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## AL walks out of JS to protest state minister's 'abusive' remarks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) lawmakers yesterday staged a stormy walkout of parliament, protesting 'abusive' remarks by State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman against AL leader Motia Chowdhury.

They left the House proceedings at 8:15pm as Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar did not meet their demand for expunging Rahman's words.

Standing on a point of order, the state minister alleged that the opposition workers especially the females frequently hit the policemen in the name of street agitation. "And such trend of attacks on the police started after former minister and Awami League leader Motia Chowdhury had bitten a policeman's hand," he said, making the opposition lawmakers fly into a temper.

As the AL legislators were clamouring for the speaker to switch off Rahman's mike, the state minister continued blasting the opposition's women activists.

After his address, deputy leader of the opposition took the floor and asked the speaker to expunge Rahman's words from the records.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## 10 killed, 90 hurt as experimental steam engine explodes

### Physics teacher made the low-cost engine to run irrigation pumps

STAR REPORT

Ten people were killed and 90 others sustained injuries when a steam boiler exploded at Baropaka village under Gobindganj upazila in Gaibandha district yesterday afternoon.

The dead are Titul, 30, Amirul, 30, Sharmin 12, Nurunnabi, 14, Atiq, 7, Rurul Amin, Russel, Rafiqul, and two unidentified persons, reports our staff correspondent at Bogra.

The boiler exploded during a demonstration of a steam engine devised by Moinul Islam, a lecturer of Physics in Mohimaganj College in the district, said our Gaibandha correspondent.

Moinul said the cheaply made engine that was to be used for running irrigation pumps and

other machines related to agriculture would be cost effective also as it could be run with gas instead of fuel oil, witnesses said.

Several hundred curious villagers gathered to see the demonstration of the steam engine.

As the maker started the turbine at about 5:00pm, the gas chamber exploded, leaving four people dead on the spot and many others injured.

Six others died on the way to hospital.

The injured were rushed to Sonatala Upazila Health Complex and Mohammad Ali Hospital in Bogra and Mohimaganj Hospital in Gaibandha.

Groaning of the injured accompanied by anxiously moving relatives created messy situations

there. The conditions of several injured are critical, doctors said, adding that they are struggling hard to cope with the situation as the hospitals have very little arrangement for dealing with burn injury patients.

Meanwhile, mystery shrouded the fate of Moinul, the so-called inventor of the steam engine. Some said he fled the scene after the accident while others said he is among the injured who are undergoing treatment at a Bogra hospital.

Neither the upazila administration nor the local media knew anything about the 'invention' or 'demonstration' of the machine, Gobindganj upazila nirbahi officer said, adding that they are investigating the matter.

## Employers' body concerned over wage hike in SoEs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Employers' Federation expressed its deep concern over the government's decision increasing wages and benefits for the workers employed in state owned enterprises (SOEs).

"Bangladesh Employers' Federation is not against increased wages for the workers of the SOEs but feels strongly that 104.46 percent increase without any linkage to productivity will aggravate the financial problems of the SOEs more acutely," said Syed Manzur Elahi, president of the federation in a statement yesterday.

He said total wages for unskilled workers have been raised by 104.46 percent from Tk 2597 to Tk 5310. For skilled workers it has been raised by 99.57 percent from Tk 3700 to Tk 7384.

As the government took the decision, the federation suggested implementation of the proposed wages in three to four phases so that the increase does not become abrupt.

"Development experience of the last few decades indicates that wages delinked from productivity, whether in the public or private sector, cuts across the viability of the enterprise and sooner or later, the enterprise ceases to be cost

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## FUEL, POWER CRISES RMG sector fears 50pc output fall

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prevailing diesel and power crises in the country are forcing ready made garment (RMG) manufacturers to keep their factories idle sometimes for five hours of a ten-hour working day, said leaders of the manufacturers.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in a press conference yesterday said production in RMG industry might fall by 50 percent and production cost might go up by about 25 percent due to the crises.

The garment industry today faces a catastrophic fall and if the government does not address the problems immediately Bangladesh might lose its market to competitors like India and China.

BGMEA leaders demanded that the government improves the power situation urgently or provides them with diesel under special arrangement so they can maintain usual production rate. If diesel price is raised they want to be provided with diesel at a subsidised price.

BGMEA President Tipu Munshi said the government is claiming that there is no crisis of power and diesel in the country, but the reality contradicts its claim.

Munshi in his written speech said normally production goes on for 10 hours a day in garment factories, but now about five hours are being lost daily due to load shedding.

Many of the garment factory owners resorted to generators, but the recent crisis of diesel has worsened their woes.

Munshi also said they usually collect diesel in containers or drums. But with the backdrop of fuel crisis, the government put a bar on carrying diesel in containers, which Munshi said has been like 'adding insult to injury'.

Besides, 90 percent of the generators used in garment factories is diesel run and only about five percent is run by gas. So, in the face of diesel and power crises, garment factory owners are being forced to ship their product by air to make up for lost time in a bid to maintain deadlines. "Airfreight charges cost

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

## 'FAILED STATES' INDEX Bangladesh up 2 notches

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Bangladesh was ranked 19th in the 'failed states' index, marking a slight improvement from 17th position last year, according to a study.

The report, compiled by the US Foreign Policy magazine and the US-based Fund for Peace, ranked 146 nations according to their stability.

Judged according to 12 criteria including human flight and economic decline, Sudan was ranked number one while Norway was ranked 146.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are among the world's top 10 most vulnerable states. Pakistan moved from 34th last year to ninth in the new report while Afghanistan was 11th last year but this year has been placed 10th. Nepal and Sri Lanka

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

## Cops seize 35,365 litres of fuel from hoarders

STAR REPORT

Police on Monday night seized huge amount of hoarded fuel from an unlicensed filling station at Abhoyanagar in Jessore.

Acting on information, a contingent of police from Abhoyanagar Police Station raided Noapara Petroleum Depot in Noapara, reports our Jessore correspondent.

The policemen seized 35,365 litres of fuel including 23,758 litres of petrol and 11,607 litres of kerosene. They sealed off the depot and lodged a case with Abhoyanagar Police Station against seven people including managing director of the depot Shajjadul Karim Kabuli.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## Police suspect arson at B Chy's house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The police yesterday said they believe Sunday's fire at the Baridhara residence of former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury was not an accident, rather an incident of arson.

It is however still not clear whether anyone from inside or outside the house set the fire, said sources close to the four-member police team probing the incident.

Members of the probe committee interrogated the five policemen, who guard the house, and people of the neighbourhood yesterday evening. Details about the interrogation could not be learnt.

The police headquarters

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

## DHAKA TUBE RAIL

# Foundation laying in Aug but no project yet

RAFIQ HASAN

The government plans a foundation-laying ceremony in mid-August of an underground railway, or a metro subway as Americans call it, in the densely populated capital, although it is yet to make a concrete decision in this regard.

Even a feasibility study of the proposed underground has not been conducted yet. The communications ministry did submit a proposal to the Planning Commission last year seeking Tk 7 crore for the study, but the commission did not approve it.

Sources said a state minister has been tasked with organising the ceremony, where the prime minister would lay the foundation stone of the underground, a move some quarters view as aimed at boosting the ruling party's popularity with the upcoming general election in view.

In the last few months, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the communications ministry have exchanged a number of letters on the subject, without arriving at any specific decision, the sources said.

They said the communications ministry in a letter to the PMO on

April 13 recommended formation of an independent authority to supervise and monitor the construction of the underground in Dhaka City. In response, the PMO last week asked the ministry to come up with more specific suggestions about forming the authority.

"Setting up an underground railway in the capital would be a very complicated and expensive project and such an authority would be required for finalisation, coordination and implementation of it," the ministry observed in the letter.

The authority can be formed under the communications ministry, the PMO or any other ministry, the letter said, adding, if necessary, the authority can also operate the underground.

The ministry sent another letter to Contech Limited, a local firm which had participated in the pre-qualification bid called by Bangladesh Railway in November 2002 for constructing the underground on a 'build, operate and transfer' (BOT) basis.

In the letter, the ministry regretted not issuing a letter of intent in

favour of the firm at this stage, as it had not provided adequate information about the financier and partners in the mammoth project.

The ministry asked Contech to submit details of its legal status, technical, management and financial capability, project implementation experience, and status of investment ownership in the proposed project.

In the pre-qualification bid, Contech submitted a proposal for establishing a 52km underground at a cost of Tk 52,000 crore under a joint venture of a number of foreign and local organisations.

According to Contech proposal, MTRC of Hong Kong will work as the constructor, Sena Kallyan Sangtha, Bangladesh as financier and project manager, the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology as the lead consultant, Hitachi of Japan as equipment supplier, and JBIC as provider of supplier's credit and syndicated bank loan.

But, the firm did not provide authorisation letters of the companies it named as partners and financier in the project, the ministry pointed out in the letter.



This chunk of the roof of a two-storey building in Tajmahal Road of Mohammadpur in the city fell on a car parked in front yesterday during its demolition to make room for a new apartment complex. Luckily, no one was hurt in the incident.

PHOTO: STAR

## 36 EMINENT CITIZENS ISSUE STATEMENT 'Instability' from 'failure' of political parties worries them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty-six eminent citizens yesterday expressed grave concern at the 'instability' in the country emanating from 'failure' of the major political parties regarding reform talks on caretaker government and the Election Commission, rise of militancy, price hike of essentials and various other issues.

Suggesting some reforms and changes, the civil society members urged the major political alliances to act sensibly for the sake of democracy and asked the people to take active interest in political issues.

In a joint statement, they said it is a matter of grave concern that the opposition returned to the streets to realise their demands for reforms while the government continued its 'repressive' acts as the efforts for reform talks came to a virtual halt.

If the political parties cannot come to an agreement on issues like reforms in caretaker government, the Election Commission and electoral rules and process, they should present their ideas as draft bills before parliament for open discussions, the eminent citizens stressed.

They also asked the government to arrange a public hearing by the parliamentary committees so that the civil society members can convey their views to parliament.

"If elections could not be held through making the required changes, the unstable situation in the country would continue," they observed.

The joint statement also says it is a present day imperative that political parties are reformed through mandatory registration. The conditions of registration should include democratic practices within the parties, making all sorts of monetary transactions through banks, publication of audited reports on incomes and expenditures of parties, and nomination of persons active in a party for at least three years.

The renowned citizens also expressed concern at the price hike of essentials, devaluation of taka, crisis of power, adverse impact of the shortage of fertiliser and fuel for irrigation pumps on agriculture, and failure of the administration in different fields and reckless and brutal behaviour of the police.

They called upon the government to track down the absconding

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

## WRIT IN HC Authorities asked not to allow toxic Alfaship to proceed further

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered the authorities concerned not to allow MT Alfaship, a toxic ship now waiting at the outer anchorage, to proceed further towards the Chittagong Port.

A High Court bench gave the directive to the director general (DG) of Coast Guard, DG of the Department of Shipping, the collector of customs and the chairman of Chittagong Port Authority following a writ petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

## Outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A member of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) was killed in 'crossfire' during a gunfight between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his cohorts in Pabna early Monday.

The dead, Jamal Hossain alias Zia alias Ranju, was a member of PBCP and charge-sheeted accused in seven murder cases, says a Rab press release.

Tipped off, Rab-5 of Rajshahi

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

## EC to publish draft voter list today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will publish the draft voter list across the country today while its appeal against the High Court directives on voter-listing remains pending with the Supreme Court.

The draft list will be posted at public places so that people can easily inspect the list and raise objections or make claims, if they have any.

The commission has completed the work of the fresh list, ignoring the High Court's January 4 directives for revising the existing roll, but has yet to finalise the date for publication of the final roll.

"The Election Commission will fix the date for publishing the final voter list at an appropriate time," Acting Secretary to the EC Secretariat Mohammad Zakaria told reporters at his office yesterday.

"We are not ignoring the court directives in preparing the voter list," he claimed, replying to a query about the appeal scheduled for hearing on May 14.

The draft roll, which is likely to have over one crore new voters, will be on display at the offices of local government bodies, cantonment board, and educational institutions that are used as polling stations.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

## Rehabilitate Rohingyas in your countries

Morshed tells EU

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh rejected a suggestion by the European Union (EU) leaders to accommodate and rehabilitate Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and requested European countries to rehabilitate the refugees in their countries.

"I have requested the countries with huge area of lands in Europe

to rehabilitate the Rohingya refugees in their countries. It's a global responsibility... each big country in Europe can take couple of thousands of Rohingya refugees and rehabilitate them in their countries as it is difficult for Bangladesh to bear them alone," said Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

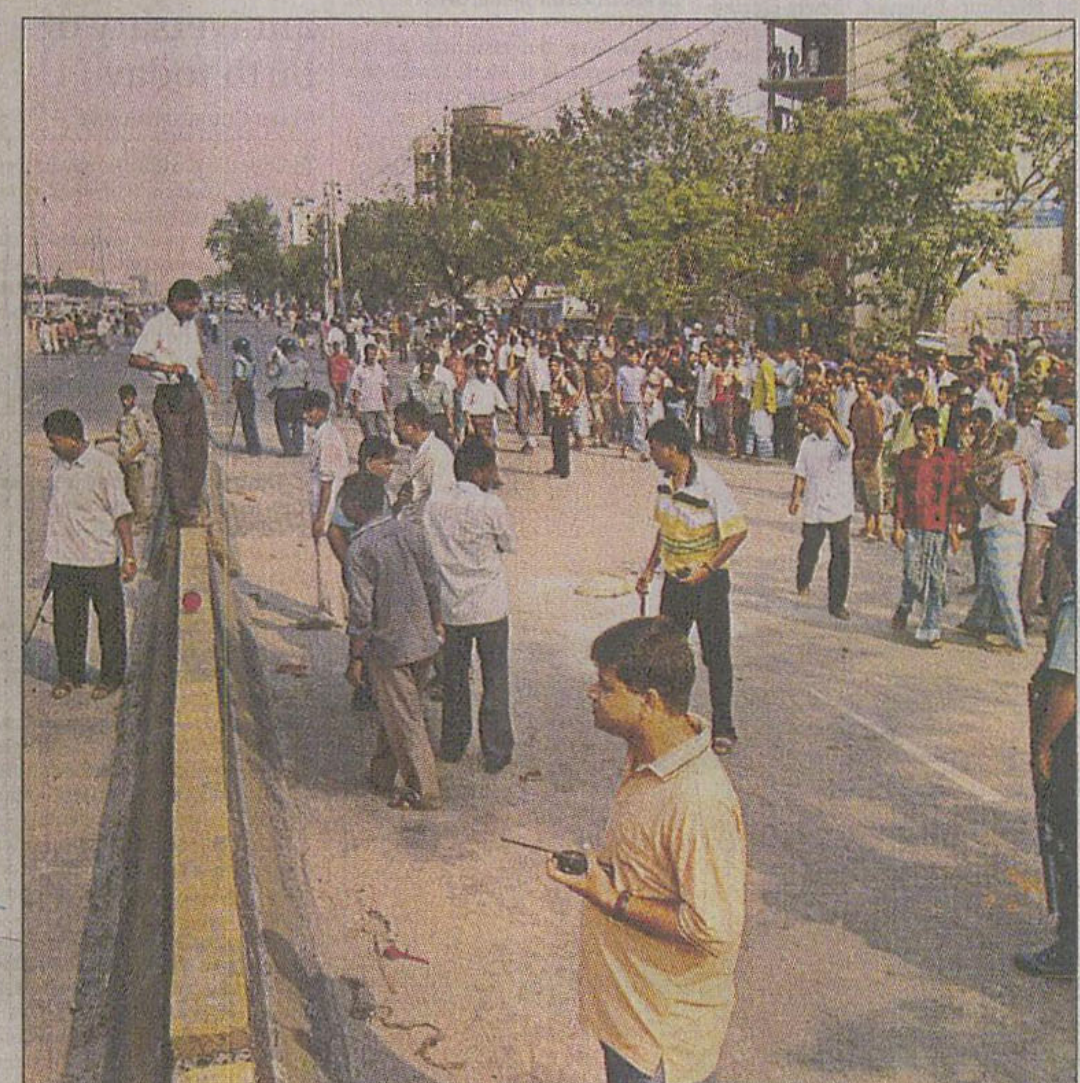


PHOTO: STAR

Police try to get the situation under control as an angry mob vandalised several vehicles and kept the Dhaka-Chittagong highway blocked for an hour at Kutubkhali on the outskirts of the capital after a lorry had run over a class four schoolgirl.