

Fertiliser crisis

FROM PAGE 1
The country. Four days ago, a central monitoring committee was formed to oversee marketing of fertiliser and fuel in 16 districts.

SATKHIRA
Hundreds of farmers yesterday laid siege to local agriculture office at Kolaroa upazila for fertilisers.

Police swooped on the demonstrating farmers at about 2:00pm, leaving at least 10 injured. The local police claimed that the farmers vandalised furniture of the office.

In a separate incident, over 2,000 farmers barricaded Satkhira-Kaliganj Road in Debhata upazila, disrupting communications for more than four hours yesterday.

Earlier in the morning, the farmers went to Panulia Bazar to buy fertilisers. But on finding an acute shortage of urea and accompanying high price, they went berserk. They set up barricade on the road and staged a sit-in at around 7:00am, causing a huge snarl-up.

Besides, the demonstrators hemmed in Debhata Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Ali Kader as soon as he reached the scene of the demonstrations. He let him go only after he assured the farmers of an adequate supply of fertiliser within 2:00pm.

Meanwhile, AL demonstrated in Shyamnagar, Tala and Sadar upazilas in the district.

In Shyamnagar, some 3,000 people participated in the opposition's programme of laying siege to the local UNO office. The AL leaders blasted the government for its failure to supply fertiliser during the peak season for boro cultivation.

Satkhira Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ilias at a press briefing yesterday said the fertiliser crisis in the district will be solved within two or three days.

RAJSHAHI
Hundreds of farmers from five villages under Mohanpur upazila yesterday blocked the Rajshahi-Naogaon Highway at Kamarpur for over an hour, beginning at 11:00am.

They also laid siege to the UNO Office and submitted a memorandum to the UNO. They said they will go for even tougher movement if an uninterrupted supply of fertiliser is not ensured immediately.

JESSORE
The fertiliser crisis in Jessore seems to have eased up of late, reports BDNEWS.

PM asks armed forces

FROM PAGE 20
Arabia and Sri Lanka participated in the 10-month course.

The prime minister distributed the graduation certificates among the PSC (passed staff course) graduates at the DSCSC auditorium.

Ministers, chiefs of the three services, dean of the diplomatic corps Abdullah M Al-Namla, MPs, senior officers of the armed forces, spouses of the newly graduated officers and distinguished personalities attended the graduation ceremony.

Addressing the function, the prime minister said despite resource constraints the government is committed to build up a modern, efficient and strong armed force through imparting advanced training.

She said the role of the armed forces have become multi-dimensional in the context of the changed security scenario in the present day world.

The prime minister observed that this should be reflected in the field of education and training programmes for the armed forces. She described the armed forces as a symbol of the country's independence and sovereignty.

AL sticks to demand

FROM PAGE 1
Earlier, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid initiated the debate, citing Wednesday's statement of Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar in which he claimed that the Business Advisory Committee had unilaterally decided not to hold any discussion.

Responding to the AL lawmakers' demand, the treasury bench members said the BAC has unanimously decided that no discussion on any specific issue would be held.

"It is true that the Awami League had demanded discussion on 10 issues at the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee, but the meeting unanimously decided not to hold any discussion," Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain replied to the AL lawmakers.

The chief whip said there was no difference of views at the BAC meeting held on February 16. He requested the speaker to run the House as per the decision of the BAC.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, also the chairman of BAC, made similar comments. He said: "We have unanimously agreed that the lawmakers will raise all the points while participating in the discussion on thanks giving motion on the president's speech."

But the AL lawmakers said the decision was not taken unanimously. "The ruling party had the majority in the Business Advisory Committee to decide against holding any discussion. We did not agree with the decision. We are still demanding discussions," Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid countered the chief whip.

Even a few days ago, a long queue of farmers in front of the fertiliser sale centres was a common scene, but the situation now appear to be much improved due to intervention by the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), said sources.

The demand for urea fertiliser came down after the BCIC authorities had started distributing among the farmers some 42 tonnes of fertiliser originally meant for buffer stocks.

As of yesterday, the distribution that began last week was still going on.

Meanwhile, on request of Jessore District Fertiliser Monitoring Committee two private fertiliser factories—Ahad Fertiliser Factory and South Bengal Fertiliser Industry—have supplied 5,000 and 1,000 sacks of urea fertiliser without making any profit. They said they stored those for making NPKS fertiliser.

The Monitoring Committee has asked the BCIC authorities to give the dealers the fertiliser earmarked for the month of March to meet the demand of the season.

130 shot dead

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from 11:00 pm to 8:00 pm on Wednesday.

The upsurge in killings came after suspected al-Qaeda linked militants bombed the 1,000-year-old Imam Ali al-Hadi mausoleum, one of the countries' main Shia shrines, in the town of Samarra, north of Baghdad.

Early Thursday police also reported finding the bodies of three Iraqi journalists working for Dubai-based Arabiya satellite television who were kidnapped near Samarra Wednesday evening while reporting on the shrine bombing.

"The bodies of the presenter Atwar Bahjat, of cameraman Adnan Abdallah and of soundman Khaled Mohsen were found early this morning some 15km north of Samarra," police said.

In other violence, at least 12 people were killed in a powerful roadside bomb attack in Baquba, 60km northeast of Baghdad, of which eight were Iraqi army soldiers and four other civilians, police said, adding 20 others were wounded. Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, renewed calls to his community to remain calm and forsake revenge for the bombing of the shrine.

Apartment discharging their noble responsibility of protecting the country's independence, she said the members of patriotic armed forces were also making significant contributions to the fields of tackling natural disasters, construction of infrastructures, socio-economic developments, maintaining law and order, providing health care services and spreading education.

Congratulating the new graduate officers from abroad, Khaleda hoped that they would act as good-will ambassadors to foster relations between their country and Bangladesh.

"We have friendly ties with your countries. We are hopeful that the ties will be deepened through your training at this Staff College," the prime minister told the foreign participants.

Earlier on her arrival, the prime minister was received by the Commandant of the DSCSC Maj Gen Md Aminul Karim.

Later, the prime minister, who is also chairperson of the governing body of National Defence College (NDC) and Defence Services Command and Staff College, presided over the 7th joint governing body meeting of the NDC and the DSCSC.

AL sticks to demand

Earlier, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid initiated the debate, citing Wednesday's statement of Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar in which he claimed that the Business Advisory Committee had unilaterally decided not to hold any discussion.

Shahid said the opposition party did not agree with the ruling party's statement. "We are still demanding discussion at least one or two major issues."

AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim said how parliament will be effective if the lawmakers cannot speak about the issues like the crises of power, diesel and fertiliser.

The AL lawmakers who participated in the thanks giving motion on the president's speech blasted the government for the crises. The farmers across the country have become helpless due to the crisis of agricultural inputs, they observed.

The opposition members informed the House of the demonstrations staged by farmers at different places demanding electricity, diesel and fertiliser.

While taking part in the thanks giving motion, the lawmakers of Jatiya Party, the second largest opposition in parliament, also mentioned the farmers' sufferings.

The ruling alliance MPs however lauded the president's speech and mentioned the development works carried out by the government.

Mirza Abbas

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the trial is proceeding in his absence.

Moving the petition, advocates Sanaulah Miah, Masud Ahmed Talukder, Khoshed Alam and Mohammad Ali told the court the accused had earlier obtained bail from the High Court (HC) and they did not misuse the bail privileges.

The acting Public Prosecutor (PP) Sultan Abu Naser however did not oppose the bail petition. Since the accused had obtained bail from HC, the court might consider granting the bail, the PP said.

Following the hearing, the judge granted bail upon a bond of Tk 50,000 with two guarantors. The judge also fixed March 21 for hearing on the charge framing.

The same court on January 26 directed Abbas and four others to appear before it on February 20 but the accused did not appear before the court on the day.

The case was stayed for a long time following a court rule. HC vacated the stay order on the case clearing the way for the trial to begin.

Constable Abu Naser, 27, was killed at Razarbagh Police Lines in Malibagh on February 2001. According to the prosecution, over 150 activists led by former Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mirza Abbas brought out a procession during hartal called by the then opposition party BNP around 11:30am on February 13, 2001.

They attacked a procession of the then ruling Awami League near Razarbagh Police Lines. Bullets were fired at the police barracks from the BNP procession killing the constable who was standing on the corridor near to his third floor room at Rajabagh Police Lines.

The constable died on the spot and another Constable Partha Roy was also seriously injured in the incident.

Subedar Jamal Uddin filed a murder case with Motijheel Police Station on the same day. The investigation officer pressed charges against Mirza Abbas and five others on July 11, 2001.

MPs trade

FROM PAGE 20
used unparliamentary words during the debate on thanks-giving motion on the president's speech or taking floor on points of order. Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, however, made no effort to interrupt the lawmakers' indecent debate.

Presiding over the sitting yesterday, the speaker rather provoked AL lawmaker Shajahan Khan, who took the floor on the grounds of personal clarification, to specify the name of a lawmaker who had made indecent remarks in parliament on Wednesday.

On repeated urge of the speaker, Shajahan told the House that ruling BNP lawmaker Helen Zerin Khan made derogatory remarks against him and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. Shajahan himself also used a few offensive words attacking Helen personally.

The BNP deputy immediately demanded floor to counter the AL lawmaker.

LGPD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan also requested the speaker to allow Helen Zerin to give her clarification. He further requested the speaker to expunge all unparliamentary and indecent words from the proceedings of the House.

Earlier, AL lawmaker KM Jahangir Hossain also drew the speaker's attention towards the indecent words used by Helen Zerin against the leader of the opposition.

During the morning session on Wednesday, Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas and State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud launched blistering attack on the AL and its lawmakers using unparliamentary words.

The speaker told the House that he would expunge all unparliamentary words from the proceedings of the House.

In the evening sitting, however, Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui neither prevented BNP lawmaker Helen Zerin from using indecent words in her speech nor expunged those words from the House proceedings.

During yesterday's morning session of the House, AL lawmaker Mirza Azam initiated a heated attack on the prime minister, her son Tarique Rahman and Hawa Bhaban.

The BNP lawmakers protested the remarks by making noise in the House.

The speaker told the House that he will expunge all unparliamentary and defamatory words against the president and others.

Teeage

FROM PAGE 20
Nazrul admitted to reporters at the DMCH that Nazrul used to beat up Shilpi sometimes.

Motijheel police last evening said Shilpi's father Sirajul Islam, a scrap metal trader in Mymensingh, came to the police station and filing of a case is under process.

Shibir leader

FROM PAGE 20
"We've noticed strong efforts by Jamaat-Shibir leaders to save Shatehi although confessions of three held killers go against him," observed a senior police official.

Echoing the police view, RU sources said both the killings were committed days before the elections of the RU Teachers Association.

Power sector collapses

FROM PAGE 1
country if there is political will," observed an industry insider.

Due to lack of political will and drive, the recent government decision to implement 'load management' measures also remain ignored. The power ministry held a meeting with business leaders on this matter and they agreed to keep the city shopping malls and commercial enterprises shut after evening to save up to 500 megawatt of power.

"We are experiencing 800 MW to 1,800 MW load-shedding this month, which is very unusual at this time," says an official of the PDB. "Yet, we see no urgent steps from the higher authorities to resolve such a crisis. Even they do not appear to be seriously concerned about it."

Another official said, "There has been no special drive to increase power generation quickly although the higher authorities have been talking about some skid-mounted power plants since last year. We are actually running the power sector like business as usual."

He added that just because the previous AL government had taken up some power projects during its tenure, the present government enjoyed its benefits in the first couple of years of its rule. But it will leave the country in a serious power crisis by the time it hands over power to the caretaker government.

The country's total power generation now is 4,100 MW while the demand is 3,900 MW. But as of yesterday, various power plants remained shut due to technical glitches or maintenance work. As a result, load-shedding hovered around 856 MW yesterday, 867 MW a day before and so on.

This summer the demand for power is likely to rise up to 4,500-5,000 MW. PDB sources said even the best efforts cannot prevent a load-shedding level of 1,000 MW because adequate power projects are not in the pipeline.

The government has recently revived the four-year old Sikalbaha 150 MW combined cycle (CC) power project and a tender is likely to be floated soon. This would be financed under the PDB.

Besides, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has agreed to finance two 120 MW plants in Siddhirganj. This project was conceived four years ago. In addition, the World Bank will finance a 120 MW unit at the same site.

Sources say, these three units may be implemented eventually.

Two power projects implemented by this government so far

Stipends end up

FROM PAGE 1
vanishes into 'unseen' pockets.

According to the government rules, a student has to secure at least 45 percent marks in exams and 75 percent attendance to get the stipend — both feats difficult for a poor child to attain for a waft of reasons.

Sultana says why she failed in three subjects — English, mathematics and Bangla grammar.

"I did not have the books on those subjects," she keeps gazing at the ground. "I asked my father to buy them, but he could not manage the money as he was sick with ulcer. I had to depend solely on the classroom lectures. But I could not understand what the teacher taught."

Neither could Sultana's rickshawpuller father afford a tutor for her.

"I don't understand most of the studies in school," she says. "And at home, I have no one to help me out. Sometimes, I take help of a girl in the neighbourhood, but she also does not have time for me."

Both her father and mother are uneducated.

This is the hardest hurdle the first generation of poor students is facing today. The teachers can pay little individual attention in a classroom packed with students. The better-off students then take help of private tutors. But, in a semi-rural setting, that costs at least Tk 300-400. And so, the poor students, who cannot afford private tuition, find themselves slowly sucked into semi-literacy.

The stipend system also spins off another kind of discrimination. Those who get the award, such as Sumaiya Sultana Mini of class VII, are mostly the well-off ones and do not have to pay school fees. Mini's father is a railway employee and owns a five-room house. He has a colour TV, a freeze, gas oven, steel cupboard and cultivable land in Pabna.

But, those who do not get the stipend, mostly the poor like the eighth-grader Afsana Khatun Bithi, have to pay school fees. Her father, a jobless man, has no means to pay the amount. Her sister, who earns by sewing and offering private tuition, can hardly meet Bithi's school fees.

Here lies another paradox for parents. They know, as the government campaigns, that education for girls is free.

"I also knew that," said a headmaster in Natore. "But then I received this letter."

The letter from the education ministry says the schools should charge tuition fees from girls who do not get stipends. And so, Bithi, Sultana and many others like them have to pay for schooling.

Not only are they deprived of the stipend, these poor children have to bear other costs too, some of which they are supposed to get free.

Books often are one of them and play a crucial role in a student's academic performance.

At Madhyakompur Girls Primary School, Parvin, daughter of a rickshawpuller, had to pay Tk 5 to the teachers to get six books for class III.

are Westmont 40 MW barge-mounted plant (2004) and Tongi 80 MW simple cycle peaking power plant (2005).

But the Tongi plant, built by Harbin of China, is one of the worst performing plant in a decade. The plant kept on tripping right from the beginning of test operation early last year, and also during its guaranteed commercial operation period.

After assuming office, the coalition government cancelled or suspended a number of major power projects for 'questionable' bidding process but it started pursuing new power projects by resorting to 'questionable' bidding process, sources mentioned.

The cancelled or suspended projects include Khulna 210 MW (CC) plant, Sylhet 150 MW CC plant, Bheramara 450 MW CC plant and Bhola 20 MW plant. Except the Bhola plant, the others were financed under Supplier's Credit, a corruption prone financing system 'discouraged' by the BNP government.

While these projects were cancelled because of supplier's credit, in 2004 the government signed an agreement with a Chinese consortium to install Barapukuria 250 MW power plant under a supplier's credit agreement. Some of the worst implemented power projects under this government include Barapukuria coal-fired 250 MW plant, which was supposed to start operation last year. But now even the most optimistic forecast puts off the operation till April. Some officials also say the plant may not go for commercial operation in a year or two.

Another ultra costly project under implementation is Mymensingh 70 MW Phase-3 CC plant of Rural Power Company (RPC). Being built at a cost of \$120 million, which is four times the cost of PDB's Sikalbaha simple cycle 70 MW plant, this project is suffering from fund crisis. The fund crisis was caused by the RPC's corruption, which led one of the project's financiers to withdraw a 20-million euro grant.

The government now has only one new agreement to set up a 90 MW CC power plant in Fenchuganj. The bid went to Chinese Harbin, which appears to have government favour despite its lack of qualification and poor performance in the Tongi plant.

The government is processing another agreement with Harbin for the PDB's Chandpur 150 MW CC power plant. This bid went to Harbin although the company grossly violated tender rules and a govern-

ment review committee took a stand against it. The agreement will be signed when the prime minister approves it.

Besides, the government is processing an agreement with BON consortium — comprising Orion Power, Steag and Belhase— for the 450 MW Meghnaghat-2 private power project amid gross violation of tender rules. None of the three companies in the consortium had submitted bid to qualify in this tender. Industry insiders express doubts whether these inexperienced companies would ever be able to implement this project.

If the government had not cancelled the finalised bid to Summit Power on the 450 MW Sirajganj private power project in early 2004, this plant would have started partial power generation by now. Since that cancellation, the project is going for repeated re-tendering while power developers are increasingly losing interest.

Moreover, a section of officials of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is pushing ahead an unsolicited bid for Meghnaghat-3 power project although the policy and rules do not support such bids. Industry insiders also dismiss the possibility of this scheme.

Instead of re-tendering another bid because of changes in the policy, the PDB is trying to award the 210 MW Siddhirganj phase-2 power project to Orion and NEPC. The original bid floated in 2002 sought supplier's credit financing while the Orion-NEPC proposed commercial financing. Then the government's policy on supplier's credit became restrictive. But the PDB did not re-tender this project under the new policy and kept on modifying the tender documents apparently to award contract for the project to Orion-NEPC.

Shamsul Huq
FROM PAGE 20
of this renowned intellectual to education and said his service to the nation as a successful foreign minister will be remembered.

He prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

In his condolence message, the president recalled the contributions of this great educationist as a central education minister of the erstwhile Pakistan and a foreign minister of Bangladesh.

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Nizami
FROM PAGE 20
taken up following the estimate.

Nizami said a total of 18 lakh 43 thousand tons of fertiliser has been supplied to farmers till February 21 this year. There is enough stock of fertiliser to meet demands till March. There will be no shortage of fertiliser in the current season, he added.

The minister said the demand of fertiliser in February stands at 4.46 lakh tons while a total of 3.42 lakh ton fertilisers had been supplied. Another 1.18 lakh metric ton fertilisers are being supplied following the demand in February. The availability of fertiliser would stand at 4.60 lakh metric tons this month.

On the other hand, the total demand of fertiliser in March is 2.75 lakh tons while the stocked fertiliser would stand at 3.15 lakh tons.

He said electronic media and several newspapers published news saying IRRRI and boro cultivation might be hampered due to fertiliser crisis in the current season.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension, 87.43 percent of IRRRI and boro cultivation have been completed across the country within February 19, 2006.

Hasina
FROM PAGE 20
The former prime minister, who placed the reform proposals in parliament on February 12, reiterated that the BNP-led coalition government is manipulating the voter list to rig the next general election.

"The alliance government wants to snatch the peoples' democratic right to vote. It is conspiring to capture power again through rigged election," Hasina alleged. She urged the people to follow this move.

The AL chief asked her party leaders and activists to resist 'vote thieves' in every village, union, upazila and district.

She blamed the then president, caretaker government chief, security personnel, law enforcers and civil administration for what she said is helping the BNP-led alliance to rig the election in 2001. Anti-liberation forces are siding with the alliance to avenge their defeat in 1971, she added.

The government has increased prices of essentials and is patronising militants in planned ways to make the country dysfunctional and destroy the spirit of the Liberation War, she alleged.

Referring to the crises of power, diesel, fertiliser and seeds, Hasina accused the present rulers of creating the artificial crises just to make money.

She also mentioned developments in various sectors under the previous AL government.

Laxmipur district AL President MA Alaiddin, Chapainabganj AL Joint Convenor and Bhranbaria AL Presidnet Lufail HA also spoke on the occasion. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Motia Chowdhury, Suranjit Sengupta, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir and Obaidul Quader were present.

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