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Govt denies fuel crisis, price hike plan

Saifur blames media for price increase 'rumour'; energy adviser says situation to improve within 72 hours

STAR REPORT

Amid rumour of a potential fuel price hike leading to hoarding of fuels by unscrupulous traders, especially in the northern districts, the government yesterday denied any shortage of fuel in the country and said it has no plan to increase the prices soon.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman at a meeting in Moulvibazar yesterday denied ever

the oil prices at this moment," he

Labelling the media report as "misreport" and "media havoc", he said there is no crisis of fuel in the country, reports our correspondent in the district.

Energy Adviser Mahmudur Rahman also told the press that the ministry has neither sent any proposal to the prime minister

saying that the fuel prices would be increased. "We are not increasing to increase the fuel prices nor does it have any plan to the oil prices at this moment," he

He told reporters that the situation will improve within 48-72 He also asked the district com-

missioners (DCs) to identify unusual buying of fuels by the dealers during the last week.

Meanwhile, reports of severe fuel crisis came yesterday as

unprincipled owners of filling stations stopped selling fuels at places in the northern districts where six vessels with 42 lakh tonne fuel have been stranded in the river in Bera upazila of Pabna for the last

The price of kerosene yesterday shot up to Tk 50 per litre at some places while petrol was selling at Tk 100 per litre.

> In the capital also some filling SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Rocca leaves **IMF'S ANTI-POVERTY LOAN**

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca left Dhaka yesterday morning for Washington, ending her three-day

Rocca came here on Thursday, met the government and opposition leaders and discussed what she said country's two major challenges for free and fair elections and combating militancy.

This was Rocca's fourth and last SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Rejoinder, our reply

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a rejoinder said the headline and the references made in The Daily Star report "Curb terror finance, militancy to skirt US sanctions -- Rocca tells Dhaka" to so-called "sanctions" are grossly incorrect, baseless and misleading. The ministry SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Govt seeks waiver of a few conditions

Fund board meets Feb 3

REZAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh has requested the IMF to waive a few conditions for the fifth tranche of its Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF)

If everything goes right, Bangladesh will get around \$75 million as the fifth PRGF tranche and some \$25 million as the last instalment of Trade Integration Mechanism (TIM) from the International Monetary Fund sometime in February.

Bangladesh's request for waiver of some conditions, the TIM instalment and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) are likely to be tabled at the IMF executive board meeting slated for February 3.

Bangladesh is supposed to fulfil three specific conditions and to live up to certain macroeconomic performance criteria to get the fifth PRGF tranche.

Of the conditions the first was for establishment of an independent audit unit headed by an adviser

The PRGF tranche along with in the National Board of Revenue (NBR) by November 30. The second condition was to reconstitute Sonali Bank's Board of Directors in line with the central bank's criteria, with at least two board members having relevant banking experience, by December 15. The last condition wanted the government to appoint a financial adviser to Agrani Bank to facilitate its privatisation also by December 15.

Of them, the government so far has fulfilled the first condition only. SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

BANGLADESH POLITICS US, EU come up with identical views

UNB, Dhaka

Taking a cue from the political ground reality, the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) emerged with almost identical views on Bangladesh's upcoming parliamentary election, terming it crucial and critical for democracy, economic development and stabil ity of the country.

A EU troika delegation led by Nikolaus Scherk and then US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca came up with the views after holding a series of parleys with key political leaders and representatives of civil society here in the past

Both the EU and the USA called for ensuring fairness and transparency during the run-up and level SEE PAGE 15 COL 4 petroleum crisis in the region.



Railway tankers carrying oil departs Tongi station for the fuel hungry northern districts yesterday in the wake of a

14 children OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

BSF pushes in

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) early yesterday pushed 14 Bangla speaking children into Bangladesh through Shalkona border near Benapole land port while a child smuggling attempt was foiled in Bagharpara upazila in

The pushed-in children, aged between 7 and 15, said they were living with their parents in Mumbai in India and Mumbai police arrested them along with their parents a week ago.

They were separated from their parents and brought to Shalkona border Friday midnight. Following the push in, the children took refuge in a nearby village and reached Benapole the next morn-

Some of the children identified themselves as Billal Sheikh, son of Ruhul Sheikh, Farid, son of Shafayet Sarder, Nazrul Sheikh and Enamul Sheikh, sons of Azibar

Workers to gather at 4 points before entering Dhaka

14-PARTY 'LONG MARCH' ON FEB 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Grassroots leaders and activists of the Awami League-led 14-party opposition coalition will start their 'long march' towards Dhaka from all corners of the country on February 2 which is supposed to culminate in a massive gathering of people in the capital on February 5 as part of an ongoing movement to 'topple' the government.

Leaders of 14-party at a meeting with its local leaders from districts adjacent to Dhaka, held at the AL office in the capital yesterday, announced the route map of the march and its starting date. They urged their field level leaders and SEE PAGE 15 COL 3 | activists to be prepared for tougher

and ceaseless programmes if they encounter any kind of obstruction or if there is any attempt from the government to foil the 'long

"You have to go forward braving any kind of obstruction," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil also coordinator of the 14-party coalition told the grassroots leaders "February 5 will make history in the country by expediting the fall of the alliance government.

Leaders and activists of northern and southern districts, and Sylhet and Chittagong divisions, who will kick off their journeys towards Dhaka on February 2 and 3, will take breaks in Tongi, Mawa, SEE PAGE 15 COL 4 SIDDHESWARI COLLEGE Students assault principal, demand his ouster for graft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of students yesterday assaulted the principal of the Siddheswari University College and vandalised the windowpanes of his office, demanding his removal for alleged corruption.

The students were also protesting Principal Rafiqul Islam's alleged role in an incident of Thursday when two students had beat up Abdur Rashid Bhuiyan, an assistant professor of Bengali at the

About 200 students and teachers of the college brought out a procession from the campus at 3:45pm yesterday, demanding the principal's removal, and called an indefinite strike at the college until

On Thursday Abdur Rashid took away the answer scripts of two students of the Habibullah Bahar

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Akheri Munajat

POOR NAVIGABILITY

55 vessels remain stuck Ctg snapped for 11 hours for 15 days in Jamuna

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, from Pabna

Fifty-five vessels including 10 laden with rice and seven carrying fuel remain stranded in the Jamuna at Shahjadpur in Pabna for about 15 days due to poor navigability.

The situation arose as dredging work at a three-kilometre channel of the river from Mohonganj to Penchakola in Nakalia, Shahjadpur remains suspended due to strong

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) officials could not say when they will be able to clear the channel. BIWTA Site Engineer

Akhtaruzzaman told The Daily Star they can dredge the river when the current does not flow over two nautical miles per hour.

at about four nautical miles at Nakalia point in Shahjadpur and help of existing equipment."

Nakalia can be made navigable," he

"But the current is now flowing

we can't dredge the river with the "We cannot even say when the channel from Mohonganj to

Workers yesterday were seen unloading goods from the stranded vessels to small boats along the 25kilometre waterway from Baghabari river port to Nakalia to take those to the port.

Ten Dhaka-bound ships carrying about 10,000 tonnes of rice were seen stranded at Baghabari port. Forty-five Baghabari-bound ships carrying goods and oil remain stranded for about 15 days.

Thirty vessels, some of which carrying about 15,000 tonnes of fertilisers, have been stranded at different points in 20 kilometres between Penchakola and Latifpur. Five ships carrying 2,000 tonnes of wheat and three ships carrying 1,800 tonnes of cement have also been stranded.

During dredging, workers were seen yesterday afternoon dumping the removed sand into the river SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Gas supply in Ctg snapped

Gas supply in nearly half of the port city, including Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), remained stopped for 11 hours due to technical glitch in distribution system since early yesterday.

The disruption in gas supply affected both industrial and domestic consumption to a great extent, businessman and residents said.

Officials of Bakhrabad Gas Systems Ltd (BGSL) suddenly noticed the leakage and disorder of a bulb at CEPZ high-pressure distribution station at around 1:00 am, which forced the authorities to

Halishahar, Sadaraghat and other adjacent areas were completely out of gas and supply was simulta-neously affected in Patharghata,

The CEPZ area, Agrabad,



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Army men install water purification filters on the bank of the Turag for the Biswa litema devotees yesterday. The SEE PAGE 15 COL 3 three-day congregation concludes today.

Hospital

Bank

Akheri Munajat of the three-day Biswa Ijtema, the second largest congregation of Muslims, will be offered after Zohr prayers today, seeking divine blessings for peace, progress and prosperity of the

UNB, Gazipur

Muslim Ummah. Around three million devotees from 64 countries, including host Bangladesh, are expected to partic-

ipate in the Akheri Munajat. President lajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina are expected to join the munajat.

The authorities have arranged special trains and other transports for the devotees. Four special trains started running yesterday from Akhaura, Noakhali and Jamalpur to Tongi carrying the devotees, while 21 other trains will run between different districts and Tongi today.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Mass promotions lead to record **OSDs**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Large-scale promotions of government officials have resulted in a record number of officials getting OSD (officers on special duty)

After the promotion of 378 senior assistant secretaries to the post of deputy secretary (DS) on January 26, the number of DS to become OSD now is 463.

Some 50 officials in the rank of joint secretary (JS) and additional secretary are also OSD at present.

There are no DS level vacant posts, sources in the establishment ministry said. While there are 865 DS level posts, the number of DS was 950 before the latest promo-

Eighty seven senior assistant secretaries, who were recently transferred to the district level as additional deputy commissioners (ADC) and Zila Parishad secretaries, and promoted to the post of DS, will have to work in their present positions for at least one year.

It may create complication in the civil administration when both the DC and the ADC will be of DS rank, said a former bureaucrat.

"To clear the promotion congestion, the government should also create more posts," he observed.

To ease the promotion jam and remove grievances of the government employees who have been deprived of promotion for long, the government is going to give promotion to JS level next month and to DS level in May, a source close to the government's policy making

Large-scale promotions on political consideration will be ultimately harmful for the civil administration, said a former cabinet secretary requesting ano-

Earlier the government gave DS level promotion to 493 officials in 2003, and to 327 officials in May

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