he will send any reform proposal to the government at all, when the government has already rejected outright the idea of bringing reforms in the electoral system, sources at the EC said.

"We don't know anything about the CEC's reform proposals, as he never discussed the issue with us," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told The Daily Star.

MA Syed submitted the six-point reform proposal on May 21, his last workday as the CEC. Before placing the proposals to the president, he told journalists, "If the Election Commission is not allowed an independent secretariat with financial autonomy, it would not be possible for it in future to conduct elections freely and fairly."

Visits to some of the areas revealed that persons loyal to the ruling party lawmakers from Chittagong-8 and 9 constituencies were working as the supervisors of the enumeration staff while the ones appointed by the EC appointed kept aloof.

In Dampara Bagmanirum area [city corporation ward No 15], Ranjana Sen, headmistress of a local primary school, was seen collecting information at around 10:00pm while local JCD President Rezual Karim Manik and some others were supervising the process.

When asked, Manik said he was supervising the task on the instructions of a local lawmaker of the ruling alliance. Some JCD activists loyal to a former state minister were also present there.

At Enayet Bazar at around 11:00pm, JCD activist Nezam Uddin was seen dictating to schoolteacher Nepali Das how to go about her job as an EC-appointed enumerator. "I am only helping her do the job properly," he told The Daily Star.

Information collection in Agrabad Pathantuli area is reportedly going on under supervision of local ward BNP Vice-President Abdul Moteleb and his son Didarul Alam.

While visiting the area at around 2:30pm yesterday, no enumerator was found to be in the field.

Abdul Moteleb said the commission's staff would come at 3:00pm as from that time onwards he and his men would be able to accompany them.

"We are overseeing the listing job to make sure none of our men is left out of the list," he told The Daily Star. "We have already prepared a list of voters in the locality on our own and submitted it to Khosru Bhai [local MP]," he added.

However, things seemed different in neighbouring Dayyapara area where Kater Saha, a schoolteacher, was carrying out without any interference the task he was assigned by the EC.

Despite repeated attempts, the persons appointed by the EC to supervise the task in these areas with the above alleged anomalies could not be available for comment.

Meanwhile, some heads of the schools engaged in the enlisting process said collecting information alongside taking care of their schools have become very difficult for them.

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Headmistress Ranjana Sen of Bagmanirum School said, "We are usually busy at the beginning of the academic year and now with the enumeration assignment on I can hardly make time for my school."

Flash floods

FROM PAGE 16

Local police commissioner Teduh Tedjo said 31 people had been found dead in Jember district, about 800km east of the capital, while around 700 people had sought refuge at government buildings and schools.

"Of 31 bodies, only 16 had been brought to hospital. The rest are still in the flooded areas because of transport problems," he said.

Television footage showed scores of people, some carrying babies in sarongs or leading oxen by hand, fleeing along muddy roads on foot, bicycle and motorcycle.

Over 300 police officers, assisted by rescue workers and soldiers, were continuing to scour the flooded area for more victims, Tedjo said.

More than 100 houses in Kemiri village in the district were swept away those belonging to plantation workers nearby were also submerged, he said.

Heavy rains have inundated the area since Saturday.

The state-run Antara news agency said hundreds of houses in four villages in Jember had been swept away by the floods after the Kaliputih riverburst its banks.

"Many victims have not been found. Many of them may have been buried in the mud," local police chief Soejatmianto was quoted as saying.

Severe flooding, much of it blamed on rampant deforestation and the development of natural water catchments areas, is not unusual during Indonesia's rainy season.

More than 200 people were killed in 2003 when flash floods tore through Bahorok, a popular riverside resort in North Sumatra, destroying more than 450 buildings. The tragedy was blamed largely on illegal logging.

Hajj flight

FROM PAGE 1

However, Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab), federating body of 363 hajj agencies, on Sunday expressed its fear that the five DC-10 flights and the chartered plane will be able to carry a little over 1,650 pilgrims.

"Even after confirmation of the five slots, 700 to 800 intending pilgrims will miss the Hajj," Haab President Abdus Shakur told The Daily Star last night.

He said concerned officials are trying hard under last moment pressure to send all the pilgrims to Saudi Arabia. "Why such pressure was not created two months ago?" he questioned.

Some 51,000 intending pilgrims have obtained Saudi visas.

The government must send all of them by January 4 as the Saudi government seals off the special hajj airport that day.

ROME FLIGHT CANCELLED

Biman authorities cancelled the DC-10 flight BG-0851 scheduled to fly to Rome in the morning and diverted it to Jeddah. The new flight, BG-055, was scheduled to take off at 9:20 last night.

The sudden cancellation of the flight caused sufferings to the passengers. Biman sources said the authorities may arrange another flight (BG-001 for Rome today).

HAJJ CAMP

Meanwhile, a few hundred non-ballettee pilgrims at the Hajj Camp in Ashkone in Uttara are still passing times in uncertainty and anxiety as most of them do not know when their plane tickets will be confirmed.

Many intending pilgrims with a few hundred relatives are languishing at the camp.

Many of them, including women, have been passing their days miserably along with some relatives on the camp's ground floor. They are exposed to shivering cold, mosquitoes and acute toilet crisis.

The Haab president said around 50 percent of the 2,000 pilgrims at the camp are passing days in uncertainty as they could not confirm bookings for air tickets.

Hajj Officer Abi Abdullah yesterday said they are asking the non-ballettee pilgrims not to panic.

The traditional festival took a new dimension and was renamed after the Guro people braced Christianity and Christian missionaries started arranging same types of programmes.

Each programme costs a lot as it requires several expensive things. When not an inch of land is left for Jum cultivation, it is impossible to continue all the rites and rituals, said the Mandi families in a helpless tone.

The traditional festival took a new dimension and was renamed after the Guro people braced Christianity and Christian missionaries started arranging same types of programmes.

Each programme costs a lot as it requires several expensive things. When not an inch of land is left for Jum cultivation, it is impossible to continue all the rites and rituals, said the Mandi families in a helpless tone.

The traditional festival took a new dimension and was renamed after the Guro people braced Christianity and Christian missionaries started arranging same types of programmes.

Each programme costs a lot as it requires several expensive things. When not an inch of land is left for Jum cultivation, it is impossible to continue all the rites and rituals, said the Mandi families in a helpless tone.

The traditional festival took a new dimension and was renamed after the Guro people braced Christianity and Christian missionaries started arranging same types of programmes.

Each programme costs a lot as it requires several expensive things. When not an inch of land is left for Jum cultivation, it is impossible to continue all the rites and rituals, said the Mandi families in a helpless tone.

The traditional festival took a new dimension and was renamed after the Guro people braced Christianity and Christian missionaries started arranging same types of programmes.

Each programme costs a lot as it requires several expensive things. When not an inch of land is left for Jum cultivation, it is impossible to continue all the rites and rituals, said the Mandi families in a helpless tone.

The traditional festival took a new dimension and was renamed after the Guro people braced Christianity and Christian missionaries started arranging same types of programmes.

Each programme costs a lot as it requires several expensive things. When not an inch of land is left for Jum cultivation, it is impossible to continue all the rites and rituals, said the Mandi families in a helpless tone.

Nepal rebels abandon

FROM PAGE 16

which we rebelled has come to an end," the rebel leader Prachanda, or the Fierce One, said in a statement.

"We want to make it clear our future actions will be targeted against the autocratic regime. We are compelled to go offensive not only for the sake of peace and democracy but for the sake of self-defence."

King Gyanendra, who seized power 11 months ago, and the army declined to match the truce called initially for three months in early September and extended by a month in December. It ended at midnight.

The Royal Nepalese Army was ambivalent about the announcement.

"The army's position has not changed. Whether there is a ceasefire or not, we are acting on the government's mandate. The army will continue to do its duty," a senior army official said on condition of anonymity.

The United States embassy in Nepal said the end of the ceasefire was an unwelcome development.

"We think that it is very unhelpful and we are deeply concerned," a spokeswoman said. The United States, India and Britain cut lethal military supplies to Nepal after the royal takeover.

More than 12,000 people have died in the so-called "people's war" waged by the Maoists since 1996 to establish a communist republic.

The end of the ceasefire will result in increased unrest and violence in the months ahead, said political scientist and retired politics professor Lok Raj Baral.

"It will be back to square one," Baral said. "Strikes, conflicts and disturbances will start again. The government will face more confrontations, with the opposition alliance and the rebels."

In November the Maoists formed a loose alliance with seven political parties, saying they would jointly press for democracy.

The parties earlier Monday had called for an extension of the ceasefire as did UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the European Union last week.

The rebel leader said he "respected and understood" the calls to continue the ceasefire but an extension was not an option.

"The Royal Nepalese Army has compelled us to end the ceasefire. It was not only impossible, but also suicidal for us to extend it further," Prachanda said.

The end of the ceasefire will not signal an end to the alliance with the parties, according to the acting president of the Nepali Congress (Democratic) party.

The case filed by JP alleged that Manzurul Ahsan Khan and Shah Alam hit Ershad and Rowshan Ershad with iron rod and stick in an attempt to kill them. CPB president further directed his men to beat up other JP activists, it added.

One person was killed in a road accident during a clash between the JP (Ershad) and the CPB at Paltan on Sunday, leaving at least 25 activists of both the parties injured.

Chandpur tender, the three-member IMED panel headed by former law secretary Mohammad Asaduzzaman received informal calls from Harbin's business lobby. They were later put under pressure to refrain from announcing the Harbin bid invalid.

Amid such a situation, the panel in its verdict said, "With the given option to choose between the rules and regulations and apparent financial benefit shown in arithmetic that may be derived by accepting an irregular tender, the PPR Review panel has no hesitation in upholding the law of the land and classify the HPE offer... as informal and void."

The PDB had previously awarded two bids to this inexperienced company. Harbin's first venture-- 80 MW Tongi power plant--is technically flawed and it has not operated well in the last nine months.

In its second deal for the 90 MW Fenchuganj plant, Harbin got exceptional treatment from the cabinet purchase committee that gave it around Tk 50 crore or 10 percent advance down payment for implementing the project. The government had restricted such down payments from 2003, and Harbin is the lone exception in this regard.

The business lobby behind Harbin admitted to The Daily Star they spent huge money after a section of officials, including those in the PDB and the power ministry, and also some policymakers and influential politicians at the 'alternative centre of power' of the government.

The lobby also claimed that officials, and not policymakers, generally create all the hitches in a tender process. "As officials keep on changing posts, you pay a policymaker because he is there for a certain term," said one of the top lobbyists.

Both the Chandpur and Fenchuganj tender processes generated complaints about the PDB's bias for Harbin but no action was taken.

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud at a roundtable on October 31 last had attributed the review panel's complaint about Chandpur project to the PDB's 'minor negligence'.

At the same forum, Secretary for Power MM Nasiruddin had asked whether it was justified to 'sacrifice' procurement in the 'name of transparency'.

Official sources said that during the October review of the

Official sources said that during the October review of the

Official sources said that during the October review of the

Official sources said that during the October review of the

Official sources said that during the October review of the

Official sources said that during the October review of the

Purchase

FROM PAGE 1

The cabinet committee on purchase has also approved the land development proposal under Uttara Ideal Residential Town project at a cost of Tk 75 crore.

Earlier the committee declined to approve the land development project because of higher tender prices. The rejected tender proposals set Tk 247-Tk 250 for filling up per cubic metre while in the re-tender that was accepted yesterday the prices came down to Tk 157-Tk 203 per cubic metre.

Under the project, 6,640 plots will be prepared and 40,000 flats built.

that a JP procession celebrating the party's 20th anniversary led by Ershad and Rowshan Ershad tried to march towards the Baitul Mukarram and came face-to-face with a CPB rally in front of the CPB office.

The CPB leaders and the on-duty policemen asked the JP leaders to change their route but they did not pay heed to it. At one point, the JP activists started to hurl chairs and strike the CPB activists with sticks that left several members of the CPB central committee, including CPB President Manzurul Ahsan Khan, injured.