

Fuel crisis

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The BPC, however, informed the dealers that the supply of oils on the weekend, Friday and Saturday, and other government holidays will remain suspended as usual.

The schedule was relaxed for the December-April period being the high-irrigation season. As that season has expired, the distribution schedule will revert to the usual from May 1, the handout said.

The government requested the dealers to collect their required fuel oils on the weekdays and to keep adequate stock for selling throughout the week.

OIL PRICE DECISION WITHIN A WEEK

A decision on the increase of oil prices would be taken within a week, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman told the press after a meeting of the cabinet committee on economic affairs yesterday.

Taking a decision in this matter is not easy, he remarked, as the government will have to consider the macro and microeconomic effects. The issue also needs to be thoroughly discussed with the people concerned, he said, adding after that a proposal in this regard will be sent to the prime minister.

On privatising oil import, Saifur said he himself has been suggesting this for long. But, he does not know exactly why it is not happening. He said a 'vested quarters' is standing in the way of privatising the petroleum distributing companies.

CHITTAGONG SITUATION

Our Chittagong correspondent reports: Unusually long queues were seen at the main depots of all the three marketing companies of BPC, as the fuel supply to dealers resumed yesterday.

Tank lorries started lining up since Saturday night and by the morning their number went beyond a hundred at each of the supply depots, sources said.

With the supply resumed, all the petrol pumps in the port city started operating since 9:00am.

Sources said the supply resumed at 6,500 MT for diesel and 1,500 MT for kerosene a day.

The BPC at present has 126,972 MT diesel and 16,041 MT kerosene in its stock that can sustain the country for about 21 days and 11 days respectively, BPC sources said.

Besides, an oil tanker laden with 20 thousand MT diesel and 10 thousand MT kerosene from Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) is due to reach Chittagong Port within the next three to four days, they said.

Another oil tanker carrying the same quantity of KPC diesel and kerosene is also expected to arrive by May 6, they added.

KHULNA SCENARIO

Our Khulna correspondent reports: A severe fuel crisis hit the consumers in Khulna district, as petrol pumps could not supply diesel on Saturday and until 6pm yesterday. Transport owners could not buy diesel from any of the 26 filling stations in Khulna City before yesterday evening.

According to dealers, over 500 petrol pumps in Khulna division were out of diesel, hampering the road and river transport services in the last two days.

Not a single drop of diesel is now being smuggled out of the country, said Khulna dealers and agents, because they are now united against the smugglers to safeguard their business.

BOGRA

Our Bogra correspondent writes: Some oil dealers and filling station owners in the northern region have allegedly hoarded a huge quantity

Opposition lays

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police and the BNP activists intercepted an AL procession heading towards local electricity office. Both the groups equipped with firearms and lethal weapons fought on the streets for about four hours.

Angry protesters attacked a nearby police outpost, ransacked the local Press Club and damaged at least 20 houses and 15 shops during the clash. Police charged batons, lobbed more than 30 teargas shells and fired 20 rounds of rubber bullet to disperse them.

In the capital, the opposition combine staged demonstration and brought out a procession. Addressing the rally, the opposition leaders accused that the BNP-Jamaat alliance government could not add a megawatt of electricity to the national grid due to corruption and mismanagement.

The opposition line-up laid siege to the electricity supply office in Khulna city from 11:00am to 11:30am yesterday, reports our staff correspondent in Khulna. The half-an-hour siege was followed by a rally.

The opposition activists also laid siege to the Narayanganj and Kishoreganj electricity supply offices protesting power shortage, report our correspondents.

of diesel, petrol, octane, and kerosene with a view to sell them on the black market, a BPC high official in Bogra said yesterday.

Mizanur Rahman Raton, general secretary of Rajshahi Division Fuel Oil Distributors Association, denied the allegation. He said the rationing system in supplying fuel oils has given rise to fuel crisis in some areas in the north.

In some places diesel, petrol and kerosene are being sold at Tk 2 to Tk 3 higher per litre than the government price.

Sources at the BPC northern control room in Bogra said at least 1.54 crore litres of diesel was in stock yesterday in the northern depots including the main depots at Baghabari.

Yet, a local journalist said, diesel is selling at Tk 2 to Tk 3 higher per litre in some areas adjacent to Baghabari depot including Pachakola, Birishalika and Coal Ghat. Petrol has been selling at Tk 50 a litre in Badalgachhi upazila of Naongon district during the last three days, said an NGO worker posted in that area.

Our Moulvibazar correspondent says: Severe fuel crisis has persisted in Moulvibazar district with most of the filling stations kept closed.

Though a few filling stations were selling petrol, diesel and octane, but their owners said their stocks were too poor and they might be forced to stop selling at any time.

SATKHIRA

Our Satkhira correspondent reports: Most of the filling stations in the district have stopped selling fuel for the last two days causing immense sufferings farmers, transport owners and other consumers.

Long queues of vehicles were seen yesterday at the filling stations but most of them had to go away empty-handed and in utter frustration.

However, a few of the vehicles could get one or two litres of fuel.

Taking advantage of the situation, a section of retailers are selling fuels at exorbitant prices. Petrol is selling at Tk 52 a litre. Some customers said they had to buy petrol at rates as high as Tk 55 to Tk 60 a litre.

Govt bans

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Polembros Shipping Ltd of Greece in 2002. It was last anchored off St Petersburg, Russia on August 28, 2005, according to Greenpeace.

Kashem, who owns a ship-breaking yard, later bought the vessel, he told the news agency.

Last February, the government refused to allow the scrapping of the asbestos-lined luxury ocean liner SS Norway in Sitakunda ship-breaking area, the second biggest in the world after Alang in India.

That ban came a day after French President Jacques Chirac had ordered the asbestos-lined warship Clemenceau, on its way to India for scrapping, back home from the Indian Ocean.

Ship-breaking yards in Bangladesh dismantle up to 80 ships, mostly oil tankers, a year. Operating on Sitakunda beach, 25 kilometres or 17 miles north of Chittagong City, they directly or indirectly employ 300,000 people.

3 get death

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section 9/3 of the Women and Children Repression Act, 2000 for causing injury to Tania, a college student, and raping her after abduction. The judge also said the three were also found guilty under section 302/34 of the Penal Code for conjointly murdering the victim.

Their double sentences to death shall run concurrently and be subject to confirmation by the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, the judgment added.

The verdict was announced after examining 38 witnesses, the autopsy report and confessional statements of the accused in 13 working days. Tania's parents, relatives, teachers and friends expressed their satisfaction on the verdict and demanded their immediate execution.

Earlier, human-chains, processions were organised and memorandums were submitted in Dashmina and Barisal demanding capital punishments to the killers. Processions were also brought out demanding immediate execution of the sentences after the verdict.

Tania Akter was a first year student of Dashmina Abdur Rashid Talukdar College. She was doing her studies from her uncle's home at Goalchini of Dashmina upazila.

On September 20 last years, Tania became missing as she did not return from a private tuition at the college. Her body was recovered on September 23 near a canal.

On suspicion police arrested Miraz and according to his confessional statement arrested Jafar and Nur Alam later.

Six core areas

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The meeting primarily identified six core areas for its vision paper -- general economic issues, social issues, information and technology, external issues and globalisation, human rights, rule of law and institutional reforms, transparency, accountability and responsiveness at all levels of state activities.

Presided over by Convener of Nagorik Committee 2006 and CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan, the meeting decided that the issues discussed in Mymensingh dialogue on Saturday would be carried forward in Jessore regional dialogue scheduled for May 13.

A list of citizens' aspirations was prepared at the meeting and it will be placed before the participants at Jessore regional dialogue for prioritisation.

The meeting decided that the statement of expenditure made in connection with the civil society initiative will be posted regularly on CPD website.

The Nagorik Committee 2006 solicited suggestions from people about their aspirations and vision for Bangladesh.

Comments on the six core areas may be sent to CPD office (House 40/C, Road 11, Dhanmoini R/A, Dhaka 1209) or through email (<election07@cpd-bangladesh.org>).

The next meeting will be held on May 7.

CPD Executive Director and Member Secretary of the Nagorik Committee Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Prof Ajmiller Reza Chowdhury, Maj Gen (Rtd) Moinal Hussain Chowdhury, Dr Iqbal Mahmud, M Mujibul Huq, Dr Mahmuda Islam, Laila Rahman Kabir, M Hafizuddin Khan, Ambassador Abul Hasan, ASM Shahjahan, M Syeduzzaman also attended the meeting.

HC bench skips

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petition 'not-press' at that bench comprising Justice Awlad Ali and Justice Zinat Ara. He told BDNEWS that he could further submit the petition before another bench of the High Court.

"After hearing the petition, the High Court bench declined to pass any order in the case on the plea that an appeal regarding the case has been pending in the Appellate Division. That is why I made the petition 'not-press' in that bench. I will mention the matter in another bench," he said.

Karwan Bazar

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The body was later taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy.

Police could not arrest anyone as of 8:30pm yesterday.

Hanif often received death threats over cellphone from criminals and rivals after he was elected joint general secretary of KBBKS Super Market about a year ago, said his brother Jonaid Hossain.

Some local traders said that Shahadat, an accomplice of top criminal Pichchi Hannan, was among the assailants.

Shahadat was angry with Hanif as he (Hanif) drove Shahadat off Karwan Bazar and barred him from collecting jhat (garments by-products) from a garments factory of the area, a source said.

Some other sources said the accomplices of Pichchi Hannan might have killed Hanif as he helped police arrest Pichchi Hannan in 1998. He was in jail for eight months. Coming out of the jail on bail Hannan announced Tk 10 lakh reward if anyone could bring him the head of Hanif, the sources added.

As the news of Hanif's murder spread, leaders and workers of AL and its front organisations along with several hundred traders brought out a procession at Karwan Bazar demanding immediate arrest and punishment of the killers.

Govt to break

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if the prime minister approves, for carrying out four railway projects under the communications ministry, decided yesterday's cabinet committee meeting.

The Chinese company has been contracted to supply 80 metre gauge railway carriages under two contracts -- one for 50 and the other for 30 carriages.

PT INKA has to supply 50 broad gauge carriages for Bangladesh Railway.

The contract with IRCON, India is for modernising the signalling and interlocking system to a turnkey status at 12 railway stations in the Akhaura-Sylhet section.

Earlier, the cabinet committee on purchase had turned down these proposals and referred them to the cabinet committee on economic affairs.

The communications ministry at yesterday's meeting argued that the tenders for the projects had been floated before the government imposed the bar against advances, and so the bar is not applicable for these particular projects.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs also approved two other proposals yesterday. One of them is for relaxing the obligation of observing the Public Procurement Regulations (PPR) in leasing aircraft on an emergency basis to carry Hajj pilgrims in the current fiscal year.

The other proposal is to waive the obligation of abiding by the PPR in procuring arms, ammunition and explosives for the Special Security Force.

Mysterious blaze

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The fire in the first floor bedroom burnt documents, books, other papers, clothes, carpet and foreign local currencies.

Prof Chowdhury's family said the fire caused a loss of valuables worth Tk 4 to 5 lakh.

The fire was first noticed around 5:05am yesterday. "I saw the curtain at the northern side of the ground-floor drawing room burning and immediately phoned their domestic help, Jyotsna, who was sleeping inside," said an on-duty police constable, Masud, who was then sitting near the gate of the house 'Mayabi' on Road No 12 in Baridhara diplomatic enclave.

Jyotsna immediately knocked on the bedroom door of former president's son, Mahi B Chowdhury, on the second-floor of the three-storey building.

"Hearing screams, my wife Ashfa Haq Lopa woke me up. I opened my window to see smoke all around," Mahi told this correspondent. As he opened the door, he saw dense toxic smoke had covered the whole house.

"I brought my daughter Sherejad and son Arash Taleah who were struggling to breathe in the adjacent room to my room and rushed to recover my father from the first floor."

Mahi said he saw the drawing room and a first floor bedroom burning. "It was so hot that I felt like I was inside an oven."

He brought his father and mother, Hasina Warda Chowdhury, to his bedroom and came down with his family members before the blaze could reach his room.

Informed by the on duty police, Hamid, the supervisor of four police constables who guard the house in three-hour rotation shifts, and three other constables brought plastic pipes from an under-construction building just west to Chowdhury's house and poured water to douse the fire.

A Rab-1 patrol car that was passing by the house informed the fire brigade that reached few minutes after the policemen and three domestic helps brought the fire under control.

Mahi said they suspect the arsonists set the fire through two windows on the ground floor and through a window and a ventilator of the toilet on the first floor.

"Most of the damage are beside the windows and the windowpanes are broken. The attackers used the see-saw as a ladder to set fire on the first floor."

Mahi and his wife told reporters that they smelt toxic gas during the fire and they were feeling itchy, which indicated that the fire did not originate from any electrical short circuit.

"Experts said there is smell of phosphorus and that gunpowder has been used," Mahi told reporters.

During a news briefing later in the afternoon, Mahi said, "There is no doubt that it is an attempt to kill the former president with all his family members in a planned way."

"The fire didn't originate from a short circuit because my television was on

during the incident and the constable phoned from the intercom. It also didn't originate from the gas stove because nothing was gutted in the kitchen," he said.

Prof Chowdhury said the attack was made to reap political benefit. "I don't have personal enmity with anyone. But Bikalpa Dhara men have been targets of ruling party attacks since our launching and we've been attacked almost everywhere when we organised any meeting or rally."

"The government might carry out more heinous attacks on us and this incident has strengthened that apprehension," he said demanding a judicial probe.

He said they had received phone calls and letters earlier threatening to kill him and his son.

Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain, Nazibul Bashir Majibhandari, Krishak Sramik Janata League chief Kader Siddiqui, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner SM Mizanur Rahman visited the spot.

Terming the attack a planned one that is of very grave concern, Dr Kamal expressed his surprise about how the attackers could escape despite the presence of five policemen.

He called for bringing in international experts and for an in-depth probe immediately. "The attackers have expressed the reaction of those who do not like his (B Chowdhury's) politics."

Fire Brigade formed a three-member departmental committee headed by Deputy Director (Operations) Selim Nawaz Bhuiyan. It will submit a report in three days.

Visiting the house, the committee examined the burnt objects, electric cables, gas lines, and collected evidence.

Declining to make any comment on the cause of the fire, Selim Bhuiyan told The Daily Star, "We'll first examine the evidence, talk with experts and sit later to determine the cause."

About the possibility of an electric short circuit, he said: "We've found a break in the (electric) circuit, but it cannot be identified as the cause of the fire."

Asia to host

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the 2019 competition. Besides, England will also host the inaugural Twenty20 World Championship in 2009.

Australia and New Zealand co-hosted the 1992 World Cup and had been in line to stage the 2011 event after Asia (1996), England (1999), South Africa (2003) and the West Indies (2007) were each awarded the tournament.

Sunday's decisions need to be ratified by the ICC's annual conference in July.

Meanwhile, according to Bangladesh Cricket Board general secretary Mahbul Anam, Bangladesh are expected to host six World Cup matches -- three in the first round and three in the second.

Essentials turn 30pc

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shot up steeply. At the Karwan Bazar fish market 1kg local variety catfish was found selling at Tk 400, ruih at Tk 420, small ruih at Tk 110-120, koi at Tk 400-450, and takti at Tk 110.

Onion is being sold at Tk 25 a kg, which is Tk 5 higher than that of previous week, pulses at Tk 58, Tk 6 higher, gram at Tk 52, Tk 7 higher, garlic at Tk 110, Tk 20 higher.

Prices of almost all vegetables saw a sharp rise mainly due to shortage of supply and the lean season, traders at different kitchen markets said.

Prices of potato, tomato, aubergine, carrot, chilli, papaya went almost 20-25 percent higher in just one week.

Traders and common people identified price hike of fuel and agriculture products including fertiliser and seeds as the major reasons for price hike of essentials. Hoarding of essentials by unscrupulous syndicates has also contributed to the hike, they said.

Siddique Hawlader, a vegetables trader at Karwan Bazar who buys vegetables from Savar and sells in the city, said, "It has become harder for us

to make profit from selling vegetables. I buy vegetables at Tk 6 per kg, but it has become very difficult to sell it at Tk 8-10 as customers are buying less at such high price. Now, if I sell the vegetable at less than Tk 8, it will not yield any profit."

Restaurant business is also suffering in the wake of price hike of vegetables, rice, meat, fish and other essentials.

"Despite the high price of food items we cannot increase the price of meals. So, to make some profits we try to adjust by lessening the quantity. Nevertheless, the profit is much less now," said Arif, a restaurant owner at Karwan Bazar.

Shortage of fuel supply halted movements of around 60 per cent inter-district vehicles on Saturday, mainly from the vegetables rich northern districts.

It did not have any impact on vegetables supply until yesterday, but the impact may be severe if such situation continues for another two or three days, traders at Karwan Bazar feared.

May Day today

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Chicago, USA, at the height of a prolonged fight for eight-hour workday.

The day is public holiday.

Trade unions, professional organisations and political parties in Bangladesh will observe the May Day by organising rallies, processions of workers and seminars in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

In 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions passed a resolution stating that eight hours would constitute a legal day's work from and after May 1, 1886. And that was achieved with blood spilled in a vigorous movement in Chicago.

The unions called a general strike to achieve the goal, as the workers were being forced to work 10, 12 and 14 hours a day in the heydays of industrial boom.

In Chicago, the heart of the movement, police and militia fired into a crowd of strikers at the McCormick Reaper Works Factory, killing four and wounding many on May 3, 1886.

The agitating workers called a mass meeting the next day at Haymarket Square to protest the brutality. Police again fired into the crowd, killing one more worker and injuring many others. A bomb was thrown at the police, leaving a police-

Security guards

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Mosharraf Hossain said they closed the shop at 9:05pm on Friday and did not come to the shop on Saturday, as the market remains closed on that day.

"We came to the shop at 10:00am today and found the lower part of a shutter and a grille broken," Mosharraf yesterday said, adding that the uniform of a security guard was found inside the shop.

On information, police rushed to the spot, and sealed the shop where broken pieces of ornaments lay scattered.

Police seized pieces of iron rod, screwdriver and other equipment used to break the shutter and grille.

The criminals might have chosen Bikrampur Jewellers as it was full of gold ornaments, a staff of a nearby jewellery said, adding that there are around a dozen jewellery shops on the first floor of the market.

Officer-in-Charge of Paltan Police Station said he told Jhalakathi police to arrest the three missing guards who hail from the district.

On August 28 last year, burglars took away about 4,000 tola gold ornaments and other valuables worth about Tk 5.15 crore, breaking through the ceiling of Venus Jewellers situated on the third floor of 15-storeyed Navana Shopping Complex in Gulshan-1.

In another big heist on February 4, 2004, robbers took away some 4,000 tola gold ornaments and Tk 3 lakh in cash from two jewellery shops at the upmarket Karnaphuli Garden City in Shantinagar.

In both the incidents, police could hardly recover any looted gold ornaments.

Mastermind

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recent Mediterranean Sea boat capsized tragedy.

An official announcement yesterday said the arrested are ringleader Mizanur Rahman and his accomplices Abu Yussuf Muhammad, Haydar Hassan and Mustafa Kamal.

They were involved in "illegal trafficking of Bangladeshis through Morocco" over to the western world according to an official press release from Dhaka.

These manpower smugglers let down many job seekers who had either landed in prisons or perished at sea.

Following information from Bangladesh Embassy in Rabat, the Moroccan authorities dismantled their smuggling network in the course of which nine different nationals, including the four Bangladeshis, were apprehended.

A Bangladeshi called 'The King', Mizanur Rahman, ran the network and was reported to have relations with security and administrative offices in different countries.

The arrested Bangladeshi nationals are being tried in a Moroccan court and if found guilty will be sentenced to imprisonment for a certain period of time before they are deported to Bangladesh.

As per information received from Morocco these traffickers had allured helpless Bangladeshi youths over the last four years by promising them a safe passage to Europe in exchange for money.

Many of the victims who went through various travel agencies remained stranded after being abandoned by their local agents and all of them sought to return home, Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment said in the press release.

At least 15-20 Bangladeshis met their tragic end on the Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea while trying to reach Europe in makeshift boats.

Bangladeshi

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Khrurshed Ali, village Sungair of Chhatak upazila of Sunamganj district, Mahbul Alam, son of Abdul Latif, Tarakpur village of Mirzapur thana of Tangail, Salah Uddin, son of Abdul Majid, Palamganj village of Dohar under Dhaka district, Shaiful Islam, son of Altaf Khan, Longdhala village of Horirampur upazila of Manikganj and Based Miah, son of Hares Miah, village Domra Kandi of Banchharampur of Brahmanbaria district.

The four injured persons are Azhar Ali, son of Saher Beparai, village Meghola of Dohar, Kader Dewan, son of Abdul Khaleque, village Charbeshan of Munshiganj, Ahmad, son of Abdul Halim, village Purba Shasalika of Chhatkhil upazila under Noakhali district and Mohammad Rezaul Haque, son of Fazal Chowdhury, Madham Mohishal of Bhedarganj upazila under Shariatpur district.

The accident took place early Friday on a bridge near Jeddah when a bus was transporting them to Madina.

"To respect the status of workers is important to us, as we are confident in the politics of development-production," she added.

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina called upon the workers of the country to form a united movement to save the countrymen from the existing misrule.

Workers of Bangladesh Apparels Worker's Federation, National Garments Workers Federation and other organisations will hold separate rallies in the city to mark the day.

Tata ups gas price