

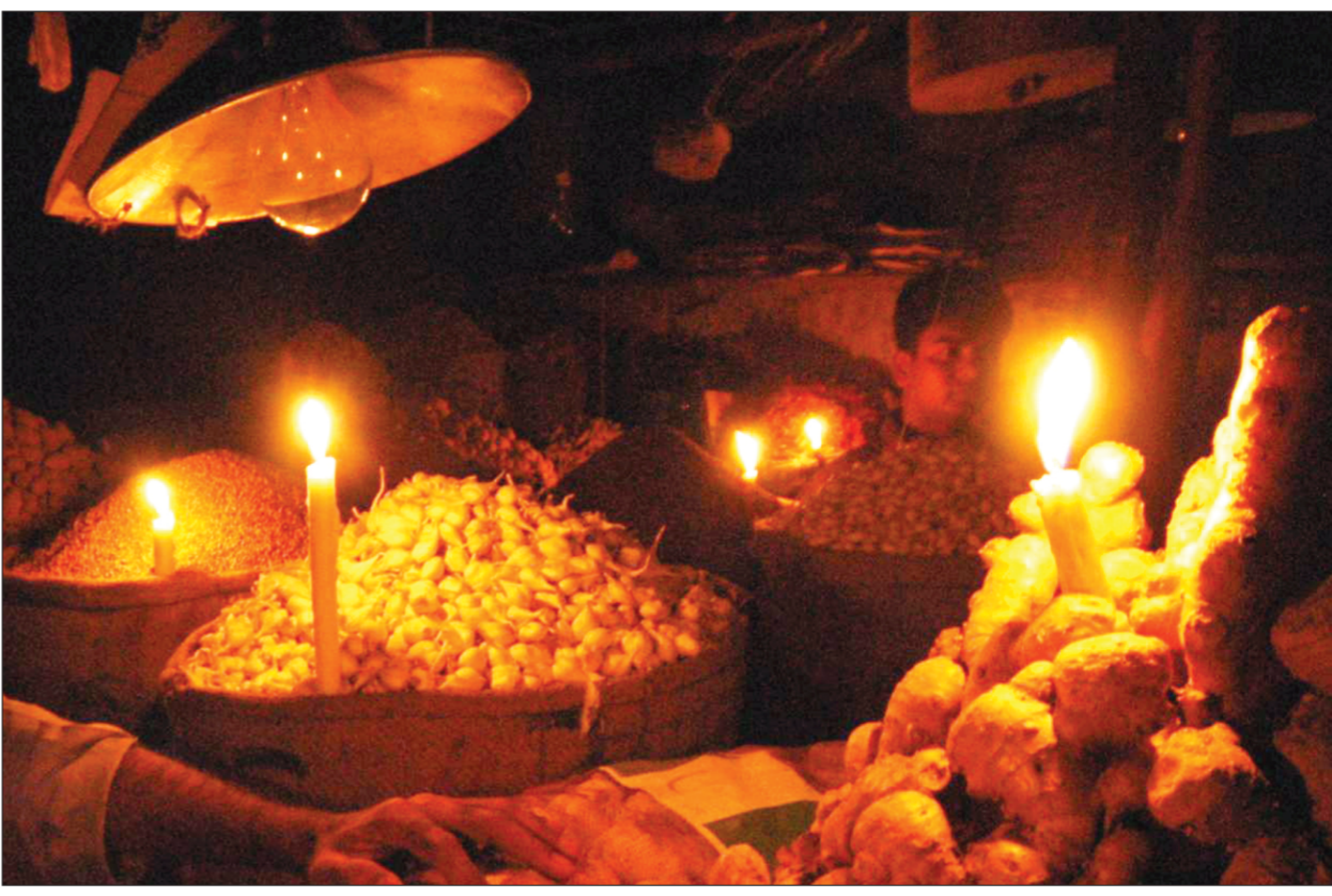
Power outage causes loss to business

TAWFIQUE ALI
Frequent power cuts and low voltage problems have been causing losses in trade and business as both production and sales volume have declined, said traders in the city.
"The wholesalers in Moulvibazar are compelled to close their shops early due to regular power failures that have reduced their sales significantly," said Abdur Razzak, the president of Moulvibazar Wholesalers Association.
"Owners of factories face huge loss not only because of disruption in production and cancellation of orders, they also have to pay the workers without production," Razzak said. "I run a flour mill, production of which has also declined."
He said that power outages disrupt trading at least three to four times a day with power cut for more than an hour each time

in the old part of Dhaka. Traders of other areas in Old Dhaka said they are experiencing load-shedding several times daily.
"We have lost at least 25 percent of our sales volume with a decline in customer turnout because of load-shedding of power particularly in the evening," said Mujibur Rahman, manager of Royal Restaurant on Haranath Ghosh Road in Lalbagh.
Md Zakir Hossain, owner of a hardware store in Karwan Bazar Babosayee Kalyan Samity Super Market, said, "Usually we sell goods worth Tk 8 thousand per day on average, and it has now come down to Tk 5 thousand."
He said they are experiencing power outages at least four times daily.
Despite the fact that summer is yet to set in, the frequency and duration of power outages have already reached an alarming level, said Farid, another hardware trader at Karwan Bazar. "I have never seen such a situation

in the last six years."
"We experienced a decline in the sale of air-conditioners by 35 percent during February that saw perhaps the worst power cuts in recent past," said Jalal Mahmud, in-charge of General and Sharp Electronics showroom in Tejgaon. Referring to the low voltage problem, he said: "Fluctuation of voltage damages electric appliances that make the customers think that it is the fault of a certain brand."
As of March 1, power deficit in the greater Dhaka electrical zone was 200 MW against the total demand of 1,400 MW, said Md Tawhidul Islam, chairman of Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa). Approximate power demand in the Desa area is 700 MW, said Islam who is also the chairman of load management committee.
Regarding old part of the city, Islam said the area is fed electricity mainly from Hasnabad grid. But an amount is fed from

Dhanmondi-Ramna 33KV line as the Lalbagh substation with two 33KV lines cannot carry the required load.
"But with the ongoing shortage in power generation, we cannot presently feed old Dhaka areas from Dhanmondi-Ramna 33KV line," Islam said. "A new substation in Kamrangirchar is under construction and is expected to be commissioned by October next to meet the electricity demand in old Dhaka," he added.
Managing Director of Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco) Saleh Ahmed said total demand for electricity in the Desco area is 400 MW and the current deficit is 100 MW. "There is no load-shedding in the Desco zone (covering Uttara, Gulshan, Baridhara and some other areas) except for two hours from 6:00pm for the last three days," he said.



A common scene at kitchen markets in Dhaka lately.

Fixed price list at markets -- a sham

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN
A black board at one entrance to Karwan Bazar with names of certain commodities written in chalk and partly hidden by posters promoting a political candidate barely catches the attention of passers-by or surrounding traders.
Another such board in the New Market area with a few columns and names of some commodities written on it gives the impression of an open-air school for street children.
Only inquiries will tell that these are the remnants of an initiative taken by the authorities in 2004 to prevent price fluctuations.
The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) placed notice boards in 25 commodity markets in 2004

following orders from a certain ministry.
Specific price lists of various commodities, including perishables, were given to the commodity market traders' associations.
The association members were to put up the price list on the notice boards, which traders were expected to follow.
DCC personnel were responsible for checking what was written on the boards, but has not been continuing partly because of traders' indifference in following price list and partly because of the ineffectiveness of the initiative, said traders and traders' association officials.
"A certain government source sent us a price list regularly, which we put up on the board, but we do not receive any such lists now," said an official of Bonolota Market Babshayee Samity that is in

charge of the commodity market adjacent to New Market. He said the last price list they received was in April 2005.
"We are customers too, when we shop for commodities. These price lists prevented traders from charging unfair prices," he added.
DCC personnel were responsible for checking what was written on the boards, but has not been continuing partly because of traders' indifference in following price list and partly because of the ineffectiveness of the initiative, said traders and traders' association officials.
Another official of the Samity said they informed the DCC about this a few months back but received no response.

"The last time we saw DCC officials was in 2004," said an official of Islamia Shanti Samity, in purchasing costs.
The officials said that some of traders followed the price list but would still charge a few takas extra according to individual

charge of the commodity market in Karwan Bazar.
He said that though the price list had to be written on the notice

board everyday, it was done for a few days and DCC personnel had not shown up since then.
The officials said they received price lists from a khamarbari, but admitted that they did not inform DCC about not receiving any price list, as traders did not follow it.
Samity officials and the traders gave different views when asked if any official would monitor the supply in the markets before fixing the price list.
"Traders did not follow the price list probably because officials did not monitor the supply in the market before making the price list," said a member from an association in charge of the Charulota market in Magbazaar.
Officials of the market adjacent to New Market were not sure if any such monitoring took place before the price was prepared.

However, both association officials and traders agreed on the ineffectiveness of following a specific price list.
"Purchasing costs differ from trader to trader. Therefore all of them cannot follow the same price list. A single fish can have one variety that is cheaper than another. In such situations it is not possible to fix a specific rate for fish," said an official from the association in Karwan Bazar.
Association officials and traders agreed that availability of storage facilities for perishables could prevent price fluctuations to a certain extent. This would prevent waste, financial losses and also ensure a regular supply to the market.
DCC and commerce ministry officials gave contradicting versions on the price list issue.
"The commerce ministry used

to give price lists to the associations to be written on the boards. Our personnel do not check the price lists as they are no longer written on the boards," said an official from the DCC market section.
On the other hand a commerce ministry official said that the ministry never sent price lists to any commodity market.
No official from either the DCC or commerce ministry could confirm if the market supply was monitored before the price lists were fixed.

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BHASHANI NOVO THEATRE

Bogged down by technical faults

WAHIDA MITU
Visitors to the Bhashani Novo Theatre in the city alleged that the shows in the country's only planetarium are not regular these days due to technical problems.
Hundreds of visitors from the city and elsewhere rush to the planetarium every day but they are often compelled to return without enjoying the show.
The visitors to the non-formal space science education institution said there were several mechanical faults and interruptions of the shows in the previous weeks. The shows were often cancelled or delayed by one or two hours.
Nasim came from Kushtia along with his four relatives on February 23 to watch the show at 11:00am but due to technical problem the show was postponed. The planetarium authorities assured the visitors that they will run the next show at 1:00pm.
Nasim waited for the next show but it was also postponed due to the same reason. With much disappointment, several hundred visitors including Nasim went back home. The visitors include about 200 students from a school of Comilla.



As the city is currently experiencing frequent power outages, the planetarium needs alternative source of electricity for uninterrupted service. But the only generator of the planetarium remained out of order for long, sources said

The planetarium had remained closed from February 16 to 22 due to weekly and government holidays and mechanical faults in its equipment including the uninterrupted power supply (UPS) system, sources in the Novo Theatre said.
"I came to visit the planetarium yesterday (February 22) and saw a notice that the show will resume today. But I have to go back today without enjoying the show," said Nasim. "I don't understand why they failed to fix the technical problems."
This correspondent contacted the director of the planetarium for her comments about the problems, but she declined to talk to the press.

However according to sources in the Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), poor maintenance is responsible for frequent mechanical troubles in the planetarium. "The problem is due to mishandling of the machines," said one of the ministry high officials when asked about the present state of the planetarium.
The ministry officials said the batteries of the UPS had problems with charging and those were run without repairing that caused further trouble. They said the machines of the planetarium need careful handling and constant monitoring.
As the city is currently experi-

encing frequent power outages, the planetarium needs alternative source of electricity for uninterrupted service. But the only generator of the planetarium remained out of order for long, sources said. They added that the instant power supply, projection system and even the elevator do not work properly.
The planetarium was inaugurated by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on September 2004 with a prime objective to attract young visitors, especially students, who are interested in astronomy.