

US senator

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South and Central Asian countries, he also said Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh will require close US attention as both Nepal and Sri Lanka have been facing violent insurgencies and Bangladesh's commitments are being threatened by extremists.

Lugar said the senate committee looks forward to ensure that the South Asia Bureau achieves the goals of building US strategic and economic relationships, supports nascent democracies and combats instability and extremist movements, according to the US Senate official website.

On February 9, the State Department merged five Central Asian states with the South Asia Bureau and President Bush nominated Richard A Boucher as the new head of it.

Currently Christina B Rocca heads the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, which now comprises of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Senator Lugar pointed out the diplomatic and economic ascension of India as the region's most exciting and promising transition. "The US Congress welcomes India's progress as we seek to work more closely on the global stage to address mutual concerns, such as countering terrorism, promoting democracy, preventing HIV/AIDS, and improving energy security," he said.

He said that in addition to a landmark visit to India later this month, President Bush would go to Pakistan, a key partner in the war on terror.

"Islamabad has made significant economic strides, but continues to face challenges, including a lack of strong democratic institutions and continuing threats to the country's stability from extremist and sectarian violence."

Turning to Central Asia, Senator Lugar said transition to stable and democratic political systems has been slow since the break-up of the former Soviet Union. "Corruption continues to be a problem in Central Asia and criminal groups in the region have become conduits for smuggled narcotics from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and elsewhere to markets in Russia and Europe."

"I am also concerned about the direction of Russia's economic and security activities in Central Asia and look forward to hearing how the administration plans to deal with energy security in this critical region. Most of the natural gas exported from Central Asia is sent through pipelines controlled by Russia," Senator Lugar added.

In his speech before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard A Boucher said "The success of US policy in South and Central Asia is critically important to our national interests."

He also said that turning policies into results is as challenging in South and Central Asia as in any other part of the world, adding "It is a challenge I

look forward to tackling with the advice and counsel of this Committee, if confirmed."

Turning to Bangladesh, he said, "We are looking forward to free and fair parliamentary elections next year with the full and active participation of all parties."

Boucher also said many of the world's most serious threats are found in this region: narcotics, terrorism, corruption, weapons proliferation, HIV/AIDS, failing institutions, ethnic strife, stunted economies and natural disasters. In each of the country under the bureau, the US encounters unique and challenging issues with which to deal, he added.

He said, "as we begin new strategic engagement with India, we also continue America's long friendship with Pakistan. A stable and friendly relationship between these keystone nations is essential for South and Central Asia."

The success of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and other nations in working towards a modern, moderate and democratic future is essential to ensure peace in this neighborhood and will have major implications throughout the world, Boucher further said.

Richard Boucher, a distinguished career diplomat, has served most recently as Spokesman for the Department of State. He also served as the Senior US Official for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation from 1999 to 2002, as well as Ambassador to the Republic of Cyprus from 1993 to 1996.

India reports

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officials were meeting in New Delhi to discuss the report.

There was no immediate comment available from government officials.

The Bhopal laboratory is one of just 10 high security disease facilities in the world and the only one in Asia.

With migratory birds from affected countries such as China passing through the subcontinent in the winter, Indian officials have become increasingly concerned about the possibility of infection.

Cheap ride ends

FROM PAGE 1
them of their lives and last savings.

Fixing the truck fare at Tk 25 to Tk 35, they set out the journey with the hope to meet their family. All of them came to Dhaka to earn a living, but none of them had ever thought they would not return home.

Idris Ali and Belal Hossain, two brothers from Bogra, came to the capital together. They were returning together and died on their way home, just because they had thought bus fares would cost them extra money.

"I don't feel comfortable in the polluted environment. There's no refreshment here. I'm afraid I'll have to return to this polluted city," wounded Nazrul quoted Idris as saying before the journey.

Like other survivors of the accident, Nazrul, a rickshaw-puller, thought they have had a nightmare. He said in a choked voice how the accident took place.

"I was feeling sleepy and most of my companions were already asleep. I suddenly heard a loud bang and saw sparks as the truck was rolling down the road into a ditch," he said.

"When I came around, I found a cement sack on my chest. I struggled hard to remove the burden to find that bodies were scattered around me," he added.

He alleged some local people snatched their money in the name of rescuing the wounded.

The family of Sanwar, a resident of Bogra, are wandering aimlessly near Mirzapur Police Station as they have no money to carry his body home. Neither the police nor the locals came forward to help them except listening for a while to their 'sob story'.

Caab grounds plane

FROM PAGE 1
Caab's initiative to see all Biman craft fly safely came hard on the heels of a recent humiliation the national flag carrier had experienced because of operating faulty craft.

In late September last year, a Biman flight on Dhaka-Dubai-Brussels-New York route was forced to remain stranded at John F Kennedy Airport in New York for three days as the US Federal Aviation Authorities (FAA) did not let the aircraft take off without repairing at least 17 mechanical faults it had detected.

Biman sources yesterday said one of the DC-10s that was grounded after being struck by a bird in Kuwait, is in operation again while the one that has been lying without an engine in the hanger for several months will be fit for test runs by noon today as it will have the engine of another DC-10 that went in for D-check last Tuesday.

The DC-10 that was grounded twice in 16 days in Brussels is also expected to return home by late tonight or tomorrow after repair, said Biman sources.

But till Biman gets back its full fleet-strength, officials fear that miseries of the passengers over flight schedule disarray are unlikely to lessen.

Biman has a small fleet of 13 aircraft comprising five DC-10-30s having 274 seats each, four Airbus A-310-300s with 220 seats each and four F-28s having 80 seats each.

As per the changed flight schedules, the departure time of Thursday's BG 037 flight on Jeddah-Rome-Frankfurt route has been set for 4:00pm Saturday while departure time of Friday's BG 037 flight on Chittagong-Jeddah route has been set for 12:01am Monday, Friday's Kuwait-bound BG 043 flight has been rescheduled at 9:00pm Saturday, Friday's Hong Kong-bound BG 078 flight will

depart at 3:00pm Sunday, Friday's BG 011 flight on Dubai-Brussels-New York route will depart at 11:59pm Sunday, and Sunday's BG 055 flight on Dubai-Paris-Rome route will depart on the same day at 10:00pm.

Besides, Thursday's Riyadh-bound BG 039 flight has been shifted to 11:45am Saturday, Friday's BG 049 flight on Dammam-Riyadh route has been shifted to 5:30pm Sunday, Saturday's Riyadh-bound BG 039 flight has been shifted to 12:45am Tuesday, Wednesday's BG 021 flight on Chittagong-Mascat route has been shifted to 4:00pm Saturday, Sunday's BG 021 flight on Chittagong-Mascat route has been shifted to 7:00am Monday, Friday's BG 084 flight on Bangkok-Singapore route has been shifted to 8:00am Sunday, Saturday's Kuala Lumpur-bound BG 082 flight has been shifted to 8:30pm Sunday, Thursday's Abu Dhabi-bound BG 027 flight has been shifted to 2:30am Sunday, Saturday's BG 029 flight on Mumbai-Dubai route has been shifted to 7:30pm Sunday, and Saturday's BG 019 flight on Kuwait-Abu Dhabi route has been shifted to 10:45pm Monday.

Hamas

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stance, which calls for the destruction of Israel.

"Hamas has decided that Ismael Haniyeh will be the prime minister for the next government," Aziz Dweik, a Hamas leader and the new speaker of parliament told reporters.

The sweeping victory of Hamas in last month's parliamentary election has put it on a collision course with President Mahmoud Abbas's peace policies while Israel is mulling tough new restrictions to pressure a Hamas-led government.

Butenis

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Butenis is expected to join the US mission in Dhaka shortly, official sources said.

President George W Bush formally announced the nomination of Patricia Agatha Butenis of Virginia on January 4 as the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the United States to Bangladesh.

The nomination was sent to the Senate for hearing on January 18 while the Committee on Foreign Relations chaired by Senator Lincoln Chafee testified Butenis on February 2.

According to the US Senate website, the foreign relations committee approved a number of nominations, including that of the new US ambassador to Bangladesh, on February 15.

Butenis, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service who most recently served as the deputy chief of mission in Islamabad, will be the 12th US ambassador in Dhaka since the US opened its embassy in Bangladesh.

Butenis has earlier served as the consul general to Bogota, Colombia and Warsaw, Poland. She also served as the chief of post liaison for visa services in the consular affairs bureau at the department of state. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania and her master's degree from Columbia University.

The post of the US ambassador in Dhaka fell vacant when Harry K Thomas, who served as the ambassador to Bangladesh from August 11, 2003 to July 2, 2005, was appointed the executive secretary to the Office of the Secretary of State on July 25 last year.

Since then US Chargé d' Affaires to Bangladesh Judith Ann Chammas has been carrying out the responsibility of the US ambassador in Bangladesh.

Pakistan, India

FROM PAGE 20
The service between Khokhropar and Munabao was discontinued during the 1965 India-Pakistan war over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.

The service will be operated using a Pakistani train for the first six months and an Indian train for the subsequent six months.

It will be the second rail link established between the nuclear-armed rivals since they launched a peace process two years ago after they went to the brink of a fourth war.

A train service linking India's Punjab state with Pakistani Punjab was restored in 2004.

Last month, the two countries launched a third cross-border bus service.

While confidence-building measures undertaken by the two countries have strengthened transport, cultural, sporting and commercial links since starting the peace process, they have made little progress on Kashmir, cause of two of their three wars since 1947.

Pakistan accuses India of dragging its feet in resolving the dispute while New Delhi says Islamabad is not doing enough to rein in Islamist militants fighting its rule in the Muslim-majority region.

Kashmir is divided between India, Pakistan and China. India says the Himalayan region is an integral part of its territory and is not interested in redrawing its borders, while Islamic Pakistan wants to find a solution that includes all Kashmiris.

CJ decries

FROM PAGE 1
"To promote the rule of law, we must have a strong judiciary and conducive atmosphere having mutual trust and democratic values."

Parliament, the executive, the judiciary and civil society should work together for ensuring human rights and the rule of law, he said.

"It is now imperative for all of us to work together in the spirit of patriotism to make our behaviour civilised and protect the rights of each individuals, which are the foundation of democratic norms."

It is unfortunate that in some countries the government cannot recognise and acknowledge the vital link between the human rights and sustainable development, Muddasir Husain said.

"In the present thrusts of our national life and political culture we may think about the establishment of national infrastructures for securing effective enjoyment of human rights and their promotion," he said, adding that ensuring human rights is more a domestic concern than international.

Emphasising the need for a sound and effective legal system, the chief justice said the propensity of denying human rights at the hands of the executive cannot be checked without a sound and effective legal system.

Presided over by BSEHR Secretary General advocate Sigma Huda, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Manusher Jonno Team Leader Shaheen Anam, BSEHR national committee member Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley, Project Director Albert Prasad Basu and upazila-level human rights representatives from six districts.

BSEHR Executive Director advocate Elna Khan presented the keynote speech on the occasion.

In the darkness of the shine

FROM PAGE 1
The urban-rural income difference also continually increased up to the mid-1990s, and this trend was reversed only in the later half of the 1990s with a strong agricultural growth.

The Household Expenditure Survey of the BBS shows that on-farm income is more unequally distributed compared to the rural income as a whole, and it became increasingly so throughout the 1990s. In urban areas, poverty declined substantially both in the seven-year period of the 1980s and in the first half of the 1990s, but in the later period there was also a marked increase in inequality. In the later half of the 1990s, there was only a modest increase in income, but there was not much further worsening of income distribution. The result was only a slight decline in poverty.

But many economists would pause for a moment before condemning such a process of inequality.

"Overall, it seems that Bangladesh is precariously positioned in the growth-inequality link as in the initial stage of the Kuznets process," says Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud. "The problem assumes special significance in a situation whereby the very process that brings some initial dynamism in the system also contains factors that lead to deterioration in the distribution of income."

The Kuznets process is a curve in growth and inequality. It shows that any economy in its primary take-off increases inequality, as only a section of the population can reap most of the benefits of the new opportunities. Then, as the economic growth progresses, the rich-poor gap narrows down.

But then growth comes as a tricky question for many. The episodes of higher growth in both urban and rural areas seem to have been associated with increasing inequality, thus reducing the favourable effect of income growth on poverty reduction.

Dr Mahmud still prefers this to having lower growth with equity having a smaller impact on poverty reduction. "But this can hardly be a happy choice," he adds. "A serious challenge in achieving a pro-poor growth, therefore, is to modify or reverse this adverse growth-inequality link."

Dr Zahid Hossain, economist at the World Bank, said in Bangladesh inequality has increased but poverty has also reduced. "It could be that without inequality there would not have been any growth."

His argument lies in the assumption that as new opportunities emerge with the opening up of an economy, it is the richer class that grabs the benefits first.

"The immediate beneficiaries will be the well-off people and then the opportunities will trickle down," Dr Zahid says. "But it will not benefit the poor as much as it will benefit the rich. But that does not mean poverty will not decrease. We don't know how to address such outcome, we don't know if it is morally preferable [to address this]."

"The sectors which are inequality-neutral or which can lower inequality, such as agriculture, are witnessing a low growth," says Dr Imran Matin, director, research and evaluation division of Brac. "This phenomenon is fuelling inequality."

But Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the CPD, says one need not accept the Kuznets curve as economic fatalism. "One can see from historical experience that a society which allows better distributive justice in economic growth based on improved policy management, institutional development and good governance alleviates poverty faster," he says. "There is a cavalier assumption that growing inequality has nothing to do

with per capita income growth or absolute poverty reduction. But the fact is the higher the income inequality the more difficult it is to alleviate poverty and Latin America is a case in point."

Debapriya points out that the level of inequality not only affects poverty alleviation rate -- decrease in the number of the absolute poor -- but also jeopardises the future growth prospect, as has happened in the 1990s in Bangladesh.

But as long as this process is not reversed, consumption pattern also keeps changing fast, both in urban and rural spheres. New chains of shops keep mushrooming in cities, and even in villages marketing companies keep expanding their networks, shipping newer and newer goods for the better-off people.

A walk through Agora, the city's largest new chain shop, is just a testimony to this new phenomenon. Imported luxury items rack up the shelves. Freezers are stuffed with imported fast food -- pizza slices, chicken nuggets and meat loaves, to name a few. Beside the fruit shelf of imported exotic fruits such as kiwi and black currants is the meat freezer showing imported Australian lamb priced at Tk 600 a kg. Dhaka is now turning into a city of mega shops -- every main street now has its own sideshows of swanky malls. Shop prices are shooting up. A barely 120 square feet shop on Bailey Road changes hands fast, passing on from one broker to another, to finally sell at Tk 40 lakh.

At Chandrabati village in Bhairab, shops are selling Tk 10 packs of chips, Tk 2 shampoo mini packs, coke, condensed milk and Meril soaps. Nazim Mollah runs such a shop in the village. The small outlet is sparsely stuffed. "Where are the customers?" he asks. "Somehow I manage to survive." And yet he has a handful of takers for the items, people who have managed to make that difference between them and the rest.

Although Nazim Mollah's lots have not changed much, many like him have graduated to a higher level to create another kind of inequality in the villages. They are basically the landless people who somehow found ways into non-farm activities, such as small shops and rickshaw repairing shops. Like Nizam they were self-employed with low productivity, but their business increased rapidly in the 1990s, because of more microcredit interventions. They graduated from microcredit borrowers to more productive entrepreneurs like small rice mill owners.

"The worsening of income can be alleviated to some extent if there is strong growth in agricultural income," Dr Mahmud argues.

"The sectors which are inequality-neutral or which can lower inequality, such as agriculture, are witnessing a low growth," says Dr Imran Matin, director, research and evaluation division of Brac. "This phenomenon is fuelling inequality."

But agriculture, specially the crop sector, has been limping for the last few years. After a relatively better growth of 5.53 percent in FY01, agriculture growth plummeted to a negative of 0.62 percent the next year. FY03 and FY04 saw a little

progress when growth reached 3.29 percent and 4.38 percent, much less than the overall economic growth rates of both the years, and then it again slid to a negative of 0.37 percent.

Much of these low-case figures came from farmers like Mahbubur Rahman of Netrakona who witnessed another bad crop year this year following a deluge.

"I have not seen any increase in my harvest in many years. It has always been 40-45 maunds from an acre," Mahbub says. "Rather it often flops like this year when I am hit by floods or drought. This year, prices increased, but I am a small farmer with hardly anything to sell."

And agriculture spins out inequalities in its own way. When the crop sector that contributes near to 17 percent of the GDP stagnates, fisheries and livestock sub-sector that contributes only about 3 percent to the GDP do quite well, growing from 2.81 percent in FY01 to 7.82 percent in FY05. This happens because of a boom in poultry and fishery projects involving the rural richer sector.

Abdul Barkat represents that section of the rural rich. On his return from Kuwait three years ago, he invested Tk 3 lakh in a poultry scheme that has now grown to a 200-chicken farm.

"I sell them at Tk 70 a kg now," says Barkat, also from the same village of Mahbub. "Not bad if you can pull through."

But Mahbub has no chance to get a pie of that market. "I don't have money," he says. "You need a lot of money for poultry. I am a poor farmer. I use my own seeds and buy some fertilisers and pesticides often on delayed payment. I have no luck there."

Barkat and Mahbub, Farida and the BMW owner are the faces of the inequality that have been becoming sharper by the day. And the fallout can be widespread and cyclical -- from increase in violence and militancy to a retarded growth. Domestic demand will be squeezed and human capital development process will be constrained that will jeopardise the growth prospect.

12 killed

FROM PAGE 1
Gaibandha, Salzar Rahman, 26, Idris Ali, 31, and Bellal Hossen, 25, of Shibganj and Sanwar Hossen, 26, of Kahalu in Bogra, Korban Ali, 32, and Aktar Ali, 30, of Ghoraghat in Dinajpur and Saiful Islam of Noldanga in Natore. The identities of the rest could not be known immediately.

Most of the dead are day labourers and rickshaw pullers, locals said quoting the injured.

The police said at least 45 people were travelling on the truck and were sleeping at the time of the accident.

Unable to afford bus fares, they got on the truck from the capital, paying the driver and the helper Tk 25 to Tk 35 each, reports our JU correspondent.

The driver and his helper managed to escape the scene. Police said they had overloaded the truck and were carrying passengers, making it difficult to properly operate the vehicle.

Road accidents have increased abnormally on Dhaka-Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Highway since the inauguration of the bridge.

At least 100 people were killed and over 500 injured in road crashes on the highway last year.

Electoral reforms

FROM PAGE 1
Mosharaf, also a standing committee member of BNP.

Another policymaker seeking anonymity said, "The possibility of having a solution in parliament to the crisis is somewhat remote. Because BNP will not deviate from the constitutional provision concerning appointment of the chief adviser to the caretaker government."

He added, "First, an agreement has got to be reached between BNP and Awami League on the caretaker government chief. And to make that happen, the government is thinking of forming a committee."

Another source in the BNP hinted that the ruling coalition leader might compromise on the KM Hasan issue. According to article 58C(3) of the constitution, Hasan, the last retired chief justice, is supposed to be the next chief adviser. But the opposition parties have already raised objection to his being the caretaker government head.

BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan recently said, "We are ready for discussion on any constructive suggestions as we too believe in ridding the elections of black money and muscle power."

Apparently, the ruling party is more interested in the proposals for strengthening the EC than those for reforming the caretaker government system.

A minister who is also a standing committee member of the party said an independent EC is the most crucial to having the elections conducted fairly. "An independent and stronger EC Secretariat needs to be in place. Besides, stringent laws should be framed to stop the use of black money and muscle power and the government and opposition should have a consensus about it."

But, he said, it would not be fair that parties should make demand merely to win an election. They should not be saying that "this man is good or that man is bad".

The minister, however, doubted whether there would be any talks between the government and the opposition, as both the camps seem rigid and unbending.

Industries care

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hazardous waste management and Tk 1.3 crore for other similar activities.

The report pointed out that only 39.2 percent industry establishments have so far made some capital expenditure for environment protection since their inception. Around 72 percent establishments engaged with health and social work have had no such expenditure, the report said.

Those who have had some expenditure for the purpose have not done it on a regular basis. The report found only 64 out of 605 establishments that have had some capital expenditure in 2004.

Again, around 60 percent establishments have some investment plans for procuring equipment for environment protection.

The BBS survey, styled "Environment Protection Expenditure Survey 2005" and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is the first such review of the environment protection system and its expenditure in the industrial units of the country.

Mostly from Dhaka and Chittagong, 605 out of 900 initially chosen industrial units and establishments--agricultural, manufacturing, electricity, gas, transport, hotel and health service units, among

others--took part in the survey.

The BBS has been bringing out a report titled "Compendium of Environment Statistics of Bangladesh" since last year, depicting the present condition of the country's environment and offering a large number of supporting statistics and data. The report also describes the adverse impact of the industrial wastes, especially on environment and human health.

This year's report pointed out that the standards set by the DoE for various industrial and vehicular air pollutants cannot be effectively enforced due to lack of resources. It observed that most old industries lack treatment facilities and dump untreated effluents into the nearby ponds, lakes and rivers, polluting soil as well as groundwater.

According to the report, the DoE has identified around 1,176 major environment-polluting industrial units in the country, including 365 textile mills, 189 tanneries, 118 chemical and pesticide factories and 149 pharmaceuticals.

An environment ministry source, however, claimed the statistics as incorrect, saying the number of such industrial units is much higher.

Baby trade booms

FROM PAGE 1
their relatives have been running the racket for long before the very eyes of the hospital authorities.

A Daily Star investigation revealed about half a dozen two-to-three-room unhygienic clinics run by the traffickers in Chankharpool, Nawab Katra, Nazimuddin Road and Hosni Dalan areas are used for the money-spinning trade.

In some cases, the racketeers just broker between the willing sellers and purchasers, and facilitate the delivery of the human goods. Sometimes they even steal babies and deliver them to the customers.

But, in most cases, they persuade poor women coming to the hospital for menstrual regulation (MR) to abstain from abortion, and instead to come to those shoddy clinics and sell their babies secretly for adoption after delivery.

"We try to convince the four to five months pregnant women coming for MR that it's a sin to kill a foetus and to make them agree to sell the babies," said one of the DMCH brokers, who had recently coaxed a pregnant woman into taking admission to a clinic.

If the baby sold is born in a clinic, the lion's share of the proceeds from the sale goes to the clinic owner, with the mother or the parents and the broker sharing the rest. But if the infant is sold from the DMCH, the broker pockets 40 to 50 percent of the money and the mother or parents the rest.

Poor women abandoned by their husbands and ultra-poor couples already having some offspring are more prone to sell their newborn babies. Some poor women who have become pregnant from illicit sexual relations also often opt for selling the unwanted infants.

One such mother is Monwara Begum, 30. Her husband divorced her when she was three months pregnant. After five months, in January 2005, Monwara came to the DMCH seeking an MR. But, soon a birth attendant wooed her to Mousumi Clinic in Nazimuddin Road.

A few months back, when these correspondents went to Mousumi Clinic posing as customers looking for a boy to adopt, a staff named Firza Begum told them a baby boy could be managed for Tk 12,000.

She also said, "If you want a newborn boy along with his parents' identity, it may take one to four weeks."

Though a middle-aged woman who owns Chowdhury Clinic at Nawab Katra claimed to these correspondents that they were not involved in this "business", a staff of the clinic seeking anonymity said they could arrange a baby.

A DMCH birth attendant said, "It's not a business, rather we work as mediators to help child-less couples buy a baby for adoption."

On January 3 last, the police recovered two newborn babes from a housewife who claimed to have bought them for Tk 22,000.

She bought one of them from a poor couple of Chanmari Slum in Chahsara of Narayanganj, she told the police, adding the baby's father, student.

10 injured

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Firefighters rushed to the spot and doused the fire with the help of locals after a one-hour struggle.

The injured were admitted to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital. Of them, pump owner Abdul Mannan's condition is stated to be critical.

Energy adviser